

Data-Matching

The Australian Electoral Commission must answer this question above all:

Why has it never set up a data-matching facility under the Data-Matching Program (Assistance and Tax) Act 1990?

What is this facility?

It was created circa 1983 specifically to cleanse the electoral roll at the request of the then Commonwealth Electoral Office by the Special Investigation Section of the Department of Social Security. It correlated data from pensions, unemployment benefits, medicare, social security, immigration et al on a points system, downloading the information every 24 hours. This delivered information to those departments who want it, but since 1990, only to those registered under the Data Matching Program Act.

This system initially met with a lot of opposition within the Department of Social Security, for fear the department might look bad if much fraud was found; also without from the Australian Electoral Commission after it was established in 1984 possibly for the same reason despite the fact the program was created for its predecessor.

What is obvious now is that the AEC should not reject using the Data Matching Facility of the Department of Social Security today. It should not prefer to choose the current policy of entrenching Continuous Roll Review (CRU) and abolish the old Habitation Review. One only has to read evidence given by three experienced Queensland Divisional Returning Officers of the serious limitations of CRU alone to the 2001 Pyne Inquiry of the Commonwealth Parliament. DRO's should not be reliant in their Queensland offices on "do-it-yourself" matching of programs (eg. Telstra/RTA/Centrelink) on separate screens.

State of Affairs in 1983

[Joint Select Committee on Electoral Reform 1983 \(Hansard May 27 p.103\)](#)
(Messrs. Pearson and Cirulis were Commonwealth Electoral Officer and his deputy)

Mr. Cirulis: For quite some years now we have moved away from manual operations. Claim cards are received, coded in the Office, punched on computer tapes. A printout is verified against the cards on which the entries are made.

Chairman: But you also keep a record of how many houses there are in a street?

Mr. Pearson: Yes and no. We used to maintain what we called a habitation index in the divisional office.

Chairman: The chap can say 'there ought to be 5 people on the roll in that house?'

Mr. Pearson: Yes. But we can now by a computer printout of streets by habitation.

Senator Sir John Carrick: I understand that it is not a public list. I ask why I should not ask you to give me a printout of the street order rolls as stated?

Mr. Pearson: Owing to the Attorney General's advice on the Freedom of Information Act, we have taken a narrow view of responsibility to the elector.

Senator Sir John Carrick: Once you have published that roll you have put aside the privacy of that person. It is normal practice for both sides to write up the roll in street order.

Senator Richardson: The marginal seat candidates do it. We make sure they do.

Mr. Pearson: For government purposes it does not seem improper ... If I am told that if I provide the information to the Department of Social Security millions and millions of dollars will be saved in fraud (eg. false passports and drug traffic) it is hard to justify my position. On the other hand if I am asked to provide it to a political party for the purpose of canvassing it is difficult to place that in the same category.

Senator Sir John Carrick: Or to lower the possibility of fraud at a polling place?

Mr. Pearson: If that were the essential purpose for a political party there might be some argument but that is not the essential purpose. It would be canvassing.

Senator Sir John Carrick: Which is an act of complete integrity in a democracy.

Note: The past and present NSW Electoral Commissioners in 1989 condemned the AEC for reinstating voters on the roll for any address from 1979. 'In some instances persons, whose names have been reinstated on the roll, have not lived at the address given for a number of years. NSW reinstates only for an address as recent as the preceding election.' (The Commonwealth Act requires a person to be resident at an address)

15 years on the AEC still goes its own way

Data-Matching Policy

(Parliamentary Circular Sen. Hon Nick Minchin June 24, 1998)

"The AEC has initiated discussions with other Commonwealth agencies (other than Australia Post) with a view to embarking on a program which would not only assist in validation of names and addresses, but which would assist the AEC in identifying people eligible to enrol or to update their enrolment. These agencies include Centrelink, the Australian Taxation Office, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs."

How reliable a resource for the AEC is the Australian Taxation Office?

(Dr. R. Smith Research Analyst, Aust. Inst. of Criminology Risks & Benefits of Electronic Voting)

The Australian Taxation Office has encountered considerable problems identifying with accuracy individuals and businesses to whom tax file numbers and Australian Business Numbers are issued. The Australian National Audit Office (1999) recently found that:

- ❶ 3.2 million more tax file numbers than people in Australia at the last census;
- ❷ 185,000 potential duplicate tax records for individuals
- ❸ 62% of deceased clients had not been recorded
- ❹ 40% of de-registered companies were still recorded as active

What happened in the years between 1983-98?

