

Scrutineer policy

NSW State elections

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1. Abbreviations and definitions

Abbreviations

Electoral Act Electoral Act 2017 (NSW)

Definitions

Ballot counting place – A place appointed by the Electoral Commissioner for the counting of ballot papers under section 163 of the Electoral Act.

Election manager – an election official appointed as the election manager for a district under section 81(3) of the Electoral Act.

Election official – a person appointed as an election official under section 81(1) of the Electoral Act.

Electoral district – Electoral district or district means a district for the election of a member to serve in the Legislative Assembly of New South Wales.

Eligible elector – An elector who is blind or has low vision.

Voting centre – A place appointed by the Electoral Commissioner under section 108 of the Electoral Act to be a voting centre for the purpose of taking the poll at an election (and includes an early voting centre).

Voting centre manager – Means a person appointed as a voting centre manager under section 81(4) of the Electoral Act.

2. Introduction

- 2.1. At NSW State elections, a scrutineer represents a candidate or a registered party at a voting centre or ballot counting place,¹ and other locations where scrutineers are permitted by the *Electoral Act 2017* (Electoral Act) to be present.
- 2.2. The role of a scrutineer is to satisfy the candidate or registered political party by whom the scrutineer has been appointed that the election process is carried out fairly, impartially, and with integrity. A scrutineer's presence provides an additional level of assurance to political participants and the public regarding the integrity of the election process.

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¹ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 119(1).

3. Purpose

- 3.1. This Policy details the rights and obligations of scrutineers in NSW state elections.
- 3.2. While this document provides guidance, it is not a substitute for the laws which govern the conduct of an election and the participants in an election, nor does it provide legal advice. If there is doubt about any legal matters regarding an election, independent legal advice should be sought.
- 3.3. This policy documents the Electoral Commissioner's decision under s 120(2) of the Electoral Act regarding additional scrutineers for candidates and registered parties being permitted at voting centres and ballot counting places.
- 3.4. This document also contains the Electoral Commissioner's approval for the purposes of s 158 of the Act regarding the elements of the technology assisted voting process that may be observed by scrutineers.

4. Who can appoint scrutineers

4.1. Registered parties and candidates are entitled to appoint one or more scrutineers on their behalf at a voting centre or ballot counting centre.²

5. Who can and cannot be appointed a scrutineer

- 5.1. To be appointed as a scrutineer, a person must:
 - be enrolled for the relevant district or any other district,³ and
 - be 18 years of age or older.⁴
- 5.2. Candidates may only be appointed as a scrutineer in the following circumstances:
 - a Legislative Assembly candidate cannot be appointed as a scrutineer for the district they
 are contesting but may be appointed as scrutineer for another Legislative Assembly district
 or the Legislative Council;
 - a lead candidate (i.e., the first listed candidate) in a Legislative Council group or ungrouped candidate for the Legislative Council cannot be appointed as a scrutineer for the Legislative Council, but may be appointed as a scrutineer for a Legislative Assembly district; and
 - candidates in a group who are not the lead candidate may be appointed as a scrutineer for either the Legislative Council or a Legislative Assembly district.⁵

² Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 119(1).

³ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 119(2).

⁴ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 31(2).

⁵ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 119(2), (10).

6. How scrutineers are appointed

- 6.1. The Electoral Commissioner has approved a form that provides for:
 - the appointment of a scrutineer by a candidate or registered political party, and
 - a declaration to be made and signed by the scrutineer.⁶
- 6.2. The form "SE.213 Appointment of scrutineer" published by the NSW Electoral Commission, is available on the NSW Electoral Commission's website.
- 6.3. The appointment form includes a declaration that the scrutineer must make and sign before the Electoral Commissioner, voting centre manager or election official (as the case requires) each day at the place where the scrutineer intends to act as scrutineer.⁷ This is a declaration that the scrutineer:
 - is 18 years of age or older;
 - has read, understood and will comply with the Requirement for appointment as scrutineer and Scrutineer undertaking on page 1 of the form;
 - will observe all the provisions of the Electoral Act that relate to scrutineers;
 - will follow all lawful directions issued by the Electoral Commissioner, voting centre manager or other election officials in accordance with the Electoral Act; and
 - is enrolled in the identified electoral district.
- 6.4. The person appointed as a scrutineer **cannot** act as scrutineer on any day unless the person presents the completed form on that day to the voting centre manager or to the election official, and makes the declaration before them.⁸ Scrutineers may use copies of the completed form, but the copy is to be signed, as outlined above, on each day that the scrutineer intends to act as scrutineer.⁹
- 6.5. Election officials may retain the SE.213 Appointment of scrutineer form. However, if the election official has not retained the form, a scrutineer **should** produce their scrutineer appointment form for inspection if asked by an election official.
- 6.6. Part 4 of the *Oaths Act 1900* applies to the making of this declaration, including the offences regarding false declarations and false declarations for material benefit.¹⁰

⁶ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 119(3).

