

**Submission
No 17**

**INQUIRY INTO CONDUCT OF ELECTIONS IN NEW
SOUTH WALES**

Name: Cr Maree Edwards

Date Received: 14 July 2022

I stood as a Labor candidate for Ward A, Shellharbour in Nov 2021. Upon hearing I had won a place I was excited to be able to serve the community, then gutted when advised that the Electoral Commissioner had turned over his own declaration of the Poll. We were never advised in person about his decision but discovered it on the website. It seems iVote had failed dismally yet again and the candidates have been serving on Council working hard under a constant threat of a by-election ever since.

I am a full time carer for my ill 87yo father and fronting the polls again has been daunting, I could have withdrawn but felt that would have been unfair on the voters who chose me. I am unsure if he will even survive to the 30th July and yet I must be at pre poll for 2 weeks and engage a private carer at a cost of \$40ph.

I tell the Committee this not to garnish sympathy but as a reminder that people who raise their hand to serve their communities are members of that same community and work hard to do their best. It is certainly not about the small stipend or any other perceived benefits as there are none that in my 7 months of service I have witnessed.

Representing myself against the Government Barristers and the Supreme Court Judge was daunting and all time consuming, I did this whilst caring for my dad and working through the many and voluminous documentation that we must review in our roles as Councillors. Planning documents and strategic planning for upcoming decades.

The Berejikilian Government should never have allowed the NSW Electoral Commissioner to launch such a case against itself. Their iVote failure was a Government failure and a failure of the Electoral Commission, yet those of us returning the polls are the ones suffering. with the Commissioner making a point that they were underfunded for the LGA elections of 2021. There have been previous inquiries into iVote failures and yet they still went ahead and ignored the findings.

There were at least 35 other Councils that should have been put under the spotlight based on the reasoning by the Commissioner's expert, Mr Kwok but none of these were challenged. I am yet to understand why only these particular 3 Councils were the ones selected to face this unnecessary and expensive by election. Who challenged or complained about the outcome, was this why these were chosen?

I feel that if a number of the candidates had not fought against this tyranny and utter misuse of taxpayer funds much of what was exposed in court would never have seen the light of day.

I urge you to read my evidence in Supreme Court hearings about the failure of process and systems, the lack of communication to candidates and overall heartache and hardships, along with the evidence of Dr Vanessa Teague and Cr Alexandra Wyatt. I have only attached one

Affidavit lodged by myself but there are multiple documents we lodged to the Court that I am sure can be sourced should they be required.

The public have a right to know why the Commissioner used the Supreme Court as a blunt instrument against the NSW Berejiklian government and why Government Barristers considered it a worthy case. Furthermore at what cost to NSW taxpayers and at what cost to candidates both personally and economically.

I know only that I must return to the polls and if my dad passes during this time I will hold the NSW Government and the NW Electoral Commissioner to account for my loss, during a period where I should be spending as much time with him as I can.

Thank you Commissioners for your indulgence.

Clr Maree Edwards, Ward A Shellharbour City Council.