

INQUIRY INTO 2008 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

Organisation: Muswellbrook Shire Council
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Date Received: 7/05/2009

Muswellbrook Shire Council



ENQUIRIES

PLEASE ASK FOR

Russell Esdaile

DIRECT

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OUR REFERENCE

232.001

YOUR REFERENCE

MUSWELLBROOK SHIRE COUNCIL
ADMINISTRATION CENTRE
MUSWELLBROOK NSW 2333
ABN 86 864 180 944

6 May 2009

The Chair
Ms Cherie Burton MP
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney, NSW, 2000



Dear Ms Burton, MP,

Re: Inquiry into 2008 Local Government Elections

The following submission to the Committee is made in response to an invitation received 27th March 2009.

In June 2007 the Electoral Commission NSW wrote to Council advising that Councils would now be responsible for the full cost of running the Local Government Elections. In this letter, Council was provided with a preliminary estimate of the costs of \$68,800 or \$7.14 per elector (or voter).

The reasoning behind this was outlined in the letter as:

"The NSWEC receives no funding from the Government for the cost of establishing and maintaining an infrastructure and expertise to conduct Local Government elections. Government expects that all such election activity is undertaken on a full cost recovery basis."

"The NSWEC commissioned independent auditors to review the current pricing structure and to recommend a pricing structure based on a full cost recovery model".

In May 2008, Council received a detailed Budget Estimate for the elections to be held in September. The estimate was revised upwards to \$95,200 or \$9.88 per elector. Council has now received advice from the Electoral Commission dated 26th March, 2009, that the final costs for the 2008 Election have been revised downwards to \$80,200.

By way of comparison Council conducted the 2004 Council elections for a cost of \$41,466.10, which was just over half the final cost that the Electoral Commission has charged for conducting the 2008 election. It seems incongruous that costs should increase by 100% in 4 years. It makes it particularly difficult to fund this enormous increase when Councils have had to work within the rate pegging limitations imposed by the State Government. By way of example, the \$40,000 increase in election costs is equivalent to a 0.6% increase in rates, which is significant when Council is restricted to a 3.5% rate pegging limit.

In addition to doubling the cost to Council for running the election, the Electoral Commission reduced the staffing levels allocated compared to previous elections. For Muswellbrook Shire this was a full one third reduction. This reduction in staffing led to an

increase in queuing by electors waiting to vote with consequent needless inconvenience. The additional workload impact on the electoral staff and Officers in Charge was significant. For the busy, larger booths, there were also very restricted opportunities for staff to take meal or toilet breaks. This reduction in staffing reduced the professional image of a well run election compared to previous years. The perceptions from the community and electors were that the standards at the election fell short of the professional standards set at previous elections.

Of concern to Council is the fact that the community and electors are unlikely to make the distinction as to who runs the election and Council rather than the Electoral Commission inevitably receives the negative publicity regarding the reduction in standards.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Committee regarding the operation of the 2008 Local Government elections.

Yours faithfully



Russell Esdaile
Director Corporate & Community Services