⁷ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 119(5)-(7).

⁸ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 119(6)-(7).

⁹ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 119(8).

¹⁰ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 119(9).

7. Scrutineer rights and obligations

7.1. All scrutineers will be treated equally by election officials at all times. Information made available to one scrutineer will be made available to all scrutineers present.

Requirements and expectations of scrutineer

- 7.2. At NSW State elections, scrutineers are required to:
 - behave in a professional manner, take responsibility for their own conduct, and be respectful to all participants in the electoral process; and
 - wear scrutineer identification while at voting centre, ballot counting place, or other location where they are acting as a scrutineer.
- 7.3. At NSW State elections, it is **recommended** that scrutineers:
 - attend any staff briefing (at an election location) for an activity they will be a scrutineer for at that location; and
 - observe all procedures so as to monitor compliance with legislative requirements.
- 7.4. At NSW State elections, a scrutineer can:
 - enter and leave a voting centre during voting;11
 - enter or leave a ballot counting place during counting;12
 - communicate with any person at a voting centre or ballot counting place in regard to scrutineer duties:
 - sign election forms as a witness when a witness is required; and
 - use mobile phones or other electronic devices to talk to, or text, another person, as long as the noise level does not interfere with the electoral process being undertaken and those devices are not used to film or record election processes inside an early voting centre, declared facility or voting centre, election manager's office or ballot counting place.
- 7.5. At NSW State elections a scrutineer may not:
 - touch ballot papers or declaration vote envelopes, nor any other election material;
 - film or record election processes;
 - be alone in any room where there are ballot papers; or
 - bring food or drink near ballot papers.

¹¹ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 120(3)(a).

¹² Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 120(3)(b).

Offences by scrutineers and other prohibitions

- 7.6. A scrutineer **must not**:
 - interfere with or attempt to influence any elector within the voting centre or any election
 official in a voting centre or ballot counting place (it is permissible for a scrutineer to wear
 or display a logo, badge or emblem of a candidate or political party)¹³; or
 - communicate with any person in the voting centre or ballot counting place, except so far as
 is necessary in the discharge of his or her functions.¹⁴
- 7.7. A scrutineer who commits any breach of those requirements, or who misconducts himself or herself, or who fails to obey the lawful directions of the voting centre manager or election official in charge of a ballot counting place is guilty of an offence.¹⁵
- 7.8. A scrutineer who, within a voting centre or ballot counting place:
 - commits any breach of the offence provisions;
 - misconducts himself or herself; or
 - fails to obey the lawful directions of the voting centre manager or person in charge of a ballot counting place,
 - may, on the request of the voting centre manager at the voting centre or person in charge
 of the ballot counting place, be removed from the place by a police officer.¹⁶
- 7.9. Scrutineers should also be aware of other prohibitions and offences that are described under the Electoral Act. Under those provisions a person **must not**:
 - disclose information about how an eligible elector, voting in accordance with the approved procedures for technology assisted voting, voted;¹⁷
 - disclose to any other person any source code or other computer software that relates to technology assisted voting under the approved procedures, except in accordance with the approved procedures or in accordance with any arrangement entered into by the person with the Electoral Commissioner;¹⁸
 - without reasonable excuse, destroy or interfere with any computer program, data file or electronic device used, or intended to be used, by the Electoral Commissioner for or in connection with technology assisted voting;¹⁹
 - obstruct access or approaches to the voting centre:²⁰
 - give or confer, or offer promise or offer to give or confer, any property or any other benefit of any kind to a person or any other person in order to influence any person's election conduct;²¹
 - hinder or interfere with the free exercise, by any other person, of the person's right to vote in an election under the Electoral Act;²²

¹³ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 121(1)(a), 121(3).

 $^{^{14}}$ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 121(1)(b).

¹⁵ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 121(2).

¹⁶ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 121(4).

 $^{^{\}rm 17}$ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 159(1).

¹⁸ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 159(2).

¹⁹ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 160(1).

²⁰ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 208.

²¹ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 209(1).

 $^{^{22}}$ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 210(1).

