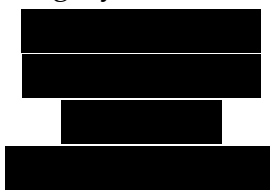# PREFERENCE COUNTING IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS IN NSW

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Date Received: 29 September 2017

**Submission to the Inquiry into Preference Counting
in Local Government Elections in NSW**
by Gregory John Olsen Esq

The recent local government elections have revealed the inequities of the preference counting system used to determine successful candidates. The two-tiered system of voting below and above the line further complicates matters for voters and unfairly favours lead candidates in Groups or Parties above the line.

I voted in the inaugural election for the Central Coast Council where there were five Wards and three Councilors to be elected in each Ward. Therefore the election was like a Federal Senate election. I discovered, when looking deeply at the final results on the NSW Local Government Elections 2017 website, that as the count continued in the allocation of preferences, the percentage of exhausted votes increased to between 60% and 70%. How could this be so?

Obviously, the ballot papers with only a #1 vote either below or above the line would be the first to be exhausted, but I found, when looking at the early excluded candidates, the percentage is quite small, as little a 0%. Therefore, single entry votes were not that common. However, as the count continued, exhausted ballot papers gradually rose to take up a greater percentage.

The reason for this is that an excluded candidate cannot receive any preferences because their low #1 vote has precluded them from continuing in the vote. Under existing counting rules, any second preferences would be lost because the candidate, to which those preferences were directed, had already been excluded. This is a major weakness of the current system of electing multiple candidates. This case is particularly relevant for voters who vote above the line because they may not realise that their preferences for the number two and three candidates will never be allocated because those candidates will be excluded very early on in the count because they received very few #1 votes below the line.

Not only are voters' higher preferences negated in the above cases, but their lower preferences may be added to a much less preferred candidate's vote count and eventually award them a seat, contrary to that voters intentions! If this anomaly could be rectified, the significant disadvantage of candidates who poll lower #1 votes would be balanced.

The quota system appears to be working well for candidates that reach a quota on their first preference votes. However, the problem is how to fairly determine successful candidates who fail to reach a quota in the optional preferential voting with both grouped and ungrouped candidates.

The simplest solution is to require voters to just tick or cross their desired candidates equal to the number of seats to be awarded in the allocated space for them on the ballot paper. Scrutineers would simply add up all the votes for the candidates and allocate seats to the candidates with the

greatest number of ticks and/or crosses up to the number of seats being decided. No more preference deals or confusing wheeling and dealing between candidates. This straightforward and simple voting system, for elections contesting multiple seats in one area, would return democracy to the voters and reward candidates who receive primary support from their constituents.