

## **2012 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS**

**Organisation:** Tweed Shire Council  
**Name:** Mr David Keenan  
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Jai Rowell MP  
The Chair  
Committee on Electoral Matters  
Parliament of New South Wales  
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Dear Chairperson Rowell

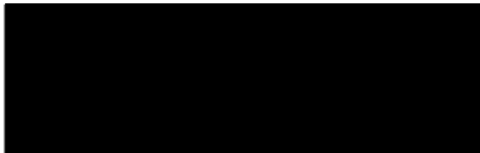
**Committee on Electoral Matters Inquiry into the 2012 Local Government Elections**

Please find enclosed Council's submission in response to the invitation to address the specific terms of reference in order to assist the current inquiry into Electoral Matters of the 2012 Local Government Elections.

Council advises that should it be appropriate, Council's Manager Corporate Governance / Public Officer, Mr Neil Baldwin would be available to provide further evidence at the public hearing later in 2013.

Should you require any further information, please contact the above mentioned Officer on telephone number 02 6670 2421.

Yours faithfully



**David Keenan**  
**GENERAL MANAGER**

## **SUBMISSION TO**

### **Committee on Electoral Matters Inquiry into the 2012 Local Government Elections**

#### **The costs of the elections:**

Council contracted the Electoral Commission of NSW to conduct the 2012 election. The cost to Council of the 2008 election was \$336,500 and the estimated cost for the 2012 election is \$380,222. The final cost for 2012 has not yet been provided to Council by the Electoral Commission of NSW.

The cost per vote over these elections is:

2008	\$7.32 based on a voter turnout of 45,967
2012	\$8.04 based on a voter turnout of 47,278

**Council requests that consideration be given to offsetting some of the costs of the elections by the application of the revenue generated from electors not voting, being returned to each Council as is presently the case in Victoria.**

#### **The experience of councils that conducted their own elections**

This item is not applicable to council as the Electoral Commission of NSW was contracted to conduct the 2012 election.

#### **Possible legislative changes to improve the efficiency of and participation in Local Government elections:**

The feedback that Council and candidates received was that a number of persons were unaware that the election was being conducted. Voter turnout was 77.9%, as compared to the State turnout of 82.1%.

The low voter turnout appears to have been impacted through:

- the lack of a comprehensive advertising programme. However, Council did place, the required legislative notices in the Tweed Link – (Council's registered weekly newspaper which is distributed throughout the shire); provided information on the election on its website, as well as advertising and running candidate information sessions prior to nominations closing;
- the fact that since the last election the only daily local newspaper has ceased to operate;
- of the remaining weekly papers, no one paper covers all of the Shire;
- the costs for candidates to advertise and promote themselves in a cross border region which is also geographically disperse is expensive as any advertising needs to account for a number of papers, including those operating out of the Gold Coast and TV and radio stations on both sides of the border;
- the lack of overall publicity limited election coverage and aided in voter apathy.

The turnout could have also been impacted by the fact that the shire has a large elderly population with some of these voters having difficulty in visiting polling booths.

#### *Voting system*

The current voting system is too complicated – with above and below the line voting, which in 2012 included twelve groups as well as individuals, with a total of 59 candidates nominating for election. The ballot paper was also quite daunting to complete, given its physical size which equated to an A3 sized page. The preferential voting system and the manner that preference votes are allocated is not widely appreciated or indeed understood by the electors. The 2012 election experienced a large informal vote of 9.4% compared to the state average of 7.9%.

The current system is also confusing for the voter in that they may inadvertently vote informally by distributing preferences above the line to Groups and below the line to Independents who are not part of a Group. For those voters wishing to vote for a Group and preference an independent they are left with the daunting task of voting below the line and increasing their risk of an informal vote. The current system therefore disadvantages Independents not as part of a group as voter apathy tends to elect above the line voting.

Other issues which had an impact upon Tweed Shire Council's election included the Returning Officer experiencing difficulty in locating an office from which to conduct the election. Further difficulty was experienced in obtaining insurance for a disused State rail station to act a pre poll booth in Murwillumbah. Council has traditionally made available two pre poll locations to cater for the diverse population across the shire.

#### *Polling booths*

The number of polling booths utilised was in excess of those proposed by Council, as the Electoral Commission of NSW required the same booths as those provided in both the Federal and State Elections. The provision of these additional booths added to the overall cost of the election. Many candidates also commented that it was an impossible task for them to adequately man the large number of booths across the geographic area and that they simply did not have a party machine behind them as State and Federal candidates do to assist with on the ground representation at the large number of booths.

#### **Council requests that:**

- **Consideration be given to conducting the election on a postal ballot system – similar to the Victorian model, with a movement to an electronic process being considered.**
- **The voting system be changed – to a first past the post system with the votes being recorded for the number of candidates to be elected, such as (7), to be represented by a valid vote of;  
Numbers 1-7; or  
Ticks 7 in total; or  
Crosses 7 in total,  
with this electoral process resulting in the removal of above and below the line voting and the removal of groups.**

### *Signage*

There was an issue with election signage (core flutes) during the election, which included the location of signage and whether candidates should be given a warning before signs were removed from public places including road reserves, trees, parks and open spaces. Inconsistencies in the way in which election signage is dealt with across the State needs to be addressed with clear policies applicable to candidates standing for all tiers of Government.

**Council requests that the NSW Government enact legislation for the use of signs for State and Local Government elections.**

This legislation would eliminate council regulatory officers having to make a determination regarding what signage is legal or illegal and provide an enforcement framework.

### Non - residential voting in local Government elections;

In 2012, Council received eight applications and in 2008 ten applications for inclusion on the non - residential roll. This number of requests appears to be totally disproportionate to the number of non-residential ratepayers registered within the shire. Given the extremely low request rate and the legislative requirements surrounding the advertising program, there is a need to simplify the non residential roll system that would capture more non resident voters.

**Council requests that the non- residential roll system be simplified to capture more non resident constituents.**

The impact of requirements under the *Election Funding, Expenditure and Disclosures Act 1981*, on participation by candidates in Local Government Elections and possible legislative changes to remove any barriers to participation.

Not applicable to Council

### Any other related matter

Section 482(2) of the Local Government Act 1993 provides "End of Term Report - *must be presented to the final meeting of an outgoing council*". This conflicts with 'electoral material' and the 40 day caretaker period. Therefore councils were unable to release publicly the Council's End of Term report. Review of this provision in the Local Government Act 1993 should be undertaken to have the outgoing council sign off on the report as at 30 June in the year of the election or the electoral material needs revision to provide an exemption for the End of Term report of a Council during the 40 day caretaker period.