



Atomic bomb dropped at Maralinga (SA) 19 October 1956. Photo: Newspix

Help sought for atomic test veterans

The Veterans' Entitlements Act should be amended to include Australian servicemen involved with the atomic tests during the 1950s, the Member for Greenway (NSW), Frank Mossfield, has told the House. He said ex-servicemen can get access to medical treatment if they can prove that their illnesses are related to the atomic tests, but the process is very complicated, drawn-out, expensive and distressing. "If they were classified as veterans, the treatment would be immediate," Mr Mossfield said. "These ex-servicemen do not want compensation, they simply want to be treated for illnesses they have." More than 15,000 Australians were involved with the atomic tests conducted by the British government at Maralinga and Emu Field in South Australia, as well as at Monte Bello. The Atomic Ex-Servicemen's Association is arranging a commemorative service on 3 October this year at HMAS Creswell naval base at Jervis Bay in honour of those ex-servicemen who have since died or who are suffering ill health as a result of the tests.

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More action needed on informal votes

We need simpler voting procedures to reduce the number of informal votes, says the Member for Fowler (NSW), Julia Irwin. But until that occurs, Ms Irwin wants extra effort to educate voters so that they may be sure their vote is counted. Ms Irwin's call comes after the percentage of informal votes in her own electorate of Fowler more than doubled to 12.7 per cent at the 2001 federal election. "More than one voter in every eight did not have their vote counted," Ms Irwin said. "9,816 voters were denied the opportunity to participate in the election of their government." According to Ms Irwin, differences in voting procedures between federal and NSW elections could be one factor. "My scrutineers observed that a large proportion of informal votes placed only one number on the ballot paper. Votes cast in this manner would be formal votes in New South Wales elections." Ms Irwin also noted that electorates with high numbers of people from non-English speaking backgrounds have recorded much higher levels of informal voting than other electorates.



Ballot counting at the federal election. Photo: Australian Electoral Commission/Arthur Mostead