***AEC School Address – Dapto High School 05/06/2014***

*Hello, my name is Mina Choubassi and I am a project officer with the Australian Electoral Commission which I will refer to from this point on as the AEC. I myself am a big fan of abbreviations possibly because my full name is Gelsomina Lucia Mafalda Cecilia Ceres Choubassi which doesn’t fit on my driver’s licence or most of the forms I’m asked to complete.*

*Next week the AEC will be assisting with your school elections and I wanted to talk a little bit on that subject and the AEC in general. The AEC is a Commonwealth agency and it is our job to provide Australians with an independent electoral service, help them understand and take part in voting and forming a federal government. Let me explain what that means as far as elections are concerned:- we do not talk about who is better, we do not talk about who is right, we are just there to take your votes, count them and give you a result. In between running elections we have other work to do, the majority revolving around keeping the electoral roll up to date which has the names of all the people enrolled to vote in Australian elections. If you are an Australian citizen and 18yrs of age it is compulsory to enrol. Recently the age to enrol has been lowered to 16yrs although you cannot vote until you are 18. There are approximately 14,712,799 people on the roll and we are kept very very busy keeping that up to date.*

*I would also like to talk to you a bit about voting. Australia is one of 22 countries in the world where it is compulsory to vote. Some of you may think this is a good thing and some of you may think this is a bad thing. It is in our constitution and the only way we can change anything in our constitution is to put the vote to the Australian people and have a majority decide to change it. The government and politicians cannot change it only the Australian people can. Living in a democracy means we are given a say in how this country is run and voting is both our right and responsibility. Our rights are given to us whilst our responsibilities are where we give back and when you think about it there is a nice balance to that. As a right and knowing we do not get to choose where we are born, we should feel incredibly lucky to find ourselves born into a family and a country where we have a say in who is running our country and making our laws. As a responsibility, we need to be willing to give back to this country by using our voice to say what we think will make it a better place. Even if we are not happy with the choices we are given we must not give up our right to vote. If we are unhappy it is important that we realise that voting itself is not the problem - it is the only way to change the problem. Voting shows you care about your country. You know the AEC also helps other countries like Ethiopia, Fiji, South Africa and Indonesia run their elections. There we see how keen people are to vote by sometimes waiting all day for their turn and then coming back the next day if they weren’t successful. Their living conditions aren’t as good as ours and they know that voting is their chance to change things for the better.*

*In your school election next week you will be voting for representatives. In federal elections we also vote for representatives. If elected to government they will represent your area in parliament and make laws on your behalf. This person will then attend parliament and vote on laws and sometimes make decisions on running the country for you. We do not get to vote on laws, it is the people that we vote into government that vote for us. We do not choose how to spend the government finances – it is the people we elect into government who make those decisions. So you can see it is very important to choose somebody you think will do a good job and make decisions you agree with. Your school representatives will also be making decisions for you so you need to be as sure as you can be that you are voting for the person that will make decisions you’re happy with. Hopefully you’ve thought about how you’re going to choose your representative. Will you choose based on how tough they seem, because of sporting achievements, on how confident they act, on how good looking they are or how well they communicate? Do you think they will be good representatives because they are knowledgeable or because they are kind or fair, intelligent or popular? You will need to think about whom you will choose and why you are choosing them. Your vote will be a secret so you don’t need to feel pressured to think the way others do.*

*Now let’s talk a little bit about the actual voting process for your election next week. Your year will be called up to the hall where there will be two voting areas. Your class will be asked to vote together at one of the voting areas so make sure you stay with your classmates. We ask that you do everything in an orderly manner and listen to the instructions that will be given to you. You will be directed to tables with issuing officers who will ask you firstly have you voted before. This is a necessary question as everybody can only vote once. You will also be asked what class you are in and your name and then be marked off the roll. The issuing officer will give you instructions on how to vote and the instructions will also be written on the ballot paper. Ballot paper is the name of the paper you will vote on. You will be given 2 ballot papers unless you are in Year 11 who will receive 4 because they are voting for the captains as well. The ballot paper will have the names of the candidates your year will be voting for, one with the female candidates and one with the male candidates. You will then take this ballot paper over to the queue controller who will direct you to a free voting screen when one becomes available. You must put a number in each of the boxes on the ballot paper in the order you prefer the candidates. In other words, the number one next to your first choice, the number two next to your second choice and so on. Make sure you have numbered the paper correctly, that you haven’t left a number out or put a number in twice. Write as neatly as possible so your vote can be understood. If you make a mistake on your ballot paper that is too difficult to fix let the queue controller know. You will need to hand the ballot paper you made the mistake on back so a fresh one can be issued to you. It is very important that you do not put any other markings on the ballot paper other than the numbers in the boxes. If you do not fill in the boxes correctly or write anything on there that can identify you the ballot paper may be called informal and not counted. Do not look at anybody else’s ballot paper and do not let anybody else look at yours. When you are finished voting take your ballot paper to the ballot box table and put it in the ballot box which has the same ballot paper attached to the front. After you have voted do not feel like you need to discuss it with anybody or say anything that makes you feel uncomfortable. Remember your vote is a secret.*

*Thank you for inviting the AEC to be a part of this very special event. I’d like to wish you all the best for the election and the rest of your year at school. Thank you.*