- by violence or intimidation, influence the vote of a person at an election;²³
- remove a ballot paper from any voting centre;²⁴
- enter into a compartment of a voting centre while any person is in the compartment;²⁵
- obstruct or unnecessarily delay the proceedings at a voting centre;²⁶
- impersonate any elector for the purpose of voting at any election;²⁷
- vote more than once at any election;²⁸
- intentionally break open a sealed package of ballot papers or other electoral material unless authorised to do so by the Electoral Commissioner or an electoral manager or required or authorised to do so by or under any legislation or direction of a court;²⁹
- display, publish or distribute material (or cause or permit material to be displayed, publish or distributed) knowing that, or being reckless as to whether, the material falsely appears to have been authorised by the Electoral Commission or Electoral Commissioner;³⁰
- make a declaration that person knows is false or misleading or persuade or induce another person to make such a declaration;³¹
- improperly sign or witness electoral papers, as set out in section 217 of the Electoral Act;
- forge any electoral paper;³²
- utter any forged electoral paper, knowing it to be forged;³³
- knowingly place in a ballot box:
 - any ballot paper that has not been lawfully issues to an elector; or
 - any other paper purporting to be a ballot paper other than a ballot paper lawfully issues to the elector;³⁴
- disclose any information obtained in connection with the administration or execution of the Electoral Act unless that disclosure is made:
 - with the consent of the person from whom the information was obtained;
 - in connection with the administration or execution of the Electoral Act (or any such other Act);
 - for the purposes of any legal proceedings arising out of the Electoral Act (or any such other Act) or of any report of any such proceedings, or
 - in accordance with the requirements imposed under the Ombudsman Act 1974, or
 - with other lawful excuse.³⁵

²³ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 210(2).

²⁴ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 211(a).

²⁵ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 211(b).

²⁶ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 211(d).

²⁷ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 212(a).

²⁸ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 212(b).

²⁹ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 214.

 $^{^{30}}$ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 215.

³¹ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 216(1), (3).

³² Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 218(a).

³³ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 218(b).

³⁴ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 219.

 $^{^{35}}$ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 268.

- 7.10. A police officer may remove or cause to be removed from a voting centre and from the immediate vicinity of the voting centre, any person:
 - who, having been given a lawful direction by or under the authority of the Electoral Commissioner or voting centre manager, fails to comply with that direction;
 - who is obstructing the access or approaches to the voting centre;
 - who is obstructing or unnecessarily delaying the proceedings at the voting centre; or
 - who is behaving in a disorderly manner or is causing a disturbance.³⁶
- 7.11. Scrutineers should also be familiar with further offences regarding non-complying electoral material, and the display and distribution of electoral material.³⁷
- 7.12. The Electoral Commissioner and every voting centre manager may give such directions as are necessary to maintain order at any election or any place where voting is occurring under the Electoral Act. A person must not, without lawful authority, contravene any such direction.³⁸

8. Scrutineers at locations at which they may be present

8.1. The Electoral Commissioner may provide information sheets to scrutineers at each location containing information specific to that location and the election activities to be undertaken at that location. That information should be considered in addition to the following.

Number of scrutineers permitted at voting centre and ballot counting places

- 8.2. Only one scrutineer for each candidate or registered party is entitled to be present in a voting centre or ballot counting place at any one time. However, the Electoral Commissioner may permit additional scrutineers for candidates and registered parties at such centres and places and in such circumstances and on such conditions as the Electoral Commissioner sees fit.³⁹
- 8.3. The Electoral Commissioner has determined under section 120(2) of the Electoral Act that additional scrutineers may be permitted in the following circumstances and conditions:
 - During the hours of voting one scrutineer per candidate or registered political party will be permitted in a voting centre or ballot counting place at any one time;
 - After 6 pm on election day additional scrutineers will be permitted, so as each candidate or registered political party is permitted one scrutineer per counting point;
 - The number of scrutineers per candidate or registered political party will be limited at the Legislative Council Count Centre or Centralised Declaration Vote Centre to one scrutineer per Council group or ungrouped candidate per counting or scrutiny point.⁴⁰

³⁶ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 203(2).

³⁷ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW), Part 7, Division 14, Subdivisions 3-5.

³⁸ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 203(3), (4).

³⁹ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 120(2).

