

**Submission
No 15**

2012 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

Name: Name Suppressed

Date Received: 2/02/2013

**SUBMISSION TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON ELECTORAL MATTERS –
SEPTEMBER 2012 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS
A PORT STEPHENS COUNCIL ELECTION PERSPECTIVE FROM COMMUNITY MEMBER –**

Council decided to use a private provider to manage the election. The Returning Officer lacked training and supporting staff. This resulted in:-

- Candidates receiving confusing advice on the process.
- Inadequate vetting of candidates. The Returning Officer could not provide details of some of the lead candidates - only names.
- Ballot papers were printed too late resulting in some postal voters not receiving ballot papers in time to vote.

The current voting system used for Council elections is confusing. No one could clearly explain how the voting system worked. Attempts by the local Tomaree Ratepayers and Residents Association to clarify the voting process resulted in them concluding that no one at the electoral office appeared to fully understand the process. They had wanted to use them as a speaker at a meeting and explain the process at “Meet the Candidates” Forums.

As a result of the last Council election it became apparent that:-

- The preferential voting system is open to manipulation. Some candidates appeared to use ghost candidates with the objective of obtaining the ghost candidates preferences. The local Ratepayers and Residents Association tried to contact all lead candidates but failed as some of the names provided by the Returning Officer were not in the telephone directory and could not be found with a google search.
- It was suggested that there were candidates receiving funding from the same source. I believe that the amount of money involved was trivial as the intent of the Candidates was to obtain preferences, not win a seat.
- Refusal by some candidates to specify where they would allocate their preferences if the voter failed to do so.

As a confused witness of our last Council election I would suggest the following changes to the Council electoral process:-

- Set strict standards for private providers to ensure that the Returning Officer receives appropriate training and are approved as a competent by the Electoral Office. Put systems in place to protect the Returning Officer from political interference.
- Simplify the process. A first past the post system is not open to the same types of abuse regarding distribution of preferences. After witnessing the performance at the last local election I no longer support the preferential system.
- Increase greater policing/auditing of candidates’ funding source and introduce harsher penalties for deliberate deception.

In my opinion in the last Council election for this area there was an abuse of the process. This abuse may not have changed the final result but may have changed the balance of power. We now have a Council that ignores the recommendations of its officers and circumvents State Planning requirements.

[Redacted Signature]

2nd February 2013