

**Submission  
No 13**

## **INQUIRY INTO PUBLIC FUNDING OF ELECTION CAMPAIGNS**

**Organisation:**

**Name:** Mr Bruce Berry

**Date Received:** 22/01/2010

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*Partially Confidential*

**Public Funding of Electoral Campaigns**

I am pleased to contribute to another inquiry into electoral processes. I am not aware of any positive outcomes of previous inquiries, but I regard the current inquiry into public funding as an essential part of the review of electoral matters.

I have enclosed a copy of my submission to the Federal Government's inquiry into electoral changes. It may be relevant to the public funding issue. It outlines the many dissatisfactions we have had over the past 7 years about our local Council's failure to uphold the public interest. The introduction of public funding for electoral campaigns may help to remove some of the contributing factors to this situation.

Neglect of the public interest is shown in areas such as party politics in the Council chamber, decision making in the back rooms and not via open debate, failure to justify decisions, lack of initiative, inconsistency, contradiction, misrepresentation, unfairness, perception of bias, irrationality, maladministration and negligence. The problems have mainly been with Council staff, but the Councillors appear to be reluctant, or unable, to do anything about the shortcomings of Council officers.

It is not surprising that funding of campaigns by political parties or by contributions by developers, etc, is seen to be detrimental to the public interest. At the same time, however, the salaries of Councillors and staff are paid for by the ratepayers and this has not necessarily brought a satisfactory level of commitment to the public, which is reflected in such matters as poor attendance at site meetings for development applications. The Local Government Act upholds the public interest in various ways, but it is not sufficiently promoted at Council, despite its acceptance that accountability and transparency to the public is vital..

**Criteria for Public Funding of Campaigns**

- a. Funding should go directly to the candidate, not the party.
- b. Funding should be contingent on the number of primary votes obtained.
- c. Unsuccessful candidates should not be reimbursed.
- d. Individual donations , except through public fund raising, should be banned.
- e. Candidates should supply a list of campaign expenses.
- f. There should be restrictions on expenditure by candidates to avoid wastage. Priority should go to personal contact with electors.
- g. There should be no expenditure by third parties on political advertising. The candidates should show that they have the ability to organise their own campaigns.
- h. Candidates should produce a summary of their achievements, affiliations, interests and aims, etc.
- i. Limits should be placed on the amount spent on public funding schemes, to create a "level playing field", with penalties for infringements.
- j. Candidates, especially new ones, should be fully instructed in their public responsibilities.
- k. Independent candidates should be encouraged, but should prove their non-aligned status.

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The inquiry should take into account any effects that public funding of electoral campaigns will have on funds in other areas ,eg, to maintain services, to efficiently process development applications, to pursue the public interest in Court proceedings. Far too often, claims are made that there are insufficient resources to promote the public interest in these areas.

The unrealistic demands from the State Government and now, the Federal Government, on future housing and other planning issues, will increase the burden on resources, both financial and environmental.

Public funding could be reduced by reducing the number of Councillors. 15 Councillors are not needed when they vote as one along party lines. There is little separating the policies of the two leading parties. It seems that they both do not give sufficient consideration to the public interest.

Public funding of campaigns and reforms of the electoral process will not solve the problems I have raised in my attachment, especially when the public now has less say in what is happening in its local areas and is often uninformed of it. A solution would be for Council to firmly abide by its own policies and controls and to be more accountable in its decision making.

However, I am optimistic that this inquiry will assist in "Strengthening Australia's Democracy", which is the aim of the Electoral Reform Green Paper.

Bruce Berry

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bruce Berry". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'B'.

**Attachment:** Submission to Electoral reform Green Paper, dated 24 November 2009

24 November 2009

Electoral Reform Secretariat

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

P O Box 6500

Canberra ACT

Submission to Electoral Reform Green Paper.

My comments are directed towards "strengthening Australia's democracy, which is the aim of this Electoral Reform Green paper. I propose to draw attention to what I see as neglect for the principles of democracy by my local Council, dating back over 7 years. The principles I am referring to are the favouring of popular rights; upholding the interests of the common people, social equality and government for the people.

My main concerns are in the area of overdevelopment and the failure to fairly enforce development controls. I note that options for the reform of Local Government are outside the scope of the Green Paper, but, of course, Local Government development issues are influenced by the demands of State Government and now, increasingly, by the Australian Government.

The issues I raise are quite extensive but they are only some of the factors that convince me that reform of the regulatory and electoral processes is necessary :-

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## **ELECTORAL MATTERS AND OTHER ISSUES**

Consideration could be given to the following, in the public interest:-

1. Funding of campaigns by political parties and corporate bodies reduces the level of commitment to the general public. Candidates should show that they have the capability to run local fund raising and, above all, to become involved with their constituents.
2. Pseudo independents manipulate the poll. In the previous election, a popular Councillor gave up his major party affiliation, became an "Independent", but continued to vote with the party he had supposedly left and at the same time worked in the office of the MP for the major party. His "moving aside" allowed an additional major party candidate to be elected.
3. Ignorance of the election process on the part of voters, through language difficulties, lack of instruction, etc, could detrimentally affect the qualities of the elected representatives..
4. Inadequate citizenship standards, enrolment procedures, proof of identity, etc, could have the same result.
5. Voting 1 above the line can produce disinterest in the poll or is the result of disinterest. It can also lead to the manipulation of uninformed and ignorant electors.
6. Candidates should be required to outline what they have done for the electorate or what they propose to do, what their qualifications are. This what happens in elections for company directors.
7. Candidates should be required to spend a specified amount of time door knocking and making themselves available at shopping centres, etc and at polling stations.
8. It is more important for candidates from major parties to meet the people instead of them believing there is no need to.
9. Party politics in local government should be discouraged.
10. Successful candidates should make themselves more accessible, at specified times.
11. The number of Councillors should be reduced, considering that:-
  - a. Attendance by Councillors at site meetings is poor.
  - b. An increasing number of DA decisions are made without discussion, outside the chamber and outside public scrutiny.
  - c. There are increasing salary and catering costs at a time when Council debts are high, and increasing.
  - d. Councillors seem to have misguided confidence in staff assessment and compliance officers and, in general, leave the decisions to them.
12. How to vote handouts at polling stations should occur only on request, to avoid wastage of resources. It would be less to the advantage of the major parties and would encourage the candidates to build up higher profiles in their electorates.

13. One of the best ways to ensure that electoral laws are easily understood is for the candidates to explain them to the electors. It may earn them votes. As it is, it seems that it is to the advantage of the candidates that the electors remain in ignorance.  
The same strategy should be used to reduce unintended informal voting.
14. The franchise in local elections should be given only to property owners and ratepayers. These are the ones who have most to lose, or gain, particularly on developmental issues.
15. Candidates in local elections should be residents or ratepayers in the local area and all their affiliations, ownership of property, etc, should be open to public scrutiny.
16. Public funding of registered parties should be removed.
17. Minutes of meetings should show how the individual Councillors voted.
18. There may be reasons for removing the franchise from those who have dual citizenship or who are living overseas for extended periods.

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment on these very important issues. I would be happy to supply any supporting information. My final comment is that I believe the most important ingredient in "strengthening Australia's democracy" is for all government institutions and judicial systems to strictly conform to democratic principles .

Bruce Berry

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