

Local Government (Empowering Councils) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Submission No: 015

Submission By: Flinders Shire Council

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1. Empower Mayors with Executive Authority:

- Direct Engagement with Executive Staff:

- Grant mayors the authority to direct executive staff, including the CEO and directors, to improve the flow of information and execution of council strategies, alleviating the burden on the CEO as the sole conduit between elected members and staff.

- Allow mayors to participate actively in the recruitment process of key executive positions to ensure alignment with council's goals and regional priorities.

- Improved Communication and Decision-Making:

- Facilitate direct dialogue between mayors and appointed directors, minimizing double handling and streamlining the implementation of council directives at the department level.

- Provide regional mayors the freedom to engage and direct executive actions, thereby reducing unnecessary bureaucratic layers that can impede responsiveness and efficiency in council operations.

2. Provide Advisory Support to Regional Councils:

- Appointment of Political Advisors:

- Allow regional councils to appoint advisors specifically tasked with supporting the political alignment and strategic output of council activities. This role would focus on ensuring that operations align with political and strategic objectives, which may not be the inherent function of existing staff.

3. Streamlining Bi-Election Requirements:

- Option to Forego Bi-Elections:

- Permit regional councils the option to forgo a bi-election if only one councillor vacates their position mid-term. Regional councils, often dealing with smaller populations, are capable of managing representation until the subsequent general election.

- Cost-Effective Bi-Elections:

- Develop measures to limit the financial impact of bi-elections on small communities by exploring cost-effective alternatives that maintain democratic representation without imposing undue financial burden on regional councils.

Justification:

Regional councils often operate with limited resources and face unique challenges such as a heavier workload and lack of advisory support. By enabling mayors to take a more active role in directing executive staff and appointing advisors focused on political and strategic alignment, councils can improve their governance and operational efficiency. Additionally, providing options to reduce the cost and frequency of bi-elections ensures that council operations remain both financially sustainable and democratically representative.

Conclusion:

These proposed reforms aim to empower local governance in regional areas, enhancing the ability of councils to serve their communities efficiently and effectively. By implementing these changes, we can ensure regional councils remain adaptive, responsive, and aligned with the needs and aspirations of the areas they serve.