Computerising of data processing of electoral roll in the AEC

1983-4

Observation of Endata (SA) Pty Ltd trial for S.A. Superannuation Board

1984-5

Computer Sciences of Australia Pty Ltd engaged as general consultant to develop a strategic plan for a national on-line system for maintenance of the electoral roll, supported by Department of Administrative Services, at Divisional Office level. First trials May-June 1985 in five divisions in NSW/Victoria/Western Australia. Plans to replace the outmoded COM 11 system for roll maintenance, and to introduce new enhancement programs to replace the election night system.

1986-7

Computer Sciences of Australia engaged to develop a hardware/software for a new roll management system using mainframe processing. COM 11 continued in use for the snap election early 1987, needing frequent programmer intervention to keep running due to extra stress of electoral roll reviews and a rush of 750,000 names just before close of the roll.

New equipment included ten NCR Tower 32's to enhance processing power, four to support the National Tally Room. The final phase of development and testing for the latter was held under extreme pressure, due to the early election, leading to breakdowns on election night.

1988-9

COM 11 replaced by new RMANS (Roll Management System) everywhere but South Australia. A NSW/Victoria/Queensland enrolment processing via DAS mainframe office automation; others by AEC in Canberra on Sequent Computer.

1989-90

Divisional Offices get computer terminals, enhancing ability to check enrolments.

Capacity to match Census Collection districts with enrolment information.

1991-3

Land use codes for each dwelling first step towards RMANS address data base.

DAS Enrolment and Technical Support section provides a name-matching facility with existing records to give greater accuracy to national data bases.

1998 RMANS now ...

is based on address, not name, *'to make it much easier to match and compare information with other agencies.'*

issues a screen warning if any enrolment being processed is for an excess of four electors in a detached residence or more than two in a flat or apartment.

identifies vacant and stable addresses, and multiple surname households.

How much confidence did AEC management engender in 1989?

Consider these two faxes from 34 of 39 DR0s in Victoria to the Hon J West, Minister for Administrative Services, Parliament House, Canberra

(15-May-1989)

Dear Minister,

Your urgent intervention in the following matter is requested.

The Australian Electoral Commission has recently introduced a computer enrolment system called RMANS, a system specifically designed for terminal access. In several states, including Victoria, terminals have not been provided, and RMANS is currently used on a batch processing basis.

For the following reasons the signatories to this request no longer have confidence in the accuracy of their electoral rolls;

- electors are being removed from rolls for reasons unknown to the Divisional Returning Officers,
- there are unknown numbers of duplicated entries on the rolls as a result of mispunching,
- many Divisions are reverting to outdated processing practices in an attempt to reduce the possibility of enrolment error.

We have not attempted to highlight other problems associated with RMANS eg. multiple acknowledgements of enrolment to electors (up to five cards) as it is considered that the major problems must be addressed in the first instance. The implications of these problems at a close of rolls for a federal election would be apparent to you.

Signed by the Divisional Returning Officers for the following Victorian Divisions.

Aston, Ballarat, Batman, Bendigo, Bruce, Burke, Calwell, Corangamite, Corio, Deakin, Dunkley, Flinders, Gellibrand, Gippsland, Goldstein, Henty, Higgins, Holt, Hotham, Indi, Isaacs, Jagajaga, Kooyong, Lalor, Latrobe, McEwen, McMillan, Mallee, Maribyrnong, Melbourne, Melbourne Ports, Murray, Scullin, Wannon. (Copies sent to all Victorian MHR's)

(7-Jun-1989)

Dear Minister,

The information provided to you by the AEC is in some areas misleading and in others totally incorrect. We note that the AEC had told you that RMANS was 'designed to run in State Head offices using batch processing'. However this advice appears to be contrary to the views expressed by the AEC in the following documents:

- 1986 ADP Strategic Plan produced by Computer Sciences of Australia Pty Ltd. of August 1985.
- The draft manual for the RMANS system
- The AEC's Annual Report 1988

(Re. complaints in letter of 15.5.1989)

The AEC's reply is selective and incorrect. Returning Officers are not worried about 'most' cases. but the remaining cases. This problem is occurring on an ongoing basis in every Division.

The AEC's reply relates to mismatching and not mispunching. Due to an increase in the number of input documents and new batch processing coding procedures a deterioration in the quality of data entry has occurred.

Under the old computer system (COM 11) Divisions had an initial reference point by way of State microfiche to check the enrolment status of electors. Any variance in elector details was detected at this point thereby preventing duplicate entries. Under RMANS there is no initial point.

