

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

**Organisation:** Mid-Western Regional Council  
**Name:** Mr Ian Roberts  
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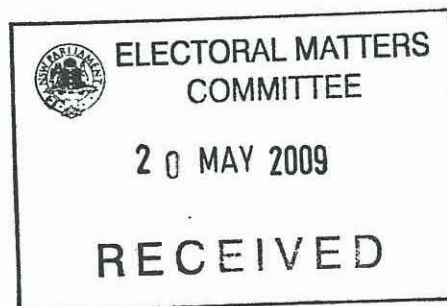
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The Chair  
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000



Dear Sir

**SUBMISSION TO JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON ELECTORAL MATTERS**

Enclosed please find a submission from Council in relation to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters.

Should you have any queries in relation to this matter please contact me on [REDACTED]

Yours faithfully

IAN ROBERTS  
MANAGER GOVERNANCE

**MID-WESTERN REGIONAL COUNCIL**  
**SUBMISSION**  
**TO**  
**JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON ELECTORAL MATTERS**

Mid-Western Regional Council appreciates the opportunity to lodge a submission in relation to the administration and conduct of the 2008 local government elections.

In so doing, the Council wishes to make it clear at the outset that it has nothing but the highest regard for its Returning Officer, Mr Russell Sear, who has filled this role for Mid-Western Regional and the former Mudgee Shire Council since the enactment of the 1993 Local Government Act. Any comments in this submission should in no way be taken as a reflection on Mr Sear.

At the same time, Council staff have no issue with the service received from the staff of the Electoral Commission. Over the years, Council staff have developed an excellent rapport with those of the Commission.

The three issues that this Council has are as follows:-

**1.     Costs**

What does concern Council though is the way that election costs have spiralled since the Electoral Commission took over control of the running of the election.

The 2008 election cost Mid-Western Regional Council \$129,690 (inc. GST).

By comparison, the 1995 election – which was the first after the introduction of the 1993 Local Government Act, which gave control of local government elections to the then State Electoral Office – cost the then Mudgee Shire Council \$44,325. While an independent Returning Officer was appointed for that election, Council provided administrative support and many of the tasks associated with the election process were carried out by Council staff as part of their normal day-to-day activities.

Admittedly, it is somewhat difficult to compare the costs of both elections as Mid-Western Regional Council covers a much larger area than that of the former Mudgee Shire Council although there has been a reduction in the number of councillors from 12 (Mudgee) to 9 (Mid-Western) and while Mudgee used 10 polling places on polling day, Mid-Western had 14.

Nonetheless, the above costs represent a 292.59% cost increase in the 13 years between 1995 and 2008.

While it is recognised that, to a certain extent, when Council “ran” the election, some of the costs would have been absorbed by Council, as was the case in relation to the 1995 election in respect of administrative costs of staff dealing with the Returning Officer, it is difficult to conceive how having the conduct of local government elections under the control of the Electoral Commission has added that much value to the electoral process.

**2.     Timing of Results**

The results of the elections take considerable time after election day because the officials result counting has been centralised. This Council’s results in respect of the 2008 election were not received until some 10 days after election day. Mid Western Regional Council is of the opinion that if all the process was left at a local level that time frame could be reduced by up to a week.

### **3. Use of Technology**

It is worth noting that we still use 19<sup>th</sup> Century technology (pencil and paper) to vote while other countries utilise the latest technological innovations to facilitate the recording of votes and tabulation of results. It would be advantageous for the Joint Committee to look at voting processes in the USA and New Zealand.

It is time that at least postal voting was introduced with the ability to process voting papers during the voting period. This reduces processing time by days. Or even the use of existing computer networks such as kiosk technology or automatic teller at banks at which people could cast their votes by using their PIN numbers might provide a simpler more cost effective method of voting.

This Council states that in the twenty first century we must look at better our more advanced methods of voting and the use of technology. We withdraw money from the bank with technology, we buy goods from anywhere in the world using the internet, so surely its time to look at the technology for voting.