

# SUBMISSION TO Inquiry into the Electoral Commission of Queensland's online publication of preliminary and formal counts of the votes cast in the local government elections and state by-elections held on 28 March 2020

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Submissions should be sent to:

Email: [lacsc@parliament.qld.gov.au](mailto:lacsc@parliament.qld.gov.au)

Committee Secretary  
Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee Parliament House  
George Street  
Brisbane Qld 4000

From: -Peter Newey  
Townsville Residents and Ratepayers Association.

Dear Committee Secretary

The following is what we saw and experienced through the 4 weeks prior to and during the Local Government election in Townsville on the 28<sup>th</sup> April, 2020.

Brief points of note that need attention: -

1. There was really no allowance for scrutineering and in fact it did not occur on the day/night of the 28<sup>th</sup> March 2020.

2. Results were up on the ECQ web site when the count had not even been done for the site, so where did the results come from

3. The ECQ continually did not provide concise and precise direction as per the Local Government Act when it came to notifying our team regarding changes enacted because of the Covid-19 pandemic. As team manager I was not privy to directions and notifications sent from Brisbane ECQ headquarters and in fact the candidates knew before I ever found out.

4. No real consideration was given to the fear by the public regarding the pandemic, hence a higher than normally would be expected of people not voting at all. This screwed the results significantly and we believe that the election should have been cancelled.

5. While the Premier and Government ministers keep saying maintain social distancing and the use of hand sanitizer there was virtually no monitoring in the first number of days and no sanitizer available. Poor action undertaken by the ECQ overall.

6. The ECQ computer system in Brisbane as a failure, in fact coming from a technology background I could not believe the poor performance of the system. Postal and phone voting was pathetic and the voting process to Aged homes and the like was poor with people in these homes being told that did not need to vote.

7. The fact that each individual voter form was not numbered and in many cases there was not indication as to where it had come from made the voting process a fiasco.

8. The fact that the votes were made of different grading paper made us believe that the voting process had been interfered with and the fact there was no Scrutineering made for a complete lack of trust in the system.

9. The fact that Council employees were part of the ECQ make up and became involved in the Placing of the JH Team corflutes showed poor training and lack of control of the voting process.

10. Finally the overall performance of the ECQ was so pathetic that it resembled a third world country in operation, something that should be taken in consideration by this enquiry.

Data collected by our organization during the election.

OVERALL VIEW: -

So, what is your understanding of the democratic process in Queensland? Are you one of the many that just accept the fact that the system as presented to you at the last 2020 March 28th election is above reproach and should not be questioned.

Most people would say "Yes", and the government is looking after us so why would they be a problem.

To be frank, until this last election we at Townsville Residents and Ratepayers Association would have said the same thing, Tin Foil Hat an all.

To be frank this last election process run by the Electoral Commission of Queensland (ECQ) was in our opinion the most badly organized election process ever put in place over the last 50 years we can remember from the previous elections that have occurred in the State of Queensland.

In fact, we have said to other partner Local government ratepayers' organizations that the ECQ system in play during this election was operated in an incompetent manner or at worst that that, corruptly from the start. They, in fact, agreed with us en-mass. We do understand that the court of disputed returns will be very busy in April and May on.

We have never seen such a Hoch poach of a computer system that was offline more than online, a phone system that was clogged and the ability to gain information from the ECQ system over the election period in many cases was impossible. When finally calling the ECQ for information, it could be said that very few operators could answer questions asked or had the knowledge to supply the information you required. In fact, in many cases offered concretionary advice to what we were receiving from the Returning Officers.

Unlike Covid-19 situation where senior public Officers clarified information publicly the Electoral Commissioner, Pat Vidgen was absent during the whole process

One of the biggest issues the public could see if they took the time to view on the ECQ database that was open to the public was incorrect, in fact, much was totally incorrect when comparing local counts to that entered into the ECQ Computer system.

Yet this data was apparently directly entered in the ECQ database from the district electoral office. We could not understand how data entered then viewed at one stage said one thing but then when viewed later showed the count decreasing in numerical value not increasing? This was just one amazing instance we saw continually in the process.

While we realize that the People involved were doing the best, they could under the circumstances it would seem that the newly rewritten software and additions to the program just seemed to be faulty and inadequate and not user friendly.

While we do understand that people are happy with the count and the probable results if the Process of the elections was questionable than should not this process come under review as part of our democratic process?

## PART 2-THE SYSTEM

In this post, we will just cover some of the anomalies that were spotted by the various people involved in the election process. We do acknowledge that the COVID-19 was in play but how the ECQ handled this was deplorable and a story in itself.

What this election process did was to show us in-depth just what lengths the various organizations involved did or did not do and it is up to you to make up your own mind as to the validity of election processors and results. Bear in mind that very similar things were viewed across the State which makes us feel that it was organized rather than random occurrences.

### The ECQ system Itself

This itself deserves a full post by itself as we know by experience the State Government bureaucracies are just about useless at getting information from and we can assure that ECQ is no different. We have never had the misfortune to deal with such a poorly run bureaucratic system previously and this was not our first election by any means.

The Computer system was repeatedly "down", the Phone voting system was unreachable for voting and for information and when you finally did get to contact people at the ECQ itself it was not until you demanded to speak to upper management did you get someone who knew what they were talking about. Even then they practiced delay, deflect or deny tactics.

We like many have taken the process of voting as being secure and above reproach, but it would seem, that this may not be the case. We believe that you were crossed off the roll electronically (well we hope so otherwise there is a fine coming) but really all you received was a voter card or form with a squiggle on it to say that the attendant gave it to you.