The AEC's response to the problem of multiple acknowledgements was to say that it had 'been fixed'. However, a sample check of acknowledgement cards received in Divisional offices on 25-May-89 has revealed that some Divisions had up to 500 duplicated cards.

Our initial concerns regarding the RMANS system still remain ... Documentation held at all Divisional Offices emphasises the fact that there are major problems with the RMANS system ... As the officers responsible for the maintenance of the electoral rolls in our respective Divisions, we inform you again that we hold grave concerns regarding the accuracy of the rolls under current operational procedures.

(Letter signed by all the same Divisional Returning Officers as above)

Is the situation any better now?

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters Commonwealth Parliament
Inquiry into Integrity of Electoral Roll December 5, 2000

Evidence of three highly experienced Queensland Divisional Returning Officers

Mr. Lamerton DRO for McPherson in a private capacity pp. EM 101-2

Mr. Lamerton: The CRU was introduced approximately two years ago as a replacement for the traditional way of reviewing the roll.... Many of us had some concerns, and since then there has been this sense of a *fait accompli*. This is what we are going to do. We are not going to return to the way of doing the roll in terms of a complete doorknock. That is it. We will not enter into any other discussion, apart from making improvements to the system in the way we have decided it is going to be done.

Chair: So, from the divisional level, you put some of these concerns to the AEC through your regular meetings and so on, and you were met with a lack of response. Is that correct?

Mr. Lamerton: Yes. It is difficult. Many people do not like the system. If an informal survey of divisional returning officers were conducted, I think it would show that they are not at all happy with what is happening at the moment. We appear to be banging our heads against the wall.

Chair: What about the direction not to investigate non-citizens enrolling? ... It was made very clear to all of you not to adopt the practice that Mr. Patching had adopted in Rankin (of checking with the Department of Immigration).

Mr. Lamerton: There was a directive As I recall, at a meeting that we attended, which I think was around 1990, we were surprised that that decision was made.

Mr. Ferguson: (You say) you cannot rely on Centrelink because a significant number of people on their list might be cheating Social Security and when you write to them they do not respond.

Mr. Lamerton: My concerns are that the CRU is not necessarily targeting all the right people. I would like to see it expanded. I am not against the CRU. I would just like to add a substantial doorknock - hopefully 100% once every election cycle. ...the one thing we have to try to do also is to update our address register (not really looked at since 1997). The AEO for Tasmania indicate they are doing virtually a full address register updating Tasmania. The question I would ask is if they are doing it there, why isn't it being done elsewhere?.... Adequate funds must be made available to the AEC to effectively carry out its charter.

Mr. Ferguson: And you see the doorknock as a very crucial part of all this?

Mr. Lamerton: I believe that to be so, particularly in growth areas and new housing estates. Also in areas where we have high turnover and voter mobility like flats, units and caravan parks. Why not do all of those rather than just those that are highlighted because we have picked up a match on another database?

Mr. Graham Smith, DRO for Forde in a private capacity EM 103

Mr. Smith: I personally would like to see, as part of the CRU, a doorknocking process which was far in excess of what it currently is. I believe that there are variations across the country in the way that the different states are approaching the actual doorknocking part of it. So, to overcome the superfluous entries on the roll, I would be advocating that we do far more regular doorknocks in a lot broader coverage. If we are not doing those doorknocks then the potential does exist for entries to be there to be used inappropriately

Mr. Smith: (later to Senator Faulkner) I believe the CRU is a problem. At the end of 1994, after the doorknock, we found several entries of people such that the review officer would go to an address and find that it did not exist or that there were multiple surnames at listed addresses... I feel as if sometimes I am just banging my head against the wall. We seem to be talking about this CRU ad nauseam but so far I am not happy with it from a personal point of view. There would be many other DRO's in that position as well.... The issue of CRU has been raised at various divisional meetings and forums by a number of people, so it has been mentioned a few times over the last couple of years.

Chair: It would be possible for someone to leave a caravan park, for example, move to another one, be enrolled in an electorate, decide not to change their enrolment, not bother to turn up and vote in the new division for their old address, and for someone to know that and go along and vote for them on polling day. The AEC would never know that was the case, would they, without voter ID?

Mr. Smith: Yes, without voter ID the only way that someone would pick it up is if, perchance, a person was working in the polling booth who actually know that person and that would be a very, very minor possibility.

