



## **JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE INQUIRY ON ELECTORAL MATTERS – INTRODUCTORY NOTES**

### **1. Proposals for group compulsory postal voting**

- Compulsory postal should be investigated as an option;
- Previously implemented by Colin Barry in Victoria and he recommended the system to the NSW Local Government and Shires Association (unsuccessfully)
- Already works very well in Victoria and Tasmania and possibly other states;
- Strong voter participation;
- Declaration of results are timely – in the 2008 Wodonga election, the poll closed at 5.00 pm on the Friday evening before election day, the count was completed over the weekend and the results were formally declared at 9.00 am on the Monday morning;
- Offers voters better convenience, time and flexibility to consider the candidates and cast their votes;
- Comparisons with northern Victorian Councils show that it is cost effective, more so for higher population areas;
- Councils should have discretion to adopt postal voting - perhaps a community decision by referendum;

### **2. Above the line group voting**

- Difficulty of compiling teams of minimum of five, few of whom have much chance of being elected;
- System can confusing to voters, with groups above the line and other individual candidates below the line at possibly at a disadvantage;
- Above the line voting ballot papers go directly to Sydney for counting - restricts opportunities for scrutineers and could be done locally;
- Councils should have discretion whether or not to adopt group voting - perhaps a community decision by referendum.

### **3. Competitive tendering of election services**

- Currently the NSW Electoral Commission is legislated to conduct the process, which creates an uncontested and protected monopoly;
- Councils are legally obliged to pay whatever price is dictated by the Electoral Commission;
- Councils have no control over determining the appropriate level of services required;
- The increased costs for the 2008 election were enormous - even though the final accounts from the Electoral Commission were in some cases substantially less than the cost estimate

- provided to Councils in May. No explanations for the lesser than estimate final costs have been given by the Electoral Commission to Councils;
- An updated RAMROC Councils summary, comparing Electoral Commission and Council costs for both the 2004 and 2008 elections, is tabled for information of the Standing Committee;
- Councils are required in their operational activities to conform to strict tendering and procurement procedures and contestability principles. The election process should be no different;
- Currently the Electoral Commission over-services in some areas, such as the length of time that the Returning Officer is engaged, whereas in other areas there are concerns about under-services, such as the lack of appropriate advertising and better communications with the public and information for candidates and voters;
- National Competition Policy principles should apply - the Local Government election process should be market tested by open tender.

#### **4. Experiences of having a shared Returning Officer**

- Candidates in locations other than the RO's base were frustrated at not being able to meet face to face with the Returning Officer;
- The RO's ability to meet the needs of candidates and communities were restricted by location;
- Counting for a number of Councils in the RO's base location or in Sydney restricted accessibility for scrutineers;
- Difficulties of having a remote location for shared Returning Officers are exacerbated by the lack of public transport; in country areas;
- The shared Returning Officer's cost to Councils were still high - appeared not to reflect the savings that were anticipated to be achieved by using a shared RO;
- Councils were often called upon to provide assistance to the Returning Officer based in another centre, e.g. in clarifying matters to prospective/participating candidates and/or to residents. These costs were generally absorbed internally and do not show up as a specific cost centre;
- Fortunately in our region, some shared Returning Officers were former senior Local Government officers and were therefore very experienced in the role and were able to provide quality service to the Councils.
- In our region, it is not necessary to have a full time Returning Officer for 10 weeks to conduct the election.

#### **5. Time taken to declare results**

- This is a matter of particular concern to the larger urban Councils in our region. Two examples highlight the issue, as follows;
- Griffith City - in 2004 the final count concluded on the Monday evening following the election. In 2008, the Electoral Commission final count for popularly elected Mayor finished on the Thursday evening, with the final count for Councillors on the Friday;
- Albury City - in 2008 the final result declaration of the poll was not made until the following Sunday (counting finalised on the Saturday) - compared to the 2004 declaration when the declaration was made on the Friday and in 1999 when the declaration was made on the

Wednesday following the election. In 2004 and 2008 the final count was actually completed some two days before the formal declaration, so the counting timetable was in fact far quicker;

- An example at the small Shire level - Murrumbidgee Shire indicated that it took 5 or 6 days to count some 1500 votes. Under previous arrangements, the result in that Council would have normally been known on the Saturday evening of the election or on the Sunday.

