

**Address all communications to  
The Chief Executive Officer**

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8 May 2020

The Committee Secretary  
Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee  
Parliament House  
George Street  
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Committee Secretary

I refer to advice received by Council on 30 April 2020 that the Parliamentary Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee is undertaking an "Inquiry into the Electoral Commission of Queensland's online publication of the preliminary and formal counts of the votes cast in the 2020 quadrennial local government election and the Bundamba and Currumbin state by-elections held on 28 March 2020".

The Burdekin Shire Council notes the narrow scope of the terms of reference for the inquiry and limited time frame for submissions to be made. It would like to make a submission in relation to the aspects concerning the 2020 quadrennial local government elections. It does not have any comments to offer on other aspects relating to the state by-elections conducted at the same time.

The performance of the Electoral Commission of Queensland (ECQ) website was a major disappointment in terms of the publication of preliminary and formal counts of votes cast at the 2020 local government election in Burdekin Shire and more broadly across other local governments in Queensland.

It is noted that issues were encountered with the ECQ website on the night of the election on 28 March, with virtually no count information being posted until quite late in the evening. The lack of progress counts was particularly concerning in the context of the COVID-19 restrictions implemented, which did not allow candidates or scrutineers to be present during the preliminary counting of votes that evening.

In comparison with past local government elections the performance of the website in terms of providing up to date information on the progress of the count was considerably worse. In the context of the substantially increased cost for the conduct of the election in Burdekin Shire for the 2020 election, with an estimated fee of approximately \$125,000 advised by ECQ, which represented an increase of over 100% on the fee for the 2016 local government election, this is extremely disappointing.

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It is understood that ECQ developed a new website for the 2020 election due to the many new online processes that were introduced. The posting of details of the progress count for all areas would be regarded as a critical element of the operation of the website. It would therefore be expected that extensive testing of this aspect of the website was undertaken to ensure its capacity to handle the level of traffic that occurred.

Issues with the ability to access the website to obtain information were largely resolved post-election night. However, the lack of regular publication of progress counts to the website was a source of considerable frustration for the community and the candidates. It appears that regular updates were being provided by the local Returning Officer to ECQ but that this information was not being updated until some time later, leaving the community somewhat 'in the dark' in relation to the progress of the count.

This resulted in Council receiving a number of enquiries from the public about the counting of votes due to their inability to obtain up to date information on the progress of the count.

As counting progressed towards the end of the 10 day period allowed for postal votes to be included in the count, the Council had to initiate contact with the ECQ to understand when the count might be finalised in order to plan for the timing of its Post-Election meeting. Information on the declaration of the poll also had to be obtained verbally as the formal notices did not appear on the ECQ website until the following day.

The lack of proactive and regular communication by ECQ to councils on the issues being encountered and its processes for updating count information on the website was disappointing. Council had to resort to making direct contact with ECQ officials to obtain up to date information, which was readily provided when requested.

I hope these comments are of assistance with the Parliamentary Committee's inquiry into this issue. The poor performance of the ECQ website on election night and the slow processes associated with posting of progress count information did little to engender public confidence in the election process. This was amplified by COVID-19 restrictions on candidates and scrutineers being able to observe the processes.

Yours sincerely



Terry Brennan  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER