

INQUIRY INTO 2008 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

Organisation: Sydney City Council
Name: Ms Monica Barone
Position: Chief Executive Officer
Date Received: 16/06/2009

City of Sydney

ABN 22 636 550 790

GPO Box 1591 Sydney NSW 2001 Australia

Town Hall House 456 Kent Street Sydney NSW 2000 Australia

Phone +61 2 9265 9333 Fax +61 2 9265 9222 TTY +61 2 9265 9276

council@cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au



2 June 2009

Our Ref: 2009/121773

File Ref: S060413

Ms Cherie Burton MP

Chairperson

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters

Parliament House

Macquarie Street

Sydney NSW 2000



Dear Ms Burton,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters in respect of the New South Wales local government elections held in September 2008.

The concerns of the City of Sydney in relation to the conduct of this election on our behalf by the Electoral Commission centre on inadequate resourcing. In particular, there were insufficient staff in the polling booths resulting in unacceptably long queues, an inadequate number of ballot boxes provided, poor placement of polling booths and an insufficient ability to receive applications for postal voting. These concerns are outlined in more detail below.

Insufficient Staff

A number of our Councillors reported unacceptably long queues at polling booths, particularly Erskineville School and Bourke Street Public School, where voting was still occurring at 7pm. These queues formed because of the shortage of staff to record the names of voters and provide ballot papers. We consider that a waiting time of over an hour to vote is unacceptable.

Inadequate Number of Ballot Boxes

Polling places appeared to have been issued with only one ballot box each. The City of Sydney held an election for the Lord Mayor, an election for Councillors and a referendum on ward boundaries. As all three ballot papers were only able to be placed in one ballot box they quickly filled and required frequent attention to enable the contents to be compressed to enable more ballot papers to be inserted. We have reports of a pool cue being borrowed from a neighbouring pub to push down the contents of one ballot box so that voters could deposit their ballots.

The inadequate number of ballot boxes also created delays in the counting of votes, as ballot papers for the election of the Lord Mayor, the election of the Councillors and the referendum on ward boundaries had to be separated before counting could commence.

city of villages

The difficulties experienced during polling day and to the count could be avoided in future if individual ballot boxes were provided for each election and referendum being conducted.

Polling Booth Placement

Unlike previous elections, there was no polling place in Alexandria, thus requiring residents in Alexandria and nearby areas to travel to the nearest places at Erskineville School and Beaconsfield. This contributed to over 3,500 people voting at Erskineville School, the highest polling place turnout within the City of Sydney in 2008.

The Electoral Commission also established a dual polling place at the Bridge Street School, Camperdown, at which just over 150 people voted. These voters would have been easily served by the Forrest Lodge School and RPA Hospital Camperdown. It would have been preferable to direct the resources used at Bridge Street School where they were needed in Alexandria.

Assisting Voters

Several polling places within the City of Sydney were within easy walking distance of each other. It would be helpful if the Electoral Commission could adopt a practice of providing the directions to the nearest polling place(s) so that voters have a choice of polling place should they be experiencing delays. This could easily be done by prominently displaying maps showing polling place locations, and polling place staff proactively providing information to voters.

Postal Voting

We received a large number of calls on the day that applications for postal voting papers were due and in the week following from distressed voters who were concerned that their applications had not been received by the Returning Officer. It appeared that a large number of last-minute applications were sent by fax to the Returning Officer and the fax machine was unable to process the volume of applications received. In future, it would be preferable for voters to be able to request postal voting forms via email in addition to the other methods that are currently acceptable.

The City of Sydney looks forward to the findings of the Committee in relation to this enquiry and trusts that the local government elections to be held in 2012 will be administered more competently.

Yours sincerely



MONICA BARONE
Chief Executive Officer