#### **6. Election Funding Authority issues**

- The requirements relating to the appointment and registration of an official agent are considered to be over-onerous and unnecessary;
- Candidates and groups who do not appoint and register an official agent cannot accept more than \$1000 in political donations and cannot incur more than \$1000 in electoral expenditure during the "election period" - these amounts are unrealistic and should be somewhat higher to justify the difficulty and expense in having an agent to administer receipts and disbursements and open special bank accounts etc;
- Agents must also "be on the NSW electoral roll" - this again seems unnecessary - particularly in our region along the NSW/Victoria border. For example, one Albury group wanted to appoint an excellent agent who resides in Wodonga Victoria, but was unable to do so;
- Similarly the requirement to appoint an Auditor for political donations and/or election expenses in excess of \$2500 is at an unrealistic figure;
- No limit amounts are specifically proposed for both agent and auditor compliance - but perhaps at least \$5000 in each case would be much more realistic - our comment is that a review should be undertaken.

Taxied by Mr Studios  
26/8/09  
SAB.

**RAMROC SCHEDULE OF 2004 AND 2008 ELECTORAL COSTS**

COUNCIL	2004 ELECTION COSTS			ESTIMATED FOR 2008				No. of Electors	EC Cost per Elector
	Electoral	Other	Overall	Elec. Com	Elec. Com	Council	Total 08		
	Commiss	Council	Costs	May est	Final acc	Costs	Costs		
Albury City	30636	49233	79869	224,200	196300	6600	202900	32,102	\$6.32
Bairnald Shire	7145	10506	17651	15,400	15400	1790	17190	1,594	\$10.78
Berrigan Shire	8885	10081	18966	51,700	34000	1000	35000	5,799	\$6.04
Carrathool Shire	6973	14906	21879	22,100	7300	1996	9296	1,915	No election
Conargo Shire	4000	0	4000	22600	4510	0	4510	1,181	No election
Corowa Shire	12006	17021	29027	59600	47900	6926	54826	8,029	\$6.83
Deniliquin Council	8679	10692	19371	45000	32000	1380	33380	5,321	\$6.27
Greater Hume Shire	26954	24304	51258	63200	50700	4549	55249	6,983	\$7.91
Griffith City	14752	34885	49637	137000	121000	9000	130000	15,607	\$8.33
Hay Shire	7119	4363	11482	18400	17300	453	17753	2,246	\$7.90
Jerilderie Shire	7739	10261	18000	13000	8600	1800	10400	1,196	\$8.70
Leeton Shire	18000	16000	34000	62500	53430	5450	58880	7,301	\$8.06
Murray Shire	7662	11965	19627	41300	28000	3865	31865	4,642	\$6.86
Murrumbidgee Shire	6184	3386	9570	15300	11700	1866	13566	1,550	\$8.75
Narrandera Shire	7793	10817	18610	34700	27700	2683	30383	4,321	\$7.03
Urana Shire	5005	8383	13388	13600	5200	1495	6695	875	1 ward only
Wakool Shire	6578	15469	22047	34700	24495	2752	27247	2,926	\$9.31
Wentworth Shire	10170	28781	38951	60700	48500	3800	52300	4,262	\$12.27
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>196280</b>	<b>281053</b>	<b>477333</b>	<b>935000</b>	<b>734035</b>	<b>57405</b>	<b>791440</b>	<b>107,850</b>	

**Notes**

1. Griffith City 2006 bi-election 64198 8632 72830
2. Murray Shire 2007 bi-election 23892 6764 30656
3. Greater Hume Shire 2005 bi-election 18700 16930 35630
6. Wentworth Shire 2007 bi-election 38129

**Northern Victorian Councils Postal Ballot System - estimated cost per elector**

	EO Cost		Population	EC Cost per Elector
	Estimate			
Wodonga City	124,000		25,331	\$4.90
Indigo Shire	85,000		12,409	\$6.85
Towong Shire	54,450		5,416	\$10.05
Campaspe Shire	130,000		30,000 (est)	\$4.33

Moira Shire	120,000		22,477	\$5.34
Gannawarra Shire	68,288		9,014 (est)	\$7.57
Rural City of Mildura	154,895		36,906	\$4.20