

INQUIRY INTO 2008 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

Organisation: Yass Valley Council
Name: Mr David Rowe
Position: General Manager
Date Received: 11/05/2009

yass valley council

the country the people

Your Reference:
Our Reference: FL.E.02.00.01
Correspond No: 293
Contact: Mrs J A Buckley/JAB
Phone: 6226 1477

Address all correspondence to:

The General Manager
PO Box 6
YASS NSW 2582

7 May 2009

The Director
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000



Dear Director

Re: SUBMISSION - INQUIRY INTO 2008 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

Thank you for the opportunity to lodge a submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the 2008 Local Government Elections. There were a number of issues that Council forwards for your consideration.

1. Sharing of Returning Officer

The sharing of a Returning Officer with Palerang and Queanbeyan Councils at the 2008 Local Government elections with the regional returning officer located at Queanbeyan was considered unsatisfactory on several accounts.

The Returning Officer was unable to take pre-polling votes at Queanbeyan for Palerang and Yass Councils. The Returning Officer was only available by mobile phone; this was as source of complaint from several ratepayers.

When counting of preference votes for Yass were conducted at Queanbeyan, a local experienced Officer in Charge (OIC) from Yass provided advice to the Returning Officer on the procedure required for the count as the Returning Officer was unsure of the procedure.

There appeared to be no process of appointing senior staff to polling places and it was only by chance that an experienced OIC from previous elections was contacted for appropriate advice on this matter.

It is believed that a Retuning Officer could have been secured from Yass Valley if there was more effort focussed on achieving this result.

The offering of training in regional locations rather than just Sydney is likely to have attracted more applicants. It is also suggested that Returning Officers who have previous experience, not be required to undertake comprehensive training but be required to undergo an update. Perhaps this update could be an on-line refresher course.

2. Cost of Election

The initial cost indications received from the NSW Electoral Commission of the 2008 local government elections were markedly different from the 2004 elections. The unbudgeted increase placed additional financial strain on Council's resources which has impacted on the provision of services to the community.

Council is of the view that it could have conducted the elections at a cost significantly cheaper than the amount charged by the NSW Electoral Commission and in a more timely and efficient manner, particularly in relation to the counting of votes. It was noted that a large amount of work was undertaken by Council staff (eg. arranging advertising; accepting lodgement of nomination forms, receipting of money and banking; pre-poll voting, assistance with furniture and transport of cardboard materials etc.) in addition to the activities of the Electoral Commission however, the increased cost to Council from the 2004 election nearly doubled.

Council also expressed its concern at the cost of bi-elections and suggested that legislation be amended to allow councils the choice to operate with one or two less Councillors until the next election.

3. Receipt Books

The distribution of receipt books to all candidates was considered to be a wasted resource. No receipts were issued by any candidates in the Yass Valley LGA. Undoubtedly this situation would be similar for most rural councils.

4. Handbook for Candidates

Councillors commented that the Handbook for candidates did not explain the process very well for new candidates.

5. Voting

There was great deal of confusion for voters regarding the number of candidates that they were required to vote for. For Yass Valley the minimum number was five, and there were to be nine Councillors elected. This could be clarified by requiring the number of candidates to be voted for, to be the number of Councillors to be elected.

6. Councillor Declarations

Councillors have also expressed their discontent with having to provide a declaration to the Electoral Commission every six months. In the case of Yass Valley the returns are more than likely to be nil for each Councillor for each return. I would be very surprised if many other rural councils are not in the same situation. A 'bulk submission' as previously proposed by Council should seriously be considered. I acknowledge that this is not a direct comment on the election however improvement to this process I am sure would be appreciated by all Councillors across the State. I have enclosed my previous submission to the Commission on this matter.

7. Website

Councillors indicated that the NSW Electoral Commission's website provided useful information relating to polling and updating of elected candidates and should be retained as a communication tool whatever format the next election takes.

8. Staff Recruitment

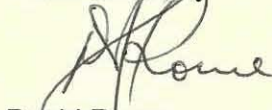
Recruitment of polling place staff was only available on-line. This was viewed as discriminatory by some members of the public as not all people are computer literate.

9. Scrutineer Training

Scrutineer training needs to be improved. It has been suggested that scrutineers be asked to read and sign a document that outlines the count process and their involvement as a scrutineer prior to them being appointed. The scrutineers were continually obstructing the counting activities of polling staff. Scrutineers are briefed by the OIC prior to counting taking place but they were not aware of what they could and could not do.

Please advise if you require any further clarification of matters raised herein.

Yours sincerely



David Rowe
General Manager

yass valley council

the country the people

Your Reference:
Our Reference: FL.E.02.00.00
Correspond No: 3744
Contact: Mr D J Rowe/LN
Phone: 6226 9227

Address all correspondence to:

The General Manager
PO Box 6
YASS NSW 2582

2nd January, 2009.

Mr Colin Barry
Chair
Election Funding Authority
GPO Box 832
SYDNEY NSW 2001

COPY

Dear Mr Barry,

Councillors and Mayors - Obligation for Reporting Funding Disclosures

I refer to your letter of the 22 October, 2008 the contents of which I reported to the ordinary meeting of Council on the 26 November 2008.

Council resolved (Minute Number 523) that I ***"write to the Electoral Funding Authority requesting that Council submit a collective lodgement"***

The basis for this request was the onerous responsibility this placed on Councillors to ensure that a return was provided every six months over the term of their representation. There was an expressed concern that a Councillor may inadvertently breach the requirements of the Act by forgetting to lodge one of the six monthly returns even though the return is likely to be a 'nil' declaration.

To assist the process I therefore seek your concurrence to provide a collective lodgement whereby I will arrange for all Councillors to complete the attached form on a 6 monthly basis.

I note that returns for the current disclosure period are due by the 25 February, 2008. It would be appreciated if you could respond at your earliest convenience so that I may relay the appropriate information to Councillors.

Yours sincerely,



David Rowe
General Manager.

**Declaration of Political Donations
and Electoral Expenditure for
Yass Valley Councillors**

Disclosure Period:

From to

Councillors	Amount \$ *	Signature
N.O. Carmody		
C.R. Burgess		
G.A. Frost		
W.A. Luchetti		
C.A. McHarg		
A.J. McGrath		
M.P. McManus		
D. Needham		
J.M. Williams		

* Where the amount for political donations or electoral expenditure received is not "nil", the official form EF.678 will be completed and forwarded by the individual Councillor.

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David Rowe
General Manager.

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(Date)