⁴⁰ Overview of legislation, policy and procedure for State election voting centres, para 6.19

Scrutineers at a voting centre

- 8.4. A voting centre is a place appointed by the Electoral Commissioner under section 108 to be a voting centre for the purpose of taking the poll at an election (and includes an early voting centre).⁴¹
- 8.5. At an early voting centre, a scrutineer **may** be present when the voting centre manager secures any ballot box used at the early voting centre and forwards it to the Electoral Commissioner for scrutiny.⁴²
- 8.6. At a mobile voting centre (declared facility) a scrutineer **may**:
 - accompany an election official to a mobile voting centre;⁴³ and
 - inspect any how-to-vote card that is in the possession of the election official (including on any electronic device) at the declared facility.⁴⁴
- 8.7. At any voting centre, a scrutineer **may**:
 - wear or display a logo, badge or emblem of a candidate or political party;⁴⁵
 - be present at a voting centre at any time when a voting centre is open for voting;⁴⁶
 - before the voting centre is opened for voting, be present to inspect the empty ballot box when exhibited and opened by the voting centre manager;⁴⁷
 - observe the issue of ballot papers and require an election official to ask a person who is claiming to vote at a voting centre (including absent electors, silent electors, and absent silent electors) questions in the following form:
 - Are you the person whose name appears as [here state name under which the person claims to vote] on the roll for the district of [here state the name of the district in respect of which the person claims to vote]?
 - Are you of or above the age of 18 years?
 - Have you already voted, either here or elsewhere, at this election?
 - Are you disqualified from voting?
 - Do you live within the district of [here state the name of the district in respect of which the elector claims to vote]? What is your date of birth?⁴⁸; and
 - observe an election official assist an elector who is unable to vote without assistance to vote where the elector has not appointed a person to assist the elector to vote.⁴⁹
- 8.8. A scrutineer at a voting centre while voting is in progress **must not** do anything that would constitute an offence against the Electoral Act.
- 8.9. A scrutineer **may not** record the name of a person, or any information provided by a person, to an election official during the issue of a ballot paper.

⁴² Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 115(2).

⁴¹ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 4.

⁴³ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 118(5)(b).

⁴⁴ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 118(7)(b).

⁴⁵ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 121(3).

⁴⁶ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 123(1)(c),

⁴⁷ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 124(1).

⁴⁸ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 128(1); s 129(3); s 135(3); s 136(3).

⁴⁹ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 134(2).

Scrutineers at the preliminary scrutiny of envelopes containing a declaration vote

- 8.10. A scrutineer may attend a location where the Electoral Commissioner examines the declaration on each envelope containing a declaration vote.⁵⁰
- 8.11. A scrutineer may:
 - observe the opening and emptying of a ballot-box;
 - observe the receipt and scrutiny (acceptance or rejection) of returned declaration vote envelopes; and
 - observe the opening and extraction of ballot papers from declaration vote envelopes.⁵¹
- 8.12. A scrutineer at a place where declaration votes are processed **may not** interrupt election officials undertaking declaration vote processes. Instead, scrutineers should direct queries to the election official in charge.

Scrutineers at the preliminary scrutiny of postal ballot papers

- 8.13. A scrutineer **may** be present at the time and place where the Electoral Commissioner, not more than 14 days before election day, produces the unopened envelopes on which a postal vote certificate is printed containing postal votes that have been received by the Electoral Commissioner and produce unopened all remaining envelopes on which a postal vote certificate is printed containing postal votes:
 - received by the Electoral Commissioner following the close of voting before the expiry of the period prescribed by the regulations, being a period of not more than 13 days; or
 - received by any election official before 6 pm on election day.⁵²

Scrutineers at a ballot counting place

- 8.14. A ballot counting place is a place appointed by the Electoral Commissioner as a place for the counting of ballot papers for the election.⁵³
- 8.15. A scrutineer at a ballot counting place may:
 - be present when a voting centre manager, with the assistance of the election officials
 - as soon as practicable after the close of voting, opens the ballot boxes
 - scrutinises the ballot papers
 - rejects the informal ballot papers
 - places the envelopes containing postal votes and provisional votes to one side as they are taken from the ballot-box
 - counts the first preferences recorded for each candidate and group of candidates, the number of informal votes and the number of envelopes containing postal vote certificates or other declarations;⁵⁴
 - be present at the initial count of early voting, postal and other declaration vote category ballot papers commencing on election day in the Election Managers' offices and Centralised Count Centres and continuing in the weeks following election day;

⁵⁰ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 142.

⁵¹ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 142(1).

⁵² Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 149(1).

⁵³ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 163.

⁵⁴ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 164.

- object to the formality of a ballot paper or the determination of preferences of a ballot paper, but is to accept the consequent decision by the election official-in-charge. If the scrutineer is not satisfied with a decision, they may note the details and will be informed that:
 - if it is an initial count, a final determination will be made in the check count, or
 - if it is a check count, the candidate may pursue the matter through the Court of Disputed Returns;

Note: See also the section below **Scrutineering at a recount of ballot papers**.