Chair: Especially in a seat with 60 polling booths.

Mr. Smith: The larger the number of polling booths, the greater the potential to abuse the system.

Senator Murray: Who should not be on the roll because they have criminal intent? That is really the juicy side of this inquiry. My judgement has been, from what I have read, that the trust system under which the AEC operates is flawed and can be abused. The problem is that none of us knows whether it is large enough to affect the result of an election The real issue is what I have seen broadly described as personation, where a real person at a real address in the wrong electorate is established or an unreal person at a real address is established. Would you agree that the greatest danger is that personation area?

Mr. Smith: I certainly see that, under the current system, it would be possible for such a scheme to be perpetrated and it is certainly a matter of conjecture as to how big and how wide that scheme could be. Would it be 10 votes, or 20 people voting 20 times which becomes 400 votes? That is where it gets worrying because, at the moment, the chance of the scheme being found out would be fairly unlikely.

Mr. Robert Patching, DRO for Rankin

Senator Mason: Earlier today Mr. Lamerton said many other DROs are also unhappy with the current procedures for maintaining the integrity of the electoral roll, especially the CRU process. Would you agree with that?

Mr. Patching: Yes. One DRO rang me and said that what I had to make clear in my submission - which I thought was good of him - was that each enrolment card in his division that he collected through the doorknock, associated with the CRU, was costing \$25.00 a card.

Senator Ferris: You have no doubt read in the Hansard of our first hearing, where Mr. Becker (Australian Electoral Commissioner) told us 'that the federal electoral system is in very good shape, and I have no reason to dispute the conclusion reached in previous AEC submissions - that no federal election result since 1984.. has been affected by widespread and organised electoral fraud Would you agree with that?'

Mr. Patching: The honest answer to whether or not an election outcome in any seat has been affected by fraud is that the Electoral Commission, truthfully, have to say they do not know - because we don't do we?

Senator Ferris: How optimistic are you, and some of your colleagues who have chosen not to give evidence here today or put in a submission, that in the end the Electoral Commission will listen to you people on the ground and actually make these changes – apart from if they are forced to?

Mr. Patching: Once you take an attitude the election cannot be affected in any way, there's no need to change. They are telling you the system works perfectly.

Chair: Following the 1996 election you said you discovered eight electors who were enrolled and who appear to be ineligible for citizenship reasons. What I find even more disturbing is that four of those electors voted in the 1997 election as well as the 1990 and 1993 elections. It poses the question: how many more are there that remain undetected? Do you still stand by the statement 'in view of the 217 that I uncovered in 20 months I would say that there would be many thousands Australia wide'.

Mr. Patching: A new person working for me brought this enrolment card to me and said 'look at this. 'This person has moved address. She has been enrolled for 14 years and moved into our division. She ticked she was not an Australian citizen this time. I have a copy of the previous enrolment card where she ticked last time that she was an Australian citizen.' She had been voting since 1985. I worked out she had voted in five elections, two referenda, and who knows how many state and council elections. You have to say we really found that by accident.

Chair: The CRU is now writing to them and asking them to enrol?

Mr Patching: When we send out, through the CRU, vacant house letters, we are probably targeting, amongst those vacant house letters, non-citizens, aren't we?

Chair: In your submission to the 1996 inquiry you talked about staggering numbers being involved in non-citizens voting. You had formulated a plan about how to deal in your own division with non-citizens voting in order to make sure that only people who were eligible to vote could vote, but you tried not to let on to the head office that that was what you were doing because your experience in the AEC led you to believe that a negative response was almost assured. They then discovered that you were involved in checking citizenship through the Department of Immigration and you became the victim of much criticism for not following so-called policy (which was to accept applications at face value).

Out of the 577 applications for enrolment you received from electors, born overseas at this time but claiming to be Australian citizens, you found 215 of those electors were ineligible for enrolment. Would you outline for the Committee whether you believe that there was a culture in the AEC that this sort of problem raised by DRO's was something they would rather have swept under the carpet?

Mr. Patching: At one of the group meetings ... I was invited along as a guest. Tim Scott (DRO for Lilly) put it on the agenda. I put down my figures and we were promptly told not to do it any more by the Director of Operations (Ross Mackay). [In 2000 Mr. Cunliffe accused him of providing no evidence of this].

Chair: Was that directive given to you orally and later confirmed in writing?

