

# Counting the votes

## fact sheet



## Counting the votes

The process of counting votes following an election is undertaken with the primary objectives of ensuring:

- accurate results, and
- the secrecy of the ballot.

There are four phases to the counting process:

- 1 the unofficial preliminary count
- 2 the indicative count
- 3 the official count, and
- 4 the preference count (if preferences are used in voting).

The counting of votes begins at 6pm on election night when the polls have closed, and continues until the counting process is complete.

All counts completed on election night are *unofficial*. A declaration of a successful candidate is made only after the *official* count has been conducted and when the outcome is mathematically certain.

If mathematical certainty requires inclusion of outstanding postal votes, an electorate may not be declared until the counting of any postal votes returned within the deadline. This is 10 days after election day.

## 1. Unofficial preliminary count – after 6pm on election night

The unofficial preliminary count begins following the close of polls at 6pm on election day. For the preliminary count, the total number of first preference votes each candidate received is tallied.

On election night, the following votes will be counted in polling booths and Returning Officers' offices:

- all election day polling booth votes
- all available early voting centre votes (some material may still be in transit)
- all available postal votes (many postal votes will still be in transit and can be received up to 10 days after election day)
- electronically assisted votes for electorates where large volumes of votes have been cast (if relevant), and
- all votes taken during early voting and on election day.

All results will be reported through Returning Officers and progressively published on the ECQ's results website.

# Counting the votes

## 2. Indicative count – after 6pm on election night, and following days if required

The indicative count is an allocation of preferences to two candidates selected by the Electoral Commissioner. The two candidates are selected because various factors indicate they are the most likely to receive the highest number of first preference votes. The factors include historical trends and current polling.

The two candidates for the indicative count for each state electoral district remain in-confidence until 6pm on election day. It is possible that, after a majority of polling booth counts are completed on election night, it becomes clear that the majority of first preference votes have been cast for different candidates to those selected for the indicative count.

Where this occurs, a corrected indicative count may be undertaken at the Returning Officer's office in the day(s) immediately following election day.

## 3. Official count – the day/s following election day

After the unofficial (preliminary and indicative) counts are complete, an official count is conducted under the supervision of the Returning Officer for each electoral district. All preliminary counts are counted again as part of the official count. No official counts are conducted on election night.

Postal votes and declaration votes continue to be counted and included in the count during this phase.

## 4. Preference count – the day/s following election day

The preference count (sometimes called the full preference count) is the process of exhausting votes received by the candidate with the lowest

number of votes, according to the voters preference marked on the ballot paper, as outlined here:

- First, the candidate with the lowest number of votes is excluded from the count and their preferences are distributed to the other candidates according to the elector's preference marked on the ballot paper
- Following this, the candidate with the next lowest number of votes is excluded from the count and their preferences are distributed to the other candidates according to the elector's preference marked on the ballot paper.
- This process of exclusion and allocation of preferences continues until there are two candidates remaining in the count and one of the candidates has the majority of votes.

A declaration of a successful candidate for each electorate is only made when the outcome is mathematically certain.

A declaration may occur once official counts have been conducted in the days after election day, however the ECQ may need to wait until a sufficient number of outstanding postal votes are received and counted to ensure there is certainty about the elected candidate having absolute majority of votes cast. Postal ballots received up to 10 days after election day are admitted to the count, and in some instances the ECQ will need to wait for day 10 postal votes to be received and counted, and undertake the preference count before making a declaration.

Following declarations of results, the successful candidate will be indicated on the ECQ's results website.