- request a check count of a parcel of counted ballot papers that are sorted to a candidate;
- witness the sealing of counted ballot papers and endorse the packages with the ballot papers and other materials used and provided for use at the voting centre;⁵⁵
- communicate count results; and
- sign results sheets.
- 8.16. A scrutineer at a ballot counting place may not impede election officials undertaking a count.
- 8.17. Ballot paper formality rules will be set out in the candidate handbook made available on the NSW Electoral Commission website. It is important that scrutineers understand those rules and the system of voting that applies to the elections.

Scrutineers at a data entry location

- 8.18. A data entry location is any place where the preferences on ballot papers are entered into counting software (including by manual data entry).
- 8.19. A scrutineer at a data entry location **may** observe all batching and data entry processes.
- 8.20. While data entry is being undertaken for a contest a scrutineer **may** make a request to the election official in charge at the location for a data entry audit of enough (as determined by the electoral official in charge at the location) ballot papers in that contest to provide a high level of confidence that the result will not be affected by data entry error.
- 8.21. A data entry audit consists of election officials confirming that the preferences captured in the counting software match those on the physical ballot papers.
- 8.22. The scrutineer **may** request, and observe, the audit of any specific batches of ballot papers for any venue/vote type, and:
 - a ballot paper markings report will be printed for those batches from the counting software (showing all preferences that have been data entered for each ballot paper in that batch)
 - the physical ballot papers will be retrieved
 - in view of the scrutineer, one election official will read out each group/candidate's name
 and the marking for the group/candidate, and the second election official must check that
 the markings on the ballot paper match the markings being called from the ballot paper
 markings report.
 - any ballot papers found to have markings incorrectly entered will have their markings reentered into the counting software, and this audit process will be repeated for those ballot papers.
- 8.23. A scrutineer at a data entry location **may not** interrupt or impede data entry operators.

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⁵⁵ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 169(2).

Scrutineering of technology assisted voting

- 8.24. The Electoral Commissioner may permit an elector who is an eligible elector to vote at the election by means of telephone voting in accordance with the provisions of Part 7, Division 11 of the Electoral Act.
- 8.25. A scrutineer appointed by a candidate or registered party **may** attend the NSW Electoral Commission location published on the NSWEC website to observe:
 - any production of the printed ballot papers and bundling and sealing of those ballot papers in accordance with the approved procedures, and
 - any other element of the technology assisted voting process that is approved for the purposes of section 158 of the Act.⁵⁶
- 8.26. The Electoral Commissioner has approved that scrutineers may observe the following elements of the technology assisted voting process:
 - any element of the process occurring in the telephone voting call centre only, including:
 - prior to the start of voting, the process of sealing the ballot box;
 - during voting, the process by which election officials record the preferences of an
 eligible elector on a ballot paper before placing the ballot paper in a ballot box in
 accordance with the approved procedures. For clarity, this means being present to
 observe the actions carried out by election officials but does not extend to monitoring
 the voting telephone line;
 - after the close of voting, the process of unsealing the ballot box and transmission of the ballot papers for scrutiny and counting.
- 8.27. Scrutineers may not observe the process for the registration of eligible electors to use telephone voting.

Scrutineering at a recount of ballot papers

- 8.28. A recount of ballot papers may be initiated by one of two means:
 - a recount request from a candidate setting out the reasons for the request, accepted by the Electoral Commissioner; or
 - on the Electoral Commissioner's own motion.⁵⁷
- 8.29. Scrutineers at a recount may request that the person conducting the recount as the delegate of the Electoral Commissioner reserve any ballot paper for the decision of the Electoral Commissioner.⁵⁸
- 8.30. The Electoral Commissioner will decide whether any reserved ballot paper is to be allowed and admitted or disallowed and rejected, and will endorse the decision on the ballot paper.
- 8.31. The decision of the Electoral Commissioner is, subject only to review by the Court of Disputed Returns when hearing a petition in accordance with Part 8 of the Electoral Act, final.

⁵⁶ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 158.

⁵⁷ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) 172(1).

⁵⁸ Electoral Act 2017 (NSW) s 172(2).

9. Monitoring, evaluation and review

9.1. This document is to be reviewed by the date being 3 years from anniversary of approval unless reviewed earlier in response to post-implementation feedback or as necessary.

10. Relevant legislation

• Electoral Act 2017 (NSW)

11. Document control

Document management

Approved by:	Date approved:	
John Schmidt Electoral Commissioner		
Executive Director Review:	15/03/2023	
Andrea Summerell A/Executive Director, Elections		
Director Review:		
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Revision record

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