

**Submission  
No 25**

**INQUIRY INTO PUBLIC FUNDING OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
ELECTION CAMPAIGNS**

**Organisation:** Port Stephens Council

**Name:** Mr Tony Wickham

**Position:** Executive Officer

**Date Received:** 24/09/2010

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Dear Sir/Madam

## **SUBMISSION: INQUIRY INTO PUBLIC FUNDING OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTION CAMPAIGNS**

Please find attached a submission into the Public Funding of Local Government Election Campaigns.

Yours faithfully



**Tony Wickham**  
**EXECUTIVE OFFICER**

Date: 24 September 2010



# **SUBMISSION: INQUIRY INTO THE PUBLIC FUNDING OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTION CAMPAIGNS**

## **Background**

Port Stephens Council local government area comprises of three (3) Wards with 45, 867 electors. The local government area is split into three (3) Wards being Central Ward with 15,927 electors, East Ward with 15,427 electors and West Ward with 14,513 electors (as at 17 September 2010).

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### **Q1. Is public funding for local government elections in NSW supported? Why?**

Council generally supports the proposal of public funding for local government elections in NSW. The proposal would provide the opportunity for any community member to stand as a candidate without the limitation of funds to support their campaign. Currently some candidates are not able to fully support their campaigns due to limited or no funds. The proposal would overcome this situation and not restrict potential candidates, whilst addressing the inequity of the current system where some candidates are supported by donors or groups with respect to funding.

The public funding model will reduce the impact of political parties and minimise the effect of political donations, particularly for areas where the Mayor is popularly elected. The community would also have more ownership of the process.

### **Q2. What factors, specific to local government elections, should be considered in developing an appropriate public funding model? How might they be accommodated?**

Factors that should be considered in the development of the public funding model are:

- Full disclosure
- Limits on expenditure
- Inclusion of Contribution Rules (e.g. Canada's Contribution rules)
- Potential use of Local Government classifications of Councils to set

limits.

- Funding based on size of the electorate.
- Addressing the issue of audits of candidates

**Q3 Aside from public funding in the form of reimbursement for electoral expenditure, are there other ways in which local government candidates and parties could be assisted?**

Further assistance could be provided to candidates by way of limiting the type and quantity of advertising candidates can display.

**Q4. If public funding for local government elections were introduced, which level of government should be responsible for its financing – local councils or the State Government? Why?**

As many Councils are only too aware the level of cost shifting from other levels of government is continuing to increase for Local Government and there are limited opportunities for many Councils to increase their income, particularly through the rating system. Council is of the belief that the State Government is the appropriate tier of government to fund any public funding of local government elections, particularly given that the State Government is the responsible for Local Government.

**Q5. What level of expenditure, expressed as an amount per elector, is sufficient to conduct a reasonable local government election campaign?**

It seems appropriate that a reasonable limit of expenditure per elector would be in the order of \$2.50 - \$3.00.

**Q6. If public funding for local government elections were introduced, are the current disclosure requirements adequately transparent?**

Generally, it is considered the current level of disclosure surrounding local government elections is sufficient, however consideration needs to be given



by the Joint Standing Committee to the matter of "creative accounting" and ways to avoid such situations.

**Q7. What factors impact on the costs of campaigning for local government elections?**

Factors impacting on the costs associated with local government campaigns are:

- Size of the local government area, including the number of electors and the physical size of the local government area.
- Increase in costs by print media due to the election.
- Loyalty of print media to advertisers.
- Socio-economic of the community.
- Limitations of advertising by the electoral commission.

**Q8. If public funding were introduced for local government elections, would expenditure caps be required? If so, what would be an appropriate method for determining expenditure caps?**

Council is of the view that should funding for local government elections be introduced, the expenditure should be capped. This could be determined by:

- Number of electors
- Density of population
- Size of electorate

**Q9. What are the typical sources of funding for local government election campaigns?**

Currently the typical sources of funding are:

- Donations
- Personal funds

- Family funds
- Political donations
- Business Support