



Electoral Council of Australia and New Zealand Charter: 2024-2026

Introduction

The Electoral Council of Australia and New Zealand (ECANZ) is a consultative and voluntary council of the Electoral Commissioners from electoral authorities of the Commonwealth, States and Territories of Australia and New Zealand.

ECANZ will be governed in accordance with this Charter, which sets out the continuing commitment of ECANZ to the pursuit of electoral integrity and high performing electoral administration on which trust and confidence in democracy relies.

This Charter provides the management and administration framework ECANZ and the two key principles which guide each commissions' individual relationship with ECANZ (Appendix A). Further, it identifies the key contemporary and emerging challenges in election delivery (Appendix B), as well as the areas of ECANZ focus to meet those challenges over the next three years (Appendix C).


Purpose

The purpose of ECANZ is to ensure that the work and role of electoral commissions is better understood and properly resourced at the heart of democratic systems that enjoy the trust and confidence of political participants and citizens alike. ECANZ acts as a forum for electoral commissioners to share ideas and initiatives and identify opportunities for interjurisdictional information sharing and collaboration.

The value of ECANZ is based on the ability to harness collective expertise and experience to address common matters and issues, to protect and enhance the integrity and performance of electoral systems across Australia and New Zealand. It provides a sense of solidarity and mutual support for Commissioners who can both contribute and access practical advice and expertise across the policy, legislative and operational dimensions of their role and responsibilities.

Commissioners can:

- Collaborate on a range of electoral issues to use the strength of their collective voice to respond, where that is appropriate and useful, to risks and opportunities for the integrity and performance of electoral systems that they face in common.
- Promote best practice electoral administration by considering policies and procedures within Australia and New Zealand and other overseas electoral jurisdictions.
- Encourage mutual and co-operative development, and sharing of, information technology resources, electoral administration systems and intellectual property associated with such systems and procedures to minimise costs to each member.

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- Establish working parties, with a clear purpose, intended impact and clarity on timelines and effective ways to review, change or conclude their work, to consider issues and report back to ECANZ.
 - Publish or distribute any reports with the consent of members.
 - Develop a program of professional development that addresses aspects of their leadership role and work which could be effectively addressed on a shared basis.

Administration

i. Membership

ECANZ shall consist of the Electoral Commissioner from each Commonwealth, State and Territory of Australia and New Zealand.

Electoral Commissioners may nominate a senior staff member from their organisation to attend meetings in place of the Electoral Commissioner.

ii. Meetings

Unless the membership agrees otherwise, ECANZ will meet at least three times a year (every four months), with an option for additional meetings, as necessary.

Meetings will be face to face; video conferencing is considered a viable alternative to a face-to-face meeting where appropriate or necessary. Each Commission is responsible for funding travel/accommodation costs for their relevant staff to attend meetings, as well as all other costs associated with being a member of ECANZ.

At least six ECANZ members (Commissioners or their appointed delegates) are required for a quorum. In the absence of a quorum, the meeting will be rescheduled to a date within four weeks, unless members agree to cancel the meeting.

iii. Chair

Members will elect a rotating Chair who will serve for a period of at least 24 months or for such period as agreed by members. A member may decline to take a turn at being Chair.

The Chair will be responsible for facilitating each meeting, with support of the ECANZ Secretariat, for a period of ECANZ for 24 months.


The Chair, may not, be the Commissioner of the Australian Electoral Commission.

The Chair may, if necessary, appoint another member to act as Chair.

iv. Secretariat

The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) will be responsible for providing secretariat support to ECANZ and the Chair. The Secretariat will be responsible for:

- Planning and coordinating ECANZ meetings with support from the staff of the Commission hosting the relevant meeting.
- Preparing minutes and coordinating action items.
- Maintaining all ECANZ documentation.

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- Maintaining the SharePoint site, including an up-to-date membership list and contact details.
 - Operating as a pivot between ECANZ, the DEC Group and ECANZ working parties.
 - Performing all relevant tasks to ensure the good governance and effective operation of ECANZ.

v. Agendas and Minutes

The ECANZ secretariat shall ensure that a draft agenda is circulated to ECANZ members for comment three weeks prior to meeting. The Chair will approve the agenda prior to its circulation.

A final agenda will be circulated to members at least two weeks prior to the scheduled meeting.

