

**Submission
No 6**

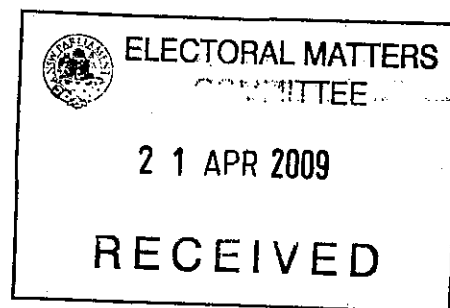
INQUIRY INTO 2008 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

Name: Mr Paul Tracey

Date Received: 21/04/2009

20th April 2009

The Chair,
Joint Standing Committee of Electoral Matters
Parliament House
Sydney 2000



SUBMISSION RE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTION COSTS.

I am writing as a Randwick Labor Councillor and former Mayor but I stress that this is entirely a private submission.

COUNCIL ELECTIONS

- a) I understand that cost for council elections run by the State Electoral Office are nearly \$8 per voter. I submit that complete postal voting would cost in the vicinity of \$2 to \$3 per vote returned.

I envisage that democracy would also be served by a postal system in which each candidate could make available to the Returning Officer a pre printed information sheet (say restricted to one side of an A4 page- detailing his or her claims for election. The Returning Officer would send out ballot papers, instructions for completing and returning, plus information provided by each candidate. All the votes returned by election day would be included after careful scrutiny by electoral officers.

The only costs would be for officials salary, printing ballot papers, envelopes etc and for insertion and posting to electors. Ballot papers returned by reply paid postage would also a cost. Australia Post provides significant discounts for such postings which could be availed by the Returning Officer.

Cost savings for local government would include the elimination of processing the normal postal votes; the staff, equipment and hire costs of polling booths; and the elimination of pre poll voting centres, most advertising etc. For candidates and political parties there would be significant cost savings on printing and advertising and on campaigning generally. Additionally such a system would be more democratic as minor candidates would have the same opportunity for promotion as major ones.

The need for political donations for campaigning would be greatly reduced and could possibly be restricted altogether. At the same time, such ease of voting (which, with prepolling, is becoming more and more popular) would increase the voting turnout which is still low compared to Federal and State elections. This is probably because of the absence of absentee voting under local government present arrangements.

Postal voting for council elections is used successfully in Tasmania and other states but there is no reason why it could not be used just as successfully in compulsory voting situations. It is widely used for company and union elections and the incidence of corrupt behaviour, is extremely minor.

Such behaviour is readily available under the present system by double voting, elector impersonation etc and there is little reason to believe that complete postal voting would lead to any greater incidence of voting corruption.

COUNCIL BI-ELECTIONS

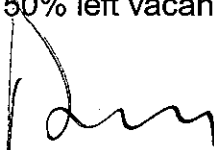
Council bi-elections are a completely unnecessary impost on local government.

They are often caused by domestic problems of Councillors, career moves or criminal convictions or financial problems. The costs for a council to fill a single vacancy at a bi-election is probably between \$20,000 and \$80,000

Councillors elected by Proportional Representation could be replaced by the nominee of the political party losing the councillor. In the case of an independent by recounting the original ballot papers.

This is the same method now used in every proportional representation system in Australia, including the Hare Clarke method in Tasmania and replacement by nomination in the Senate and Upper Houses of state legislatures.

Since bi-elections can be eliminated in the final year of a council, some thought should be given to extending this concession to other points in the cycle – for example in year 1, all councillor vacancy would be filled. In year 2, up to 25% could be left vacant (if the council so determined) in year 3, up to 50% left vacant, etc.



Paul Tracey

