

**Submission  
No 23**

## **INQUIRY INTO 2008 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS**

**Name:** Mr Jason Horton

**Date Received:** 12/05/2009

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I hereby wish to make a submission to the Committee, in regards to the 2008 local council elections.

#### Alternative Method of Voting - Postal Voting

Currently NSW is the only state that has not allow councils to have postal voting for all voters in that council area. Postal voting removes the need to employ large numbers of polling staff, hire halls etc. This significantly cuts costs of the election. The postal voting system allows for a booklet of candidates to be sent to each voter who can be better informed.

The system would operate similar to the voting for the NRMA directors, this has proven effective and well accepted in NSW.

It has been argued that the postal system is open to abuse, however this system has operated for many years in WA, Victoria and elsewhere without fraud occurring. Suitable fraud control removes and minimises any threat of electoral fraud.

Postal voting will allow the electoral rolls to be cleansed as the "no longer at this address" returns will identify those people who have moved to other areas and update the rolls for State and Federal elections.

Postal voting also removes the need for absentee voting as the Ballot Papers can be sent to any location.

#### Alternative voting system - Internet Voting

Given the security of the Internet (eg Banking) it would be possible to have e-voting and lead the way to reform the voting systems. Using Postal voting/e-voting each voter could be issued with a security PIN number to vote and this would prevent prevent multiple voting.

E-voting also assists people with language difficulties, disability and remote geographical location to vote.

In the 21st century we should look to other ways of voting and use these in local government elections.

#### Cost of local elections

The cost of running the election by the SEC has not proven to be a better system. The increased costs for council has lead to a redirection of funds rather than on service provision at a local level. The State Government should pay for local government elections.

#### Abolition of Wards

The current system that allows different councils to have different numbers wards, time has come to abolish all wards in all council. Councillors are elected to represent the whole council area, not just part of a council area. In some councils this has resulted in budgetting based on wards not on the needs of the whole community.

#### Numbers of Councillors per council

The number of councillors varies greatly in NSW per council. A standard approach should be taken for all of NSW so that councillor numbers represent comparable councils and the voter to councillor number.

The Government should follow the categories of councils, as per the DLG comparative publication, and allocate the numbers of councillors by category.

The number of Councillors should not exceed 10, plus a popularly elected Mayor.

I thank the Committee for taking my submission.

Yours Faithfully

Jason Horton

#### Proportion Representation for all Councils

Councils with wards of one or two, showed that first-past the post voting does not give a wide representation of interests of its local community. It is time to ensure that minimum number of councillors (should be 4 as is the case in many councils) representing 80% of voter preference and not 50% or less with the first past the post voting system.

#### Candidate expenditure

A review of candidates electoral returns will show that a very small percentage of candidates expended more than \$5,000 on there campaign.

The Public Inquiries into Tweed Council and Gold Coast City Council show how elections can be influenced by developers and interest groups. If electoral expenditure is limited to an amount per voter, this could reduce the possibility to influence elections.

#### Candidates Information

All candidates can put a statement on the existing nomination form. This statement should be provided to all voters in a candidates booklet. Alternatively each candidate or group should be allowed to submit information on an A4 sheet which is supplied to all voters in a voter mail out.

This will allow voters to make informed decisions about the candidates and help promote competent women, people with a disability and Aboriginals to stand. Often these groups have little to spend on campaigns and find it difficult to compete with business people or with a strong financial backing.