



## **Redlands2030 Submission on Local Government Electoral (Implementing Stage 2 of Belcarra) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2019**

Redlands2030 Inc. (Redlands2030) is an incorporated not-for-profit association advocating good governance and community participation in government decisions about matters and issues affecting the Redlands.

We commend the Government for its program of reforms aimed at reducing local government corruption risks in Queensland.

In general we support the package of reforms included in the bill. We have a few comments on the proposed reforms which are set out below.

### **Compulsory preferential voting**

- We support the proposed change to compulsory preferential voting as this aligns with the voting method used at State and Federal elections
- We think that it is not too much to ask of voters that they number each box.
- In Redland City the number of candidates for divisional councillors at the last two elections has ranged from two to four.
- In 2012 there were 28 candidates for 10 divisions, range was from 2 to 4 candidates, 7 divisions had more than 2 candidates
- In 2016 there were 27 candidates for 10 divisions, range was from 2 to 4 candidates, 6 divisions had more than 2 candidates
- At the past two elections for the position of Redland City mayor there have only been two candidates.

### **Candidates in declared groups**

- We support measures to help voters understand when councillors are aligned as a group pursuing a shared policy platform.

### **Caps on election campaign spending**

- We support the concept of spending caps for campaign expenditure.
- We note that any regulation of campaign spending will need to deal with activities of third parties which campaign to support a candidate or group of candidates (or attack their opponents).
- An example of this is the Concerned Redlands Residents Association (CRRA) which campaigned actively in the 2012 Redland City local government elections against some candidates.
- We have been advised that this supposedly third party entity was actually instigated and run by a candidate who benefitted from CRRA's campaigning.
- Consideration should be given to clarifying that any third party entity which appears to act as if it is controlled by a candidate or group can be deemed to be part of that candidate's campaign.

**Public funding**

- Public funding along the lines proposed by the government would not be a significant impost. For Redlands the maximum cost would be about \$70,000/year. Perhaps this cost could be offset by a slight reduction (about 5%) to the salaries and benefits paid to mayors and councillors.

**Holding council elections on a postal vote only basis**

- We note that Redland City Council has already written to the Government requesting that the 2020 Redland City local government elections be held on a postal vote only basis.
- Postal vote only elections are likely to benefit incumbent councillors so any decision by councillors to seek a postal vote only election begs the question: are they acting in the public interest or their personal interests?
- The Council's decision to request a postal vote only election was made without community consultation.
- We note that the Government has already expressed a preference for elections to take place at polling booths so far as this is practicable and we support this.
- We suggest that legislation on this matter should ensure that elections in major councils (like Redland City) are not held on a postal vote only basis unless there is clear evidence that a majority of the community support the change. A tick and flick council consultation exercise would not be sufficient to demonstrate clear evidence.

**Clarifying the mayor's powers of direction**

- We support the proposed changes to mayoral powers.
- Mayors should only be able to direct the Chief Executive Officer in accordance with Council written policies and directions and directions should be recorded in a form that is publicly available such as a register available on the council's website.
- The power of direction of senior executive staff should be exercised only by the Chief Executive Officer. Clarifying this separation of powers should result in an enhanced role for CEO's and improve the organisational culture within councils.
- We regularly hear that staff in Redland City Council feel intimidated by certain elected councillors.
- This is an important reform which should reduce the risk of incompetence and corruption in local government.

**Cap on amount of funds spent at councillors' discretion**

- We support this initiative.
- Ratepayers' funds should not be used on projects or activities which are designed by incumbent councillors to improve their re-election prospects.

**Conflicts of interest**

- We support the thrust of the government's reforms to requirements for dealing with conflicts of interest.
- We remain concerned that inappropriate behaviour may continue to occur in discussions by councillors outside the official minuted meetings which are regulated under the Local Government Act.
- In particular we note the potential for matters to be discussed inappropriately at unofficial meetings of councillors, 'workshops', in corridors and in lunchrooms.
- We think it very important that councillors be placed under a general obligation to avoid any participation in **any** discussion with other councillors (or officers) if they have a declarable conflict of interest.

**Chris Walker**  
**Secretary**  
**Redlands2030**