

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

**Organisation:** Lismore City Council  
**Name:** Mr Paul G O'Sullivan  
**Position:** General Manager  
**Date Received:** 25/05/2009

---

all communication to  
GENERAL MANAGER

our ref: CO09/1239:EF09/657

your ref: General Manager  
contact:

May 15, 2009

Ms Cherie Burton MP  
The Chair  
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600



Dear Ms Burton

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the 2008 Local Government election process.

Council recognises that the community's perception of the electoral process and their scepticism of politics means that Councils will no longer be able to be in total control of the election process. However, it does not accept a process where Council has little input into the administrative role but is expected to meet the significant extra costs as decided by the NSW Electoral Commission. Council also does not accept that as a matter of course, a centralised bureaucracy located in Sydney is more efficient at conducting elections than experienced local government authorities.

**A. Absolute Cost**

In 2004 the election cost was \$103,000. Council was responsible for all costs such as printing, wages, hire of halls etc... In 2008 the cost was \$198,000. Council had no control over the cost of the election, nor was there any incentive for the Returning Officer to contain costs.

Council is dissatisfied with the current arrangements and specifically challenges the cost formula and the lack of transparency that surrounds it. If the Electoral Commission is to conduct the elections it should demonstrate that it is both more efficient and cost effective than the previous local government methods.

**B. Joint Returning Officer**

This proposal for joint Returning Officers was marketed to Council on the basis of a cost saving measure. No evidence of any savings was provided to Council.

C. Local Knowledge

The advice/instructions coming from the Electoral Commission leads to many vigorous discussions. There seems to be no appreciation that public transport is virtually non-existent in rural areas, and that major centres attract people from surrounding areas for sport and shopping, particularly on weekends when elections are usually held. There was unnecessary placement of polling places in our rural areas, which presumably increased cost to Council.

The Returning Officer needs to be encouraged to discuss the election with Council staff to gain an appreciation of local circumstances, and the Electoral Commission should be prepared to heed the advice of the Returning Officer.

D. Polling Places

This seems to be an area which requires serious review. It would appear that many of the rural polling places were established in a previous era.

In rural areas people must drive to polling places. They generally cannot walk or use public transport, and once in a vehicle it is no great hardship to travel 10 minutes, if a rationalisation of polling places occurred.

This Council would support a rationalisation of polling places.

E. Returning Officers

This Council was pleased with the performance of its Returning Officer. He was experienced in his role and willing to consult with Council staff.

F. General Staff

Reviews were mixed on the performance of the staff employed at the polling place. Greater attention needs to be focussed on the training of these staff.

Yours faithfully



Paul G O'Sullivan  
**General Manager**