

**Submission
No 37**

INQUIRY INTO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AMENDMENT (ELECTIONS) BILL 2025

Name: Christina Jamieson

Date Received: 4 July 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Local Government Amendment (Elections) Bill 2025.

As a serving councillor, I am deeply invested in ensuring our electoral system remains transparent, equitable, and reflective of genuine community representation. While I support several key aspects of the Bill, I also have serious concerns about some proposed changes and their unintended impacts—particularly on diversity of representation, administrative efficiency, and public trust.

Below are my comments and recommendations on the major components of the Bill:

Support for Key Reforms

1. Exclusive Election Administration by the NSW Electoral Commissioner

I strongly support the move to require that all local government elections be administered solely by the NSW Electoral Commissioner. A single, independent authority provides consistency, eliminates conflicts of interest, and enhances public confidence in the process.

Allowing private electoral providers has led to inconsistencies and a perception—if not the reality—of unequal administration across councils. This reform will professionalise and standardise local elections across NSW.

2. Reduction of Pre-Poll Voting Period to Five Days

I also support the proposal to reduce the pre-poll period to five days. While pre-poll voting is essential for accessibility, the extended period has become an undue burden on candidates, volunteers, and electoral staff. A shorter period still supports voter flexibility while easing logistical challenges and campaign fatigue.

Concerns and Recommendations

1. Replacement of Councillors by Unelected Group Candidates

I am opposed to the proposed automatic replacement of vacating councillors by the next unelected candidate from the same group.

While this proposal aims to streamline mid-term vacancies, I believe it creates significant democratic and practical issues:

- The **existing countback system already preserves voter intent**, by redistributing the votes of the vacating councillor to remaining candidates in their group.
- It allows **situational flexibility**, which is essential when, for instance, a listed group candidate declines to serve or where all group candidates have already been elected.

- Most critically, this model disproportionately **disadvantages independents and smaller local parties**, who often rely on by-elections to fairly compete for single vacancies. Mandating automatic replacements risks entrenching larger parties and reducing political diversity on councils.

Recommended Alternative:

Rather than mandating replacements, I propose **extending the current countback mechanism from the first 18 months to the first three years** of a council term. This would enhance efficiency while still upholding the integrity of the election result. In the final 12 months, councils should retain discretion to leave vacancies unfilled with Ministerial approval.

2. Restriction of Election Day Polling Places to Within LGA Boundaries

While I appreciate the intention of limiting pre-poll locations to within the LGA to reduce confusion, I do not support extending this restriction to **election day polling places**.

In practice:

- Ward-based councils already present voters with multiple “how-to-vote” materials, even at booths within their own LGA.
- Restricting polling places to the LGA boundary may inadvertently inconvenience residents—particularly those who live near the border of two councils, and currently access a more conveniently located booth outside the LGA.
- There is **no strong evidence** that the current system causes widespread voter confusion.

Recommendation:

Apply the LGA-based location requirement to **pre-poll only**, and allow election day booth placement to remain at the discretion of the NSW Electoral Commission for accessibility and efficiency.

Summary of Recommendations

I respectfully submit the following:

1. **Support** the proposed exclusive administration of local government elections by the NSW Electoral Commissioner.
 2. **Support** the reduction of the pre-poll voting period to five days.
 3. **Oppose** the automatic replacement of vacating councillors by the next group candidate; instead, **retain and extend the countback process** to three years.
 4. **Restrict polling place location requirements to pre-poll only**, and maintain flexibility for election day booth locations.
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Conclusion

Reform of the electoral system should strengthen democracy—not inadvertently weaken it by reducing diversity, transparency, or community voice.

I thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission, and I would welcome the chance to offer further input or participate in ongoing discussions around local government electoral reform.



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