

INQUIRY INTO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AMENDMENT (ELECTIONS) BILL 2025

Organisation: Georges River Residents and Ratepayers Party

Date Received: 4 July 2025

Georges River RESIDENTS & RATEPAYERS



Submission to the Inquiry into the Local Government Amendment (Elections) Bill 2025

The Director, Standing Committee on State Development,
Parliament House, Macquarie Street, Sydney NSW 2000.

By email: State.Development@parliament.nsw.gov.au

From: Georges River Residents and Ratepayers Party

Date: 4th July, 2025

Introduction

The Georges River Residents and Ratepayers Party (GRRRP) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the ***Inquiry into the Local Government Amendment (Elections) Bill 2025***.

As a registered local government political party, GRRRP is committed to enhancing the transparency, accessibility, and democratic integrity of the electoral process. We support efforts to strengthen public trust in council elections and improve the efficiency and consistency of electoral administration. We make the following comments in response to the proposed amendments.

Support for Amendments

1. Exclusive Administration by NSW Electoral Commission

GRRRP supports the proposed requirement that all local government elections be conducted solely by the NSW Electoral Commissioner.

This amendment will eliminate inconsistencies in electoral processes across councils and ensure that all elections are administered independently and professionally by a single, impartial authority. Removing the option to use private electoral service providers enhances public confidence in the administration of local government elections.

2. Reduction of Pre-Poll Period to Five Days

We support the proposal to reduce the pre-poll voting period to five days.

A shorter pre-poll period balances the need for early voting access with the operational and resourcing challenges that an extended period creates for candidates and electoral authorities. This change will streamline the election process while still enabling reasonable opportunities for early voting.

Opposition to Specific Amendments

1. Mandated Replacement of Vacating Councillors by Same Group Candidate

GRRRP does **not support** the proposed amendment requiring that councillor vacancies be filled by the next unelected candidate from the same group on the ballot.

We provide the following reasons for our opposition:

- **The countback system already reflects voter intention.** Under the current system, a countback redistributes the votes received by the vacating councillor to other candidates in their group, typically resulting in the election of the next most supported candidate. This method honours the original voting preferences of the community.
- **Scenarios exist where this model fails.** For example, if all three candidates in a group were elected and one later resigns, or if a lower-listed candidate declines to serve, a countback by-election is the only viable way to genuinely reflect the community's vote and preserve the ordinary election result.
- **The model disadvantages independents and small parties.** Major political parties tend to attract a higher overall vote share, which often guarantees them one or two of the three positions in a ward. Independents and smaller local parties typically compete for the remaining position. In a full by-election where only one vacancy is being contested, independents are at a distinct disadvantage as major parties are more likely to secure the seat. This risks reducing diversity of representation on councils and tilting the electoral landscape further in favour of the major parties.
- **By-elections are costly, inconvenient, and result in low participation.** Forcing councils and communities to undertake a full by-election to fill a vacancy—especially for only one position—is a costly and time-consuming process. It imposes a significant burden on ratepayers and council operations, and historically results in **very low voter turnout**. This undermines the legitimacy of the outcome and reduces overall community engagement with local democracy.
- **Proposed alternative: extend countback period.** The current limitation—allowing countbacks only in the first 18 months—should be extended to the first **three years**

of a council term. In the final 12 months, we support maintaining the current provision where councils may seek the Minister's approval to leave a casual vacancy unfilled.

2. Polling Place Location Requirement on Election Day

While GRRRP supports **the intent** of requiring pre-polling places to be located within the local government area to avoid confusion, we do **not support** mandating this requirement on election day.

We note the following concerns:

- **The Minister's rationale does not hold up in practice.** The Minister claims this amendment would reduce confusion by ensuring voters don't receive "how-to-vote" material that is not relevant to them. However, even **within** a single LGA, polling places regularly service **multiple wards**, meaning voters can and do receive up to three different how-to-vote flyers—of which only one is relevant to them. This is a natural and accepted feature of ward-based local government elections and not a result of booths being located outside the LGA.
- **Restricting election-day booths to the LGA boundary offers little benefit.** There is no evidence to suggest that the current arrangements cause widespread confusion among voters. On the contrary, limiting election-day polling places to within the LGA may actually inconvenience residents, particularly those living on or near LGA boundaries who may be closer to a polling place just outside their council area.

We recommend this amendment apply **only to pre-poll voting**, where consistent and centralised locations within the LGA are more appropriate. For election day, councils and the NSW Electoral Commission should retain flexibility to allocate polling places based on practical needs and accessibility for residents.

Recommendations

1. Retain the current countback system and extend its applicability from the first 18 months of a council term to the first **three years**, ensuring continuity and democratic representation while minimising unnecessary cost and disruption.
2. Do **not mandate** replacement of councillors by unelected group members. Instead, retain the **countback by-election system**, which already achieves the same effect by distributing the vacating councillor's votes to remaining candidates in their group.

3. Apply the polling place location requirement only to **pre-poll voting**, and maintain flexibility for election day booth locations.
4. Proceed with proposed changes requiring:
 - Exclusive administration of elections by the NSW Electoral Commissioner.
 - Reduction of pre-poll period to five days.

Conclusion

The Georges River Residents and Ratepayers Party appreciates the opportunity to contribute to this important inquiry. We support reforms that promote electoral consistency, fairness, and public confidence—particularly through centralised administration and streamlined pre-polling. However, we caution against changes that impose unnecessary burdens on councils and communities or undermine the representation of smaller and independent candidates.

I would welcome the opportunity to provide further information if required.

Yours sincerely

Robert Jones

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