All papers for circulation should be received by the secretariat at least six working days before the meeting to allow for timely collation and distribution. Papers will be circulated five business days before each meeting.

Meeting minutes are to be recorded and, with approval of the Chair, circulated promptly to ECANZ members after each meeting.

Minutes will be approved at the following ECANZ meeting.

vi. Review

The Charter will be reviewed annually to assess the Council's impact and performance against its purpose and focus areas, recognising as well, the need for both agility and flexibility to deal collectively with issues as they arise.

On an annual basis ECANZ will review the content of this document and agree on the key activities that will be undertaken during the forthcoming year.

vii. Dissolution

Members may collectively resolve to dissolve ECANZ or any associated working parties at any time.

Endorsement

These terms of reference were endorsed by ECANZ members at the 27 June 2024 meeting.



Appendix A: Two Key Principles

Independence of commissions

The Council has no formal power or authority, and individual Commissioners are not bound by its deliberations or decisions. All members are responsible for the performance of electoral systems in their own jurisdictions which are:

- Transparent and accountable
- Convenient and accessible
- Responsive to the needs of electors and to other key stakeholders in the electoral process.

These are values which members seek to apply as consistently as possible and to the greatest extent possible in the context and conditions they each face in their separate and sovereign jurisdictions.

Collectivism of electoral administrators

The successful application of the values outlined above in any single jurisdictions reflects well on the overall performance of electoral systems in all jurisdictions. Similarly, members accept that a failure in any jurisdiction is a failure for all.

ECANZ can be leveraged to address a range of issues affecting electoral integrity and performance issues that have an impact on all jurisdictions, which would benefit from a collective approach for greater influence decisions made regarding the policy and operational issues impacting electoral administrators.

This will include “war gaming” different scenarios that could impact electoral system integrity and performance to lift agility, preparedness, and capability as consistently as possible across jurisdictions.



Appendix B: Challenges

It's hard to recall a period in recent history when the integrity and effectiveness of electoral systems, which is the core business of the members of ECANZ, has been more important or more challenged by difficult conditions affecting democratic trust and confidence in governments globally.

The importance of public trust in electoral processes and election results to the foundations of democracy and democratic institutions, cannot be overstated. How well electoral commissions discharge their responsibilities, is central to the health of democracy and associated conditions of security and prosperity.

The following are contemporary and emerging trends which have the potential to challenge ECANZ members to continue to deliver high integrity electoral events:

- The impact of **foreign interference in elections**;
- The use of **misinformation and disinformation**, including through social media platforms;
- Inconsistencies and issues with **funding and donations** legislation;
- **Operational issues** including the state of IT systems, technological capabilities, and access to a workforce of requisite skill, size and flexibility, and identifying the extent to which some of these resources can be effectively 'pooled'
- Poor **cybersecurity defences** against increasing attacks of rising complexity and intensity need to be addressed consistently and effectively;
- Securing a **more consistent and reliable legislative and funding base** for predictable planning and investment across the range of electoral system functions and activities; and
- **Increasing scrutiny on the integrity and operational performance of electoral systems** to the extent that they now function as front-line defences for confidence and trust in democratic institutions.



Appendix C: ECANZ Focus Areas

Over the next three years, ECANZ will focus on these areas that can be addressed on a common and shared basis and which will benefit individual jurisdictions as well as the overall quality and performance of electoral systems across Australia and New Zealand.

The following are all areas which the Council agrees represent a common agenda of opportunities and risks:

1. Revive the work on an Australian “**national electoral platform**” for services, functions and assets, especially in relation to cybersecurity and other aspects of security and integrity that can be built and used on a common and shared basis as a vital piece of national infrastructure. This is particularly important for the provision in Australia of robust and effective digital platforms for key electoral functions, including voting.
2. Develop **shared approaches to workforce and skills**, including common training programs and a shared approach to developing and utilising across jurisdictions specialist expertise across the different dimensions of the electoral process (policy, legal and legislative, IT and digital, delivery, communications, research etc).
3. Reinforce and extend the work being done on common approaches to the impact of **foreign interference in elections** and the use and **misuse of social media**.
4. Use **ECANZ as a “clearing house”** to streamline the sharing of physical and digital assets and services as well as more easily accessible comparative information about different aspects of the electoral process (funding, donations, results, voting patterns and trends etc)