

Addressed To: Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee

Submission for "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"

Preamble: I wish to provide a submission with regards to the handling of the previous Local Government Elections, with specific mention to the events that occurred in Redland City from a perspective of our more isolated communities on the Southern Moreton Bay Islands (Macleay Island, Russell Island, Karragarra Island and Lamb Island).

Statement: During the election, the start of the Covid19 response caused great strain on Island residents' capacity to vote as the nearest early voting centre was a significant distance away on the mainland at Victoria Point, which even during a normal election cycle is a significant trip for island residents who constitute around 5,373 votes, or around half of the population of Division 5 in Redland City. And as island residents are required to pay to get to the mainland, as the ferry trips are only cost-free when travelling inter-island; this can also be an unwanted cost to islanders who are typically have a higher frequency of income stress.

Further, I know from speaking with many residents that a large number of community members on the island who are predominantly seniors, with the average age on an island resident being over 50, attempted to apply for postal votes or telephone voting. However, due to phone and internet connectivity blackspots on the islands, and the huge volume of people calling ECQ, many people were not able to successfully apply for postal votes; and many who did successfully apply, did not get their votes until after election day, or never received them at all.

I, and many other residents of the islands firmly believe that these logistical issues led to a lower turnout in the vote among the island community, and by extension Division 5. Because, when you look at the turnout figures for the Redland City Divisions, all other division had a turnout of between 80-85%, however Division 5, which contains all of the four islands, and sections of Redland Bay, had a turnout of 73.72%. A significantly lower turnout than other Divisions, and a nearly 10% drop in turnout from the 82.9% turnout in 2016's Local Government Election.

Recommendation: Consideration needs to be made around accessibility of voting for remote and regional communities such as the Southern Moreton Bay Islands (SMBI), as many people who want to vote were unable to do so, as connectivity issues in these regions were amplified during the Covid19 Crisis, and strategies need to be put in place so that these communities do not face low voter turnout risks in future elections, either during a crisis or not.

Some Recommendations to reduce this risk.

1. Default Postal Voting for Island Communities.
2. Pre-Poll-Centre on a SMBI island- As even during normal election cycles many cannot vote on Saturday polling day and the trip to early voting centres on the mainland can be challenging or expensive for many voters.
3. Better staffing arrangement at ECQ call centres- to cater for any increased volumes of calls.
4. Hiring of some Full Time Electoral Commission Staff.

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