



c/o [REDACTED]

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Email: [secretary@seqalliance.org](mailto:secretary@seqalliance.org)Website: [www.seqalliance.org](http://www.seqalliance.org)*Advocating responsible planning and governance in Queensland*

19 March 2021

Committee Secretary  
Economics and Governance Committee  
Parliament House  
George Street  
Brisbane Qld 4000

Email: <mailto:egc@parliament.qld.gov.au>

Dear Committee Secretary

## **SEQ Community Alliance submission about the COVID-19 Emergency Response and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2021**

The SEQ Community Alliance Assoc Inc (SEQCA) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission about this bill.

SEQCA's membership includes various community associations in south east Queensland. Our members work collaboratively to advocate for improved planning and governance with a particular focus on local government in south east Queensland.

We understand the need for measures to ensure public safety due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

With regard to the specific measures incorporated in the COVID-19 Emergency Response and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2021 we offer the following brief comments.

### **Local governments may make 'extraordinary decisions' for the 2021-22 financial year**

We note that the Bill would give local councils the flexibility to amend rates and budgets outside of the statutory budget meetings in the 2021/22 financial year as well as the current financial year.

It would be helpful in trying to understand the need for this additional period of flexibility if the Government could provide some information about the extent to which any local councils have already made use of this additional flexibility or expressed any intention to do so.

When governments assume greater powers during periods of emergency this should be accompanied by offsetting measures to provide increased transparency. In this case, it would be appropriate if the Government were to report to Parliament about any instances where local councils have used these emergency provisions, perhaps in an end of financial year report to Parliament.

### **Local Government elections**

The proposal to provide for COVID-19 safe by-elections and fresh elections in local government is uncontroversial.

However, we note that during the 2020 local government elections, many concerns were raised about ECQ staff advising voters to “just vote 1” instead of properly explaining to voters that under the current Optional Preferential Voting system voters have the choice to vote for one, some or all candidates on the ballot paper.

We suggest that any regulations for holding COVID-19 safe local government elections include clear guidance to the ECQ that it should properly explain to voters how they can vote.

### **Extension of operation of COVID-related local government meeting provisions**

We understand that the COVID-19 pandemic requires that social distancing measures be implemented for local council meetings which are consistent with public health measures that are applied generally by the Government.

The regulations as currently worded appear to disconnect the operation of local council meetings from most other activities in the community.

People in Queensland are currently able to sit in a cinema, restaurant and sporting stadium but are precluded from attending the meetings of some local councils.

We suggest that the wording of regulations be amended to ensure that meetings are closed to the public only to the extent that this is consistent with prevailing public health directions.

We also note that where local council meetings are closed to the public for physical attendance, councils should be facilitating the live streaming of its meetings. We are aware of at least one council in south east Queensland (Redland City) which has not implemented live streaming of its meetings.

Yours sincerely



Chris Walker

President

SEQ Community Alliance