

19 October 2023

By email to: [REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

OFFICIAL INFORMATION ACT REQUEST 2023/62

On Thursday 5 October 2023 you made a request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the OIA) for the following information:

What is the status of online voting as an accessibility option outlined in the Access 2020 strategy under objective one.

Can I please have access to the latest report/review of the telephone dictation voting service.

Online voting

Objective 1 of the Commission's Access 2020 Strategy¹ is that 'disabled voters will be able to cast an independent and secret ballot in parliamentary elections'. Under a sub-objective for 2020 there is reference to online voting.

The Access 2020 Strategy was developed by the Commission in consultation with the disability community before the 2014 General Election. Given that its content does not extend beyond the 2020 General Election the Commission no longer considers the strategy to be current. As a result of your query, we will review the strategy's placement on our website, and we will examine it in more detail after General Election tasks are complete.

Our most recent published discussions on online voting are in our report on the 2020 General Election and referendums (the 2020 Report), published in May 2021:²

The Commission does not recommend online voting. However, there is likely to be continued public and political debate about it. Views on online voting are polarised both here and overseas. Changes in the postal system, difficulties with face-to-face voting during a pandemic, and the growth in demand for online services add to the perception that online voting is inevitable at some point. Advocates also identify online voting as an opportunity to increase accessibility. Opponents raise concerns about transparency of process, voting verification, authenticity of the results, protection against outside influence, and lack of evidence that it increases participation [...]

¹ <https://elections.nz/about/about-the-electoral-commission/corporate-publications/access-2020-disability-strategy/>

² <https://elections.nz/assets/2020-general-election/Report-of-the-Electoral-Commission-on-the-2020-General-Election-and-referendums.pdf>

The Commission will work with our counterparts from other similar jurisdictions and continue to monitor progress towards finding online voting solutions that are robust, cost-effective and that meet internationally accepted standards around security and voter verification. In the meantime, the Commission will focus on other technology opportunities to improve services to voters and make efficiency gains, as outlined in this report. *[Report p.44]*

As an indication of Parliament's intentions regarding online voting, the Independent Electoral Review that released its interim report in June 2023 explicitly excludes online voting from its terms of reference. It cites online voting amongst a list of 'broader constitutional matters' excluded from its remit, such as the role and functions of the Head of State, or the current size of Parliament.³

Telephone dictation voting

The 2020 Report also discusses the role of the telephone dictation voting system in the 2020 General Election. This is the most recent review of the system. Some of the points raised in the Report include:

- 2274 dictation votes were cast in 2020, out of a total of 2,919,073 total votes *[p.6]*
- The Report notes that the '...process is slow and highly manual. It requires three electoral officials to ensure secrecy and integrity – one to take the registration and issue the pin numbers, one to take the call to issue and record the vote, and a third to confirm to the voter that their vote has been correctly recorded' *[p.17]*
- Dictation voting was extended to people in MIQ via the existing telephone dictation voting service *[p.18]*
- There was increased uptake of the dictation service for people who could not mark the ballot paper due to vision or other disability (933 registrations, up from 610 in 2017) *[p.32]*

After each election the Commission undertakes a comprehensive review of all its processes and reports to Parliament. As part of this process the Commission will review how the telephone dictation service operated in the 2023 General Election.

In the interests of transparency, we release responses to Official Information Act requests every three months. We will publish this response with your personal details redacted.

You have the right under section 28(3) of the Act to make a complaint to the Ombudsman if you are not satisfied with the response to your request. Information about how to do this is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or by phoning 0800 802 602.

Yours sincerely



Ethan Tucker

Principal Advisor Governance

³ <https://electoralreview.govt.nz/about-us/terms-of-reference/>