

**Submission
No 3**

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

Organisation:

Name: Mr Ian M Tiley

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Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Parliament of New South Wales
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Committee Members,

Public Funding of Local Government election Campaigns

I lodge this submission as a person directly and continuously involved in local government since 1964 and as an elected councillor since 1991, having contested six council elections and served on three general purpose and two councils. My CV is provided. I offer comment in relation to questions 1, 4, 5, 7 and 9 in the Issues Paper.

Question 1.

Public funding of local government elections is not supported. Given that local government is indeed the “grass roots” level of local democracy in our nation, local elections should be free of any sphere of government interference in respect of funding provision.

In my view, continuation of relatively ‘uncontaminated’ local elections is essential to the ongoing integrity and public perception of the sector. This is especially vital in an era where public distrust and criticism of elected representatives are at disturbingly unprecedented levels. The present comprehensive and adequate (see question six) disclosure requirements for local government elections, in my view ensures transparency and effective accountability for contributions to campaigns from all sources.

While a case could be advanced for public funding in more largely populated metropolitan areas of NSW, it is unwarranted to have public funding in most if not all regional and rural areas of the state where there are comparatively small populations in local government areas and, as a consequence, candidates are usually known to electors.

In my experience, while acknowledging that voting is compulsory, the public generally enthusiastically engages in local government elections with voter turnouts in excess of 90 per cent. There is commonly ample free publicity of candidates, issues and election platforms courtesy of the engaged, especially print and radio, local media. In past elections, local newspapers have provided free space (250 words max) for candidates to state their election platforms. Furthermore, Chambers of Commerce arrange “Meet the Candidates” forums which are usually well attended and reported. Other inexpensive mechanisms such as letter box drops, staffing of polling booths, street walks, meeting with community interest groups are also available and commonly used by candidates.

Question 4

After many years of cost shifting, unfunded mandates and rate pegging, NSW local government has no spare capacity to, fully or partially publically fund local government election campaigns of candidates. The reality and the appropriate situation, is that the Australian government fund the conduct of federal elections and state governments similarly fund state elections. Local government has responsibility for meeting the very substantial cost of conducting local elections, a cost which has multiplied since the unfortunate mandating of conduct of elections by the State Electoral Commission.

Therefore the probability is that the NSW government, if supportive of public funding of local government election campaigns, would impose the consequent financial responsibility on local government. This would simply add a further unsustainable layer to present excessive financial constraints and adversely impact on the long term financial sustainability of the sector.

Question 5

My personal experience is relied on to offer comment on the level of expenditure required to conduct a reasonable local government election campaign. Given the available local promotional mechanisms for candidates during the election period, a successful campaign can be conducted at minimal cost. Candidate newspaper and radio advertising, letter box leaflets, posters, how to vote cards etc, can with modern technology, be effectively and inexpensively prepared. The larger the local government area, and the greater the number of towns and villages and usually the greater the cost to engage in such electoral promotion activities.

My personal expenditure on election campaigns over the years was generally less than \$1000. At the 2008 election, when I was well known in the electorate, I incurred nil election expenses. However, at the first Clarence Valley Council election in 2005 I considered it necessary to expend around \$5000. Being the last councillor elected at that election my judgement was justified!

Question 7

In coastal rural and regional local government electorates, the cost of campaigning is impacted by the large number of discrete and often remote population centres. For example, Clarence Valley Council local government area has 43 towns (including Grafton City) and villages dispersed over an area of 10.440 sq km. This creates distributive and travel costs as well as logistical matters concerning, for example, staffing of a large number of polling booths. Many such costs are met by friends, relatives and supporters who voluntarily support the election campaign.

For some candidates, the cost of advertising, printing and the like can be beyond their small election budgets and financial means, especially if raising a family and given the lack of adequate public transport which impacts in some circumstances. However, this is not an argument for public funding because those with adequate financial means would retain an advantage over less resourced candidates if public funding was introduced.

Question 9

My only experience in terms of sources of funding for local government election campaigns is own source funding and in kind campaign support. I have never been offered “cash for campaign” support and would not accept same because of my conviction that this has no place in our “grass roots” local democracy. I have retained the view that a successful campaign results in a regular (if much less than warranted) councillor allowance, which quickly recoups the small cost of an election campaign.

Summary

I strongly hold to the view that retention of the present system of candidate funding of local government election campaigns is integral to the continuing authenticity, standing, public regard and perception of local government for the reasons provided in this submission. I would welcome the opportunity of appearing before the Joint Standing Committee if that was considered useful and appropriate.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read 'I. Tiley', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ian Tiley

Councillor, Emeritus Mayor, Clarence Valley Council.