PREFERENCE COUNTING IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS IN NSW

Organisation: Goulburn Mulwaree Council

Date Received: 27 September 2017

The following submission is made by the Goulburn Mulwaree Council as endorsed by Council at its meeting held 19 September 2017.

Goulburn Mulwaree Council is in favour of simplifying the election process. Council would go so far as to saying that the preference system of voting should be replaced by a simple "first past the post" system where:

- Each enrolled elector would select a number of candidates (based on the number of Councillor positions to be filled).
- Instead of numbering the candidates in order of preference, votes would be marked as a cross or tick with each cross or tick having the same value
- Votes would then be counted with the top 9 (in the case of a 9 Councillor council) being elected

Council believes that such a system would truly reflect the wishes of the elector rather than a set of preferences, often driven by the candidates. This system would certainly be workable where there are no groups nominated for the election. Some of the advantages of this system would be:

- It is more simple
- It could reduce the importance of the ballot draw
- It simplifies the count process
- It should reduce the time taken for the polls to be declared.

Council also believes that this inquiry should certainly investigate the option of an electronic system of voting (coupled with a postal voting system). A number of jurisdictions have conducted elections in this manner to great success. The system would allow for voting to be open for a period equivalent to the pre-poll period but would not require pre-polling sites to be operated. Voters could be provided with a dedicated password and PIN to vote and could do so on-line at any time throughout the election "period". Those without access to technology (or those in remote areas with no access to internet) could be provided with the postal option.

While acknowledging that there could be a significant up-front capital cost in developing the system, Council sees a number of worthwhile ongoing advantages that would make this option worthy of consideration:

- Reduced cost of running elections/by-elections due to the lack of a need for polling/pre-polling booths. These savings both in terms of hiring the facilities and the staff time of manning the booths,
- An automated counting system where election results (whether in a simplified system of voting or the current preference system) could be determined almost instantly following the close of voting.
- The elimination of absentee voting with electors being able to cast their vote from a computer anywhere in the world.