Then you marked it and placed it in the ballot box. Did you see a printed number on the form to legalize the voter card? Err Well no, not sure. Most we have asked did not.

When you think about this part of the process, to us is a critical point as the ECQ or you should be able to actually track your name and card number to be sure you actually voted and that your completed voter card actually was counted in the election? Was yours counted? Most of us would not know. This leaves a very big security glitch in the system.

### The most important process in Count Scrutineering

The fact that the ECQ in many cases did not email or notify the Candidates or team management via ECQ email system regarding the changes to the voting process that they instigated while the election process was on. Like the change in the Scrutineering process at the close of the Election 6pm Saturday 28 Th.

In fact, for some reason that we are aware of the TSV NQSA group was not notified of changes and in fact, were seemed to be actively encouraged to ignore the process altogether.

Normally this process legitimizes the process of voting especially at the end of voting as a preliminary count of votes viewed by the Candidates representatives on the spot at the booth.

So what, you say well are you sure that your vote is among the rest of the people's votes at the School or location in the "sealed" ballot boxes and that they ( votes and boxes) actually reached the central ECQ counting location sealed? Alternatively, were they the actual boxes that left the

School or location not some other substitute boxes, we ask, as it seems that the system is well and truly open to exploitation.?

We have press releases by the ECQ after the end of voting saying that counting was going on till 11.45 PM Saturday night but there was no scrutineering encouraged or were this team notified? Several calls around 6.30 PM to the ECQ and the Local Counting center for confirmation only to be told it was underway?

In fact, we have knowledge that at the close of voting at a prime location, that counting did not start on these boxes until 5 hours later but for some inexplicable reason that within two hours results were up on the ECQ web site and the Hill team had greater than 50% of the vote?

A serious issue regarding pensioner voting in Aged homes has been reported to us as well where the ECQ representatives reportedly said to the Pensioners their vote was not required and was therefor not picked up. Do they get fined then? So much for the training of the ECQ r

This is just the start of what was in play which makes us all seem a little bit suspicious of the result as you would think by now the ECQ has had enough practice to get things operating very smoothly. It would seem not. We believe that the health emergency has activity highlighted what has been happening for years but has allowed us to see it in real-time for the first time.

### PART 3 HOW IT OPERATED ON THE DAY

What was interesting was the way the election progressed on the ground as we saw it. In the first two days at least which the State Government health Head and Premier were lording their handling of the Covita-19 epidemic the pre-polling procedure continued locally but there was no social distancing nor hand sanitizer available.

When approached the ECQ supervisors of the Booth said that they had done all they could and ordered sanitizer, but it had not arrived? It was also stated that it is up to the voters to practice social distancing even inside the Booth.

We would bet that the voters of the Townsville do not realize that many of the employed ECQ Supervisors and other staff are employed from the ranks of the Townsville City Council and before we all go of halfcocked, yes it is legal for them to work for the ECQ while on leave from the TCC but is it Ethical?

We would say not.

It is understandable that their bias will leak into the ECQ operations and we believe that this is not a great way to run an Election. It also reduces the trust in the results being above repute. We are also aware that some of the ECQ staff were or are discretely involved in the Hill team operations.

We are aware that the voting ballot paper was not the same across the election, in fact, it was different in texture (grade) suggesting that the paper was not the same across the total votes counted. What is also interesting is that the votes of different texture disappeared during the voting process suggesting to us that there was an inconsistency in the paper used by the printer of ballots or these textured votes were substitutes. Which is suspicious.

In the Postal voting scrutineering there were three distinct styles of writing on the votes counted suggesting that only three people filled out the postal votes en mass which also became evident in the numbering of the voting sequence. This also suggests that there is some hanky pranky going on there including false voting.

We can bet that many votes that should have been issued to nursing homes and the like did not arrive at their destination and we are also aware that some of the Aged home residents were told that they did not need to vote!

What was also noticed was that in the counting of the Postal votes and normal votes there was a mixture of Postal, normal and telephone votes in the same ballot box.

Just how did this occur one might ask.

Another definite issue that was spotted over and over again was the fact that the Count numbers at the Townsville "Joyce Mayne ECQ office" was different to the count of the Division when

compared to the Electronic count on the ECQ web site at virtually the same time? This data is entered into the ECQ computer system at Joyce Mayne so how could this occur?

We also noted that the counts per candidate seem to vary between the top three candidates in the division that we were monitoring. But the Total count did not vary at all.

One candidate count did not get changed at all. This occurred between Sunday the 29Th at 11.38 am to Monday the 31st March at 11.31 am.

We have also witnessed that ECQ staff were involved in removing JHT signs at the close of the count at 6.00 pm at a polling booth when it is expressly forbidden under ECQ rules.

We are also aware that Council employees in uniform were out placing JHT signs early on Saturday the 28TH at a location that was monitored by us, yet they seemed to be unaware of what they were doing was not really ethical.

What we have also heard and information forwarder to us that there were more votes counted than registered voters in certain Divisions. The approximate numbers at Palm Island 850 registered voters but 2300 votes counted, and Lockyer Valley some 26,000 registered voters and some 90,000 votes counted? We can all rest assured that the additional votes would have disappeared by now and the results rectified. We wonder if there were more instances that have not been reported.

After all, all is fair in the Queensland Council elections it would appear. After all of the elections, we have been involved in this one has definitely been the worst run of them all in over 40years with the largest number of discrepancies viewed by us. But you can bet the results will be the same and adopted by the Labor State Government after all the dust settles...But just who loses?

Regards

Peter Newey

Townsville Residents and Ratepayer association

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