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Re- Inquiry into the Electoral Commission of Queensland's (ECQ) online publication of preliminary and formal counts of the local government elections and state by-elections held on 28 March 2020.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to your Committee regarding the elections conducted by the ECQ on March 28th 2020.

May I commence by declaring that I am the husband of a Councillor in Redlands City that stood for re-election in this election. This submission is my personal view and written following my own experiences in the process.

Whilst I see the scope of your inquiry is quite specific and focusses on the publication of results, I am of the view that there were many factors that led to this poor reporting performance and indicated a level of mis-management by the ECQ. I recognise the unprecedented effects of the COVID 19 pandemic and this must be taken into consideration, however, this should have never affected the publication of results in a timely manner by a competent organisation that has led to your inquiry.

Ballot Draw-The ECQ's management of this election, in my view, first came into question when Candidates first submitted their How To Vote (HTV) Cards following the ballot draw for approval. Returning Officers (ROs) were confused by the rules regarding HTVs against Authorised Election Material (AEM). It was a number of days before a clear direction could be provided to Candidates that could be fully understood. This also was the beginning of a clear misunderstanding in the community regarding Optional Preferential Voting against Compulsory Preferential Voting as the Candidates started to distribute their HTVs or AEM that would last until well after the election.

Early Voting Centres (EVC) - The Commissioner in the lead up to Prepoll was given powers by the State Government to make directions regarding the election. EVCs were conducted for the first 2 days in a very confused way. The constant changing of directions from the Commissioner and the interpretations given by the RO ultimately led to a removal of Candidates from Polling Places.

In Redlands City on 17.3.20 the RO called, and then facilitated a meeting between candidates, or their delegates, to propose an agreement that conflicted the Commissioner's directions that were in

place at the time regarding manning of polling booths. This could be seen an overstep of authority by the RO.

During the EVC period on 21.3.20 the Redlands RO issued a directive that **no** signage was allowed at EVCs in direct conflict to the Commissioner's direction at the time. Once again, an apparent overstep of authority by the RO, or a lack of communication/management of their ROs by the ECQ.

The ECQ took control of the displaying of HTVs and election material on a static display at the EVCs. Their efforts were discouraging to say the least, with the display at Capalaba not in clear view of voters as they queued into the polling place.

Election Day- It was the afternoon of the 27th March before a direction was given regarding signage at polling booths giving little time for Candidates to make arrangements that would comply with the direction from the Commissioner. The timing of this direction shows that directions and rules were not being communicated in a systematic way to all stakeholders.

All these events in the lead up and form part of the reason for your inquiry and should be considered. They indicate that the ECQ were not managing the election as well as they possibly could have right from the start.

Election Night- This is my greatest concern regarding this election and it shows in the scope of your inquiry that the ECQ were not managing the election well.

Firstly, there were no scrutineers allowed in the room to observe the preliminary count. Scrutineers were only allowed to observe the opening of the ballot boxes and then were put outside of the room to only hear the results as determined by each Officer at the Polling Place. This brings into question the integrity and trust of the whole process.

Then, once it became clear that the ECQ did not have the ability to post results on-line as expected an email was received by candidates after 9.30pm that indicated scrutineers would be welcome to observe the count at the booths.

My personal experience is that I attended the booth closest to my home at 9.50 pm only to find it closed.

Post-election counting- Counting commenced for Redland City at the RO office in Cleveland. Once again, I understand the social distancing restrictions that were in place to combat COVID 19, however, there seemed little effort by the ECQ to manage the situation that would allow a transparent process that would give confidence to Candidates and the electorate at large. No alternate solutions were offered other than maintain social distancing. Only 1 scrutineer was aloud per Candidate despite that counting may be taking place in 3 different locations within the RO's office at the same time. It was impossible to observe each ballot paper being counted and this brings the whole process into a sceptical zone and question. It is well documented the untimely delays from the count actually being performed to when details were available on-line for public view was a normal occurrence.

After all of this occurred the ECQ website could not be called user friendly. It only gives a broad interpretation of results per each Division. There is no easy way for interested parties to breakdown the results for a Candidate per booth and then see the second distribution of preferences as they were only available as a background in a XML media feed file, They are not displayed on the ECQ website as it was previously available for easy consumption.

The ECQ website for most people hides the information that most interests them and is disappointing.

I wish the inquiry all the best and look forward to your reading about your findings.

Regards,

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