

**Submission
No 46**

INQUIRY INTO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AMENDMENT (ELECTIONS) BILL 2025

Name: Cr David Porter

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**Submission to the NSW Legislative Council Inquiry
Local Government Amendment (Elections) Bill 2025
From: Cr David R Porter
Councillor, Bega Valley Shire
Date: 8th July 2025**

To the Honourable Members of the Legislative Council,

I am a second-term Councillor in a regional council, elected to serve my community. While I remain dedicated to that mission, I hold serious concerns regarding the direction, purpose, and governance structure underpinning local councils in New South Wales.

The proposed legislative changes—particularly those concerning council elections—raise fundamental questions about whether the State Government has clearly defined the role of Councillors, or indeed the essential function of councils. As councils have never been granted constitutional recognition via referendum, they remain, in legal terms, administrative arms of the State Government. This renders elected Councillors more akin to advisory committee members than representatives of a sovereign tier of government.

Unlike State or Federal Parliamentarians, Councillors in NSW are not afforded the resources necessary to fulfil their responsibilities effectively. We are not provided offices, staff, or support, despite being tasked with significant workloads that demand continuous research, policy understanding, and deep community engagement. Meanwhile, we are required to operate under rigid regulations that often presume misconduct. We are not afforded parliamentary privilege, and are routinely subjected to online abuse, vexatious code of conduct complaints, and invasive scrutiny of our private lives—all while being remunerated at rates below minimum wage. In any other sector, this arrangement would be unlawful.

The disparity is even greater in rural and regional areas. Councils like mine are responsible for extensive road networks, bridges, airports, and infrastructure assets far exceeding those of most metropolitan councils—yet regional Councillors are paid *less*. This is not only inequitable; it undermines good governance and discourages capable individuals from seeking election.

In comparison, Queensland offers a more robust and professional model. Their Councillors are remunerated significantly higher (in some cases tenfold), receive office space, and are supported by shared administrative staff. This fosters a more sustainable, skilled, and accountable local government. I ask members of this Parliament: who among you could sustain your household and serve your constituents while working from home on \$21,000 per year?

If we value diversity of thought, independent voices, and community representation, we must ensure that people from all backgrounds can afford to serve. Currently, Councillors are disadvantaged—punished, even—for their commitment to community.

An additional concern is the growing influence of political parties within councils. Independent Councillors are legally restricted from discussing matters outside formal meetings, while party-affiliated Councillors often arrive with a predetermined position. This erodes the integrity of council debate and distorts democratic process. Aligning council elections with state elections—as proposed—risks entrenching political dominance at the local level, further weakening community-focused governance.

There is a widespread perception that local government is broken. In truth, it suffers from an identity crisis: it is neither a fully empowered level of government nor an efficient state-managed committee. It is an in-between structure that is under-resourced, over-regulated, and increasingly dysfunctional.

I urge the Legislative Council to clarify what it wants local government to be:

- **If councils are to remain community-focused administrative committees**, then political party and group involvement should be removed entirely—including the use of above-the-line voting.
- **If councils are to be recognised as a true tier of government**, then structural reform must extend far beyond electoral realignment. Councillors must be properly resourced, supported, and empowered to reflect their substantial responsibilities—especially in rural and regional contexts.

I would welcome reform that professionalises the governance of councils and elevates the role of Councillors to the level of trust and responsibility they are asked to carry. Only then will councils function efficiently and represent their communities with integrity.

Publication Disclaimer

I consent to the publication of this submission and confirm that I do not wish for my name or any part of this submission to be withheld.

Sincerely,



David Porter
Councillor

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