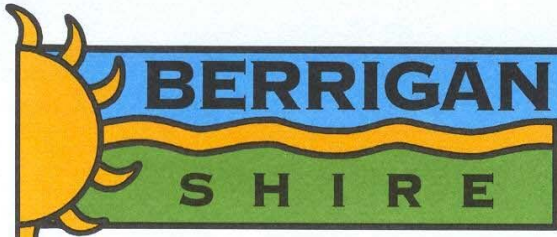


**Submission
No 14**

INQUIRY INTO 2008 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

Organisation: Berrigan Shire Council
Name: Mr Rowan Perkins
Position: General Manager
Date Received: 11/05/2009



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Ref RP:AFS

8 May 2009

The Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

*Heart of the
Southern Riverina*

Dear Sir/Madam

SUBMISSION TO THE ENQUIRY INTO THE CONDUCT OF THE 2008 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

Berrigan Shire Council welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into the Conduct of the 2008 Local Government Elections. The Council believes that the over servicing and significant cost of the conduct of the elections by the Electoral Commission NSW, when compared to historic costs, warrants the Inquiry and it hopes that some significant change can result from it.

My Council's primary concern with the conduct of the election relates to the overall cost when compared to historic costs and the fact there was no obvious service improvements resulting from the increased costs.

Primary drivers of increased costs that did not produce any service improvement were:

- The significant cost of labour provided by the Electoral Commission NSW that saw an hourly rate of \$195 charged to Councils for services provided. The Council was charged an "administration fee" in addition to these charges.

- Costs associated with the provision of a Returning Officer. Despite sharing a Returning Officer with six other Councils, the cost charged to this Council was three times the historic cost of a dedicated Returning Officer. The Returning Officer was employed full time for 10 weeks despite the fact that there was clearly no need for this to occur.
- Berrigan Shire Council was required to subsidize the cost of pre poll and postal voting at Deniliquin Council. The regional Returning Officer was based at Deniliquin and performed those services for Deniliquin at no cost to the Deniliquin Council while Berrigan Shire Council was required to provide its own staff to perform these functions.
- The Council has been charged for “Candidate Info Sessions” despite the fact that none were conducted in this area.
- The Council was charged \$990 for “Voting Centres” contrary to the Council’s cost of hiring these external facilities for a total of \$75.
- Wages costs for other electoral officials being double the Council’s historic cost.

Service issues related to the conduct of the election at Berrigan Shire Council were:

- Significant staff costs incurred due to inadequate and inappropriate advertising of the voter information line details. The Council had to deal with a significant level of inquiry as the Commission elected, against the wishes of the Council, to advertise such information in a regional farming supplement in the local newspaper. Such a farming supplement is of little interest to the majority of voters who are urban based.
- Despite the inference by the Commission that Council staff were not capable of competently conducting the election the Council was required to supply staff for pre poll and postal voting under threat of requiring voters to travel approximately 100 kms to Deniliquin to utilize those services. Council staff were not provided with any training to deliver these services.

The Council believes that while the Electoral Commission continues to operate in a legislated, price protected monopoly it will not see any improvement in quality of its services or cost reductions. If the State Government is adamant that Councils continue to be incapable of competently conducting elections then it must expose the Commission to competitive pricing pressures through a competitive tendering process.

Alternatively, the State must cap the Commission's charges to Council to the level of Ordinary Rate increases granted by it after returning to historic costs.

My Council would be pleased if you would consider its submission during the conduct of the Inquiry.

If you require any additional information do not hesitate to contact me

Yours faithfully

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

ROWAN PERKINS
GENERAL MANAGER