

**Submission
No 2**

INQUIRY INTO CONDUCT OF ELECTIONS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Name: Ms Dominique Passmore

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4th July 2022

Email submission
Hon Robert Borsak MLC
Chair

SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE CONDUCT OF ELECTIONS UNDER COVID-19

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Committee. I will be brief, and write this from the perspective of both a Voter and an Independent Candidate for Sutherland Shire Council.

As a voter, my concerns are:

1. iVote was inadequate – real investments need to be made into online voting. This has now been reinforced by the Courts.
2. Constantly moving the election date due to CoVid, and then selecting a date in December just in advance of School Holidays was to the advantage of incumbents
3. Postal votes should only come from the Electoral Commission – Parties should not be permitted to ‘market’ postal votes.
4. Accessibility at Pre-Poll was not good. In addition, Polling day accessibility really is an issue that needs to be addressed.

As a Candidate my concerns are:

1. Restrictions and inconsistent interpretation of the ‘rules’.
 - Electoral officials made different decisions at a Booth and Electorate level. As an example, in the Shoalhaven, volunteers were permitted to ‘hold up’ how to vote cards, whilst this was not allowed in Sutherland
 - Party Volunteers ‘stretched’ the rules by showing people how to vote on their mobile phones
 - Candidates were not permitted to move A-frames during polling day, but this happened all the time
 - Candidates stood in front of Covid Checkin QR codes disrupting checkin
 - Needed more Electoral staff to enforce the additional ‘rules’ and more importantly, security to enable them to do so.
 - Two week Pre-Poll suited voters, but this was too long for candidates. The campaign became survival of the fittest, rather than a contest of ideas!

Other

1. Late release and updates to Candidate Handbook. Unacceptable
2. Constant rule changes and last minute decision on How to Vote cards. This should have happened months out, not weeks
3. How to Vote cards mounted on A-Frames were permissible, however a major party copied colours of Independent. Not illegal but not ethical
4. Candidate security has been abandoned. A candidate should be able to have a registered PO box on all materials and have address lodged privately with the Electoral Commission. The security risk to myself and family was evident throughout the campaign. This is unacceptable particularly if we want more diverse candidates. I understand this is a change that is reinforcing major party representation and male candidates. Candidates were abused and personal safety threatened to the point that they abandoned their candidacy. This is not acceptable. Police and Minister reports were made, but to no avail.
5. Failure to have a strategy for Designated Institutions. This was to the advantage of the incumbents as they could visit facilities in their capacity as a 'current Councillor/Mayor' and harvest votes accordingly. New candidates did not have this ability
6. System outage (Sutherland) at ballot draw delaying candidate ballots.
7. Education – people do not know how to vote. More money and time needs to be spent educating the community on how to vote, considering the many differences we have between Local, State and Federal.

I urge the Committee to enable additional funding to the State Electoral Commission. It is evident that they are underfunded, and frankly iVote will not be successful without a review and investment.

I would also like to thank Women for Election Australia (Lica Heath – CEO) for supporting and educating a range of candidates to participate in the elections (Local, State and Federal)

Minister Bronwyn Taylor and former Local Government Minister, Shelley Hancock were also instrumental in supporting female candidates. Their support is noted and appreciated.

Yours Sincerely,

Ms Dominique Passmore