

## INQUIRY INTO E-PETITIONS

**Organisation:** NSW Legislative Council  
**Name:** Hon Shayne Mallard MLC  
**Date received:** 16 May 2017

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President  
Legislative Council  
Parliament House  
Macquarie St  
Sydney NSW 2000

5 May 2017

Dear Mr President,

**Re: Inquiry into e-petitions**

Thank you for your letter of 13 April 2017 regarding the inquiry into e-petitions. I note that the current procedure for presenting petitions to the Parliament is based on traditional hand written petition modes that date back more than two centuries. It is timely to review this practice.

In principle, I believe that a parliament must move with the times to stay of relevance and accessible to the people it serves. An example of this has been the introduction of electronic only Hansard and digital broadcasting of proceedings.

Digital technology has been the most significant change to communication in the last half century. It has revolutionised the way we communicate. I therefore support the introduction of a formal mechanism to accept e-petitions as formal petitions of matters on concern to the Legislative Council.

This however, is not support for e-petitions to replace the traditional petition model of the Parliament. E-petitions are more accessible to the younger IT literate generation and as such could skew representations to the Parliament towards the young at the expense of the older generation who may not be as connected to the digital age. Conversely, introducing e-petitions may improve the reach that the Parliament has to the younger generation who are often cynical and disconnected from the Parliamentary process.

However, there are several conditions I would suggest be introduced to prevent fraudulent or electronically manipulated petitions. There is a real danger that sophisticated software programs could easily manipulate an e-petition seeking to express a view of a law before the Parliament.



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To address this I would suggest that your inquiry seek technical advice. However, as a start I would suggest that all e-petitions be required to not only provide their email address but also full name and address from the electoral roll. This would in my opinion go some way to preventing fraudulent or manipulative e-petitions. An electronic template for e-petitions could be developed that clarified to the format required.

In my previous career at Liverpool Council we conducted an online survey for the proposed second airport at Badgerys Creek. Upon technical analysis of the online surveys submitted it was discovered that a large number originated from one IP address coming from one computer. As a result all survey entries from that address except one were noted but not included in the final results. Any e-petition system needs to guard against any organisation or individual attempting to manipulate the outcome.

Any e-petition should also be an original and unique petition for the purpose of tabling to the House. Procedures need to be developed to prevent the simple duplication (either manually or by software) to create multiple petitions through a single signature entry.

With these observations I again reiterate my in principle support for the introduction of e-petitions.

If I can be of any further assistance please do not hesitate to contact my office on 02 9230 2434.

Yours sincerely,



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