

INQUIRY INTO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AMENDMENT (ELECTIONS) BILL 2025

Organisation: Riverina & Murray Joint Organisation (RAMJO)
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NSW Standing Committee on State Development
Local Government Amendment (Elections) Bill 2025
Submission made via online portal at: [Local Government Amendment \(Elections\) Bill 2025](#)

Dear Standing Committee

Submission from the Riverina and Murray Joint Organisation

The Riverina and Murray Joint Organisation appreciates the opportunity to share its knowledge and commentary to this important consultation. Our submission draws upon vast experience from our member councils and stakeholder.

Joint Organisations (JO's) were proclaimed in May 2018 under the NSW *Local Government Act 1993*. The Riverina and Murray Joint Organisation (**RAMJO**) represents over 152,000 people covering an area of more than 80,000sq kms, comprising the 11 Local Government Areas of *Albury, Berrigan, Balranald, Edward River, Federation, Griffith, Leeton, Murray River, Murrumbidgee, Narrandera and Wentworth*. Tasked with intergovernmental cooperation, leadership and regional prioritisation, JOs have consulted with their stakeholders to identify key strategic regional priorities and has developed a *Statement of Strategic Regional Priorities*.¹

Whilst we support efforts to improve consistency and integrity in the local government electoral process, we however respectfully raise several concerns regarding the potential operational, financial and democratic implications of the proposed reforms on rural and regional councils, and their communities.

Key Issues and Impacts

1. Exclusive Administration by the NSW Electoral Commissioner

While we acknowledge the intent to streamline election processes, mandating the NSW Electoral Commission (NSWEC) as the sole election provider removes councils' ability to seek more cost-effective or locally responsive alternatives, an unwelcome additional challenge given rural and regional councils are already stretched to great lengths financially.

- Regional councils often experience significantly higher per-capita election costs due to geographic spread and lower economies of scale.
- As evidenced by RAMJO member Berrigan Shire Council, councils may take on considerable administrative burden without receiving the promised cost savings from the NSWEC.
- In the absence of competition or transparent costing, councils risk continued cost increases without recourse.

Recommendation: Retain the option for councils to engage accredited private providers where this can be demonstrated to deliver value for money. Alternatively, consider state-funded election delivery to ensure equity between metropolitan and regional areas.

¹ [2022-RAMJO-STATEMENT-OF-STRATEGIC-REGIONAL-PRIORITIES-WEB.pdf](#)

2. Reduction in Pre-Poll Voting Period

The proposed reduction to five business days may have unintended consequences for voter access, particularly in remote communities as:

- Pre-poll voting is a critical mechanism for voters who work irregular hours, have caregiving duties, travel frequently or experience mobility issues.
- In rural areas with limited polling locations, shorter pre-poll periods may depress voter turnout, weakening democratic participation.

Recommendation: Maintain a flexible approach to pre-polling arrangements to support inclusive participation, particularly for regional communities with lower access to polling infrastructure.

3. Restriction of Polling Places to Within LGA Boundaries

Requiring polling places to be located solely within the LGA may inadvertently reduce access for residents living near LGA borders/cross-border communities or working in neighbouring jurisdictions.

- Voters in regional communities frequently travel across local government boundaries as part of daily life.
- Such a restriction may increase travel time and inconvenience, potentially reducing voter engagement.

Recommendation: Allow flexibility in the location of polling places, particularly where cross-border access improves convenience for voters in remote areas.

4. Proposed Changes to Filling Casual Vacancies (Section 291B)

The new mechanism mandating appointment from within a group (where applicable) raises equity and transparency concerns.

- Many rural councils have limited or no party-political groupings, making this process inapplicable or difficult to implement.
- Appointing a councillor without a public vote, risks undermining community confidence particularly where the replacement candidate was not previously elected.
- The potential for political manipulation, especially in the absence of clear regulatory safeguards, should be carefully considered.

Recommendation: Retain the current provision allowing the next highest-polling unelected candidate to be appointed or proceed to a by-election where appropriate. Local democratic representation should not be compromised by a one-size-fits-all approach.

5. Timing and Consultation Process

The timing of this Bill and its inquiry has coincided with the end of financial year obligations for councils, including audit, budgeting and reporting under the Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) framework.

- We would like to respectfully highlight that this short timeframe may constrain the ability of councils to engage meaningfully in consultation, especially those with limited administrative capacity.

Recommendation: Extend the consultation period and consider a staged implementation process, particularly for regional councils who require time to adapt to administrative and cost implications.

Conclusion

RAMJO supports reform that enhances transparency and consistency in local government elections. However, the current Bill may inadvertently disadvantage rural and regional communities by increasing costs, reducing accessibility and limiting local autonomy. We urge the NSW Government to consider a more flexible, inclusive approach that reflects the diverse circumstances of councils across the state. We welcome the opportunity to engage further in discussions and hearings on this matter.

Sincerely

Yvonne Lingua
RAMJO Executive Officer