

**Submission  
No 13**

**PROPOSALS TO INCREASE VOTER ENGAGEMENT, PARTICIPATION AND  
CONFIDENCE**

**Organisation:** Bega Valley Shire Council

**Date Received:** 15 August 2024

15 August 2024

Committee Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Via online lodgement: [Lodge a Submission \(nsw.gov.au\)](https://www.nsw.gov.au/lodge-a-submission)

Dear Committee Members

**Proposal to increase voter engagement, participation and confidence**

Bega Valley Shire Council ("Council") appreciates the opportunity to provide this submission to the Joint Standing Committee into the proposal to increase voter engagement, participation, and confidence.

In preparing this submission, Council has referred to its own experiences in working with the NSW Electoral Commission to coordinate local government elections. It has also considered the NSW Electoral Commission's report from November 2023 regarding Technology Assisted Voting (TAV) and the recommendations made by the ICAC in its Operation Aero report from 2015.

We believe that improved awareness, knowledge, and understanding of the electoral system and processes is required – especially with reference to Local Government Elections. Educating our residents and ratepayers is likely to positively affect long-term voter engagement, participation, and confidence.

The education process should start with young people in our communities and specifically target people aged 16-18 years of age. The purpose of this education would be to develop an initial understanding of what it means to vote, what the individual needs to vote for, and how the process works. Accessible educational material for young people who are voting for the first time would also be beneficial. This means any materials produced need to be suitable for publishing on social media platforms as well as print media.

The educational material produced for young people could then be used to increase understanding of elections in the wider community. The material should be communicated in Plain English, engaging and interactive.

More proactive engagement with indigenous people in rural communities would be beneficial. Council would like to see resources become available that support our Aboriginal communities to better understand the electoral system and methods that are easily accessible. This is likely to increase participation of local Aboriginal people in our elections, leading to increased engagement and confidence overall.

Council acknowledges the NSW Electoral Commission's report on Technology Assisted Voting (TAV). Whilst there are inherent risks associated with TAV, the benefits to regional and remote communities in the Bega Valley Shire make it worth investigating. TAV can also be used to improve accessibility to voting for people

with disabilities other than those who are blind or with low vision. Having this service available more widely would support the ability for all members to contribute to the diversity and perspectives in an election process. We recommend that the electoral commission to continue researching the feasibility of this approach to voting and not continue to restrict participation on a paper-based, manual system. We support the request for government funding in the next budget to continue a procurement process for a preferred solution to implement for the NSW state election in 2027. We support the recommendations to amend the required legislation to manage the risks of internet voting.

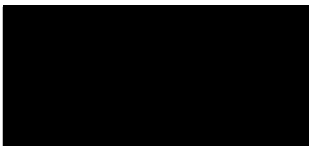
With regard to maintaining confidence in the integrity of the electoral process, Council would like the committee to consider the increasing costs that Councils are required to accommodate when conducting Local Government Elections. Council engages the NSW Electoral Commission and the costs for the election continue to increase beyond the permitted rates increase. This cost escalation has a detrimental impact on the level of confidence our residents and ratepayers have regarding the coordination of the election. The continued increase in expenditure on election costs without more clearly articulating the return on investment is diminishing the trust our ratepayers have in the electoral process and comes at the cost of other important local services. Efficiencies in resourcing and processes should be further investigated, including automation and voting kiosks.

Further we support the recommendations of Operation Aero be progressed to strengthen the laws, policies and procedures concerning political donations in NSW. This needs to occur for transparency and confidence for voters during an election. We are pleased that working group has been appointed and are progressing the recommendations.

A further matter that Council thinks could support voter confidence, understanding an awareness would be to implement a public education program clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the three tiers of Government.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission. Council invites the committee to visit the Bega Valley and would be open to hosting a regionally focussed public hearing so you can receive feedback directly from our Council, elected officials, and community on the challenges we face and improvements that can be made in ensuring our voters can actively engage in the election process.

Your sincerely



**Anthony McMahon**  
**Chief Executive Officer**