Mr. Patching: It was given to me again twice: once in writing and then I got a phone call from the Director of Operations, who told me that I had to cease immediately and that, should I be found to be continuing, he would have no alternative but to charge me with official misconduct.... Subsequently he rang me and said 'You brought this figure up at the JSCEM hearing. We want the names, addresses and birth dates of the 215. 'I said I can give you the enrolment card, ' 'No we don't want them, we just want the details.' In 1996 I was ready to return to work (after being off work sick) and to be involved in the 1996 election. The AEO refused to allow me to return to work unless I allowed him to transfer me to any part of the AEC he saw fit.'

Chair: Do you think perhaps you have been used by the AEO in Queensland as an example to other officers - 'this will happen if you raise concerns that we in head office are not interested in being raised?'

Mr. Patching: Whether I was intentionally used as an example I do not know, but I can assure you that a lot of people do think before they put submissions to the JSCEM. There are three of us here and there are 27 DRO's who complain about systems. I quite openly say to them 'if you had a backbone you'd put in a submission.' I think a lot of them are frightened of the fallout.

A roll cleanse in Queensland for the 2001 election?

In the wake of the uproar, about false enrolments for preselections in the Queensland ALP branches for Federal and State seats, that engulfed Queensland during the year 2,000, various media reports claimed towards the end of the year that Mr. Bob Longland, the Queensland Australian Electoral Officer for the Australian Electoral Commission, had promised a complete roll cleanse before a very beleaguered Premier Beattie held an election - then rumoured to be in February or March 2001.

This roll cleanse depended on Mr. Bob Longland because Queensland had now adopted the Commonwealth roll in recent years. It was a test case for the AEC, as Queensland had been running a pilot program since 1997 for managing enrolments solely by Continuous Roll Updating before adopting the policy in all states. Accordingly it had abandoned old style habitation reviews of hiring extra staff to carry out house to house reviews. By 2000, there had been none for four years. Divisional staff had to manage as best as they could despite the faults of the data-matching program devised by the AEC - names of tourists on working visas on the RTA database for example.

These DRO's knew Bob Longland was promising the moon. A complete roll cleanse was impossible.

Current checks were of the 'return-to-sender' mail - at best, only covering 10-12% of the electorate.

To do more, a full habitation review would have to be done.

- i. this takes at least 4-5 months
- ii. this requires funds to employ casuals
- iii. such funds had not yet been made available

If he intended to do more, December-January are the worst possible months

- i. school holidays
- ii. traditional time to move
- iii. absence on holidays

All those names would have to be taken off before the election but this takes DRO's at least three months to carry out.

Questions being asked before December 8, 2000

- 🌀 Has he applied for funds for habitation reviewers to be employed?
- 🌀 What is he doing about it that he wasn't doing before to make the roll perfect?
- 🌀 If he is doing something different, why hasn't he done it before?
- 🌀 How can he guarantee names will not be added immediately after reviewers do their spot-checking of sections by ballot-riggers, knowing there will be no further check for some time

- as happened in the 1989 state election in Stafford, Salisbury and other electorates?
- How can he guarantee a clean roll given that CRU methods only ensure 7% or so of an electorate has been spot-checked every 2-3 years?

Questions being asked after December 8, 2000

Mr. Longland announced that the roll had been completely cleansed on December 8, 2000 and Premier Beattie could confidently hold an election any time. The day before the issue of the writs for the election in early February, Mr. Longland announced that he had sent out 850,000 letters to electors because 600,000 electors were not properly enrolled and 250,000 younger people were not enrolled at all, despite the fact that the AEC's insistence on enrolment without ID would be more likely to get them to enrol than if they had to submit ID.

- Why send these out at the last minute when only a small fraction of enrolments could be effected in the short time left? More suspicious souls called it a blueprint for fraud as it asked for names of all people who no longer lived in the dwellings nominated on the forms!

More questions to be asked of Bob Longland

- Why was Mr. Longland conducting a mail-out when, on all other occasions, it was a standard agreement since 1992 that the AEC stop all enrolment pursuits as soon as a election is impending, whether the notice is official or not and the State Electoral Commission was apprised of this?
- How could Mr. Longland claim the one day mail out was the most successful thing the AEC had ever done. It cost \$100,000; money which could have been spent better elsewhere?
- How did Mr. Longland explain 25,000 duplicate enrolments?
- Why did Mr. Longland believe he could process 850,000 letters on top of an election when it had taken a whole year to process 634,000?
- Why send these letters out when he had just claimed the year long review to be such a success?
- Did Mr. Longland send the letter of nine DRO's saying it was a complete failure to Becker as they requested?



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