

INQUIRY INTO 2008 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

Organisation: Ku-ring-gai Council
Name: Mr Michael Miotic
Position: Acting General Manager
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Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000
Fax: 9230 3309

Inquiry into 2008 Local Government Elections

I refer to the above inquiry and terms of reference for the joint standing committee and provide the following submission on behalf of Ku-ring-gai Council regarding the 2008 NSW Local Government Elections.

Ku-ring-gai Council's submission almost wholly relates to the costs of conducting the election. During the course of, and following the election, Council has 11 documented complaints regarding the conduct of the election and they were on the following subject matters:

- Being fined - 1
- Referendum question - 7
- Not enough polling places - 1
- Candidate posters on poles - 1
- Duplicate information letters – 1

Given that complaints about the referendum question were not directly related to the conduct of the election, it is felt that the total of 4 other documented complaints does not warrant comment from Council. In fact, the 2008 election was characterised by significant advanced planning and organisation by the Electoral Commission head office and, in respect of the Ku-ring-gai election it is considered that overall the election was well organised and conducted. The only other comment is that the declaration of the poll took 9 days as opposed to 6 in 2004, an increase of 50%.

In terms of cost, however, Council has had to bear a significant increase that appears difficult to justify. The 2004 elections cost Council approximately \$230,000. Allowing for CPI increases for the period September 2004 to September 2008, the cost equivalent would be approximately \$260,000. Ku-ring-gai Council was invoiced for \$406,500 (ex GST). This equates to an increase of 76% compared to the CPI of 13.5% for the period. It should also be noted that one of the five wards in Ku-ring-gai was not contested at the 2008 elections making the increase even more substantial. Therefore, the 76% increase in costs does not take account of a 20% reduction in the number of wards contested at the 2008 election.

While it is difficult to analyse and therefore dispute individual cost items from the invoice provided, there are items such as NSWEC Administration Fee (\$39,770), Information Technology (\$36,990) and Financial Services (\$9,240) which we believe should be justified. Additionally, direct costs including Election Material (\$28,300), Elector Info Campaign – NSWEC Campaign (\$12,360) and Elector Info Campaign – Brochure (\$14,880) should be further scrutinised to assess costs per unit to ensure that the amount charged to Council is commensurate with rates we could achieve.

In summary, Ku-ring-gai Council expended \$230,000 in 2004 on the Local Government Election and \$406,500 in 2008. This increase of 76% is very difficult to understand and accept. Therefore, it is our contention that the detail of the costs be provided to councils. Following that, councils may wish to accept or dispute the amount being charged on a fair and informed basis.

Michael Miocic
Acting General Manager