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The Commonwealth of Australia was formed on 1 January 1901 when the six colonies (now States) federated to form the new nation. A Federal Parliament, consisting of two houses - the House of Representatives and the Senate - was established to govern the new nation. It is at federal elections that eligible Australians elect people to represent them in both houses of Parliament.

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History of Electoral Administration

Following the enactment of the *Commonwealth Franchise Act 1902* and the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1902*, an electoral office was established as a branch of the Department of Home Affairs to administer the conduct of federal elections and referendums. For the next 70 years the office functioned as a branch of various Commonwealth departments. The Australian Electoral Office Act 1973 established the Australian Electoral Office as a statutory authority responsible to the Minister for Services and Property.

On 21 February 1984 following major amendments to the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* (the Act) the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) was established as an independent statutory authority.

The Role of the Australian Electoral Commission

The AEC is responsible for the administration of federal elections and referendums. This includes:

- maintaining and updating Commonwealth electoral rolls

- conducting federal parliamentary elections, redistributions of electoral boundaries, referendums, and industrial and other elections as required

- enforcing compulsory enrolment and compulsory voting

- conducting electoral education and promoting public awareness of electoral and parliamentary matters

- providing information and advice on electoral matters to parliament, the government, government departments and authorities

- electoral research, and

- assisting in the conduct of certain approved foreign elections and referendums

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The Structure of the Australian Electoral Commission

The AEC is organised on a geographic basis with the Central Office in Canberra; a Head Office in each State capital city and the Northern Territory; and a Divisional Office in or near each of the 150 electoral divisions.

The AEC is headed by a Commission consisting of a Chairperson (who must be a judge or a retired judge of the Federal Court), the Electoral Commissioner (who performs the functions of the Chief Executive Officer) and a part-time non-judicial member (usually the Australian Statistician). In addition, the Deputy Electoral Commissioner assists the Electoral Commissioner.

In each State and the Northern Territory, the Australian Electoral Officer (AEO) is responsible for the management of electoral activities within their State or Territory. The ACT is managed by the NSW AEO, and during the election period an ACT AEO is appointed. The AEO is the returning officer for the Senate election in their State or Territory.

Each electoral division has a permanent Divisional Returning Officer (DRO) who is responsible for electoral administration in their division. The DRO is the returning officer for the House of Representatives election in their division.

The AEC administers the following Acts:

- *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*

- *Representation Act 1983*

- *Referendum (Machinery Provisions) Act 1984*

The AEC also has specific functions under the Constitution and the following Acts:

- *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989*

- *Workplace Relations Act 1996*

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Redistribution of Electoral Boundaries

Remote mobile polling in the Northern Territory.

Each State and Territory is divided into voting areas called electoral divisions, with electors in each division electing a Member of Parliament to the House of Representatives.

A redistribution (or redrawing) of the geographic boundaries of these divisions takes place at least once every 7 years to make sure that there is, as near as practicable, the same number of electors in each division. The procedures for conducting redistributions are outlined in the *Commonwealth Electoral Act* (the Act).

Following the 1998 federal election, redistributions were undertaken in South Australia, New South Wales, Western Australia, Tasmania, and the Northern Territory.

The redistributions conducted in 1999 in South Australia, New South Wales and Tasmania were triggered as seven years had elapsed since these States were last redistributed. These redistributions resulted in some changes to existing boundaries in these States but no changes to the number of divisions the States were entitled to.

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Redistribution of Electoral Boundaries (continued)

As a result of population changes, redistributions were conducted in 2000 in Western Australia and the Northern Territory. It was determined that population growth in Western Australia meant that the State was entitled to one more seat in the House of Representatives. In Western Australia the boundaries of the existing 14 divisions were adjusted to include Hasluck, the new 15th division.

In the Northern Territory the boundary of the existing division was adjusted to include another division. The new Northern Territory divisions were named Solomon and Lingiari.

At the 2001 federal election, electors were electing 150 members to the House of Representatives, compared to 148 members at the 1998 federal election. The number of divisions in each State and Territory at the 2001 federal election was:

New South Wales	50	South Australia	12
Victoria	37	Tasmania	5
Queensland	27	Northern Territory	2
Western Australia	15	Australian Capital Territory	2

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