

INQUIRY INTO 2008 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

Organisation: Waverley Council

Name: Mr Anthony Reed

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Chairperson
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000



Inquiry into 2008 Local Government Elections

Dear Ms Burton,

I would like to briefly comment on a number of aspects of the 2008 Local Government Elections on behalf of Waverley Council. I hope that they may be of use to the Committee in its deliberations and any suggestions for improvement for the operation or funding of future local government elections.

From the onset I would like to say that these comments and observations are not meant to reflect on the Returning Officer for Waverley or his staff. The Returning Officer for the election provided a good service and attempted to manage the costs associated with the election at the local level as far as he was able.

Council staff are of the view that the Electoral Commission based much of its planning for the local government election on previous state and federal elections and did not take account of the more local nature of council elections. As a consequence:

- We had more polling places than we believe were required. This was a view shared by our Councillors. This incurred additional cost.
- The final declaration of the poll was delayed because votes had to go to a central location for final counting. Previously votes were counted locally and finalised more quickly.
- Enquiries were handled by a central call centre, which lacked local knowledge. Most matters could have been dealt with locally and on a number of occasions ended up having to be dealt with by council call centre staff because of their local knowledge.
- Final approval for ads had to be done centrally. In at least one case this created difficulty because of the newspaper deadline for advertising.

We would like to see more attention to the local in future local government elections rather than relying on a centralised system that does not appear to have created any significant cost savings.

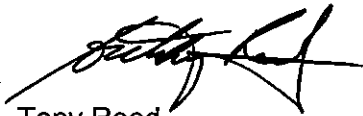
Turning to the issue of cost, we are of the view that the overall cost of this election was excessive compared to the previous election. Looking at the expense listing provided by the Electoral Commission, the administration fee appears significant (more than 10% of the total) for the support provided as does the charge for information technology. As indicated above the usefulness and cost of central vote counting is also questionable.

In future we would like the opportunity to work with the Electoral Commission on a more equal basis so that we can agree on the services to be provided and the cost of these services. In a number of cases, such as information technology, we may have been able to provide the services and support required within our own capacity or at less cost.

Looking at the bigger picture there is an argument that as one of the three tiers of government in Australia the costs of council elections should be met by the taxpayer as is the cost of federal and state elections. While this matter has not been canvassed with Councillors at Waverley it may be an issue that falls within the terms of reference of the Committee.

In conclusion, we would like to think that the 2008 Local Government Elections can be used as the basis to develop a more locally focused partnership approach for future elections. If there is any additional information that I can provide please contact me by phone on [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tony Reed', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tony Reed

General Manager