

OBSERVATION OF THE CHAIRMAN (JUSTICE USAIA RATUVILI),
ELECTORAL COMMISSION

PIANZEA Network

Election Visitor Program for the

Australian Federal Election

Canberra, 01 - 04 May 2025

This was my first official trip as Chairperson of the Electoral Commission of Fiji and I must say that this was eye opening and very interesting.

I found the structure of our hosts the Australian Elections Commission very interesting as well as the actual Commission comprises three Commissioners – a retired or active Judge recommended by the Chief Justice of the Federal Court of Australia, a non-judicial Commissioner and the Electoral Commissioner, who holds executive authority. The office and operational AEC is under the Electoral Commissioner and he is accountable to Parliament and other stakeholders for the AEC.

The Electoral Commission meets regularly however the daily running of the Commission is under the control of the Electoral Commissioner. Their structure when compared to us is the equivalent of the EC and FEO merging together.

With respect to the General Elections, a key development this election cycle was the increase in early voting, both postal and in person early voting and this trend really affected the final result. The election process was well organised and we observed at

an urban centre and then a rural centre. The process was the same and polling was very efficient and quick. Voters did not queue for too long and polling was conducted in almost a carnival atmosphere.

An interesting aspect of the elections process was the fact there is no need for the presentation of identification and no indelible link at the end of the voting. There is a lot of emphasis on trust, they trust you to be who you say you are. Voters also understood their role, those with difficult names brought their ID documents to assist the polling worker.

With respect to the Count, there was manual counting of each ballot. The voting system in Australia is similar to the previous system that we had in Fiji where the voter needs to rank their preference according to the number of candidates on the ballot with 1 being their preference and descending downwards to their last choice.

I also enjoyed the interaction with the fellow Pacific Island countries and sharing with them their experiences and challenges. They are at various stages of evolution if you like. Some smaller countries have their election management bodies directly attached to a Ministry, mainly the Prime Minister's Office. Others have a very small office and for elections they use civil servants, similar to the case in Fiji before. This experience was very useful and informative and there is a lot to learn from the Australian experience.

As for takeaways, my view is that postal voting will play an important role in our next general election next year. This is because a large population of registered voters are now overseas working in the Australian and New

Zealand work scheme, we will need to ensure that these voters have their say and that their votes are counted next year.

