

Sippy Downs and District Community Association Inc

Developing a sustainable future

ABN 74 762 958 117

PO Box 7002, Sippy Downs, 4556 www.sippydownscommunity.com

secretary@sippydownscommunity.com

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The Chairman
Law, Justice and Safety Committee
Queensland Parliament
ljsc@parliament.qld.gov.au

SUBMISSION ON THE INQUIRY INTO A NEW LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTORAL ACT: REVIEW OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTORAL SYSTEM (EXCLUDING BCC)

The Sippy Downs and District Community Association (SDDCA) represents the community of Sippy Downs on the Sunshine Coast. Our mission is for the Sippy Downs area to provide an optimum lifestyle for those who live and work here and to create a community that is socially and environmentally friendly and sustainable. The SDDCA liaises on behalf of the community with all levels of government and other key stakeholders. This submission is made on behalf of the SDDCA by its executive.

Electoral divisions

The SDDCA supports the continuation of the divisional system. In a council as geographically large and diverse as the Sunshine Coast, we receive better representation through a local divisional councillor who is directly involved in community issues. Those issues vary widely across the Sunshine Coast.

Candidates

Candidates for local government should be resident in the council area (although not necessarily within the division they represent). Candidates should also be able to nominate for both the position of councillor and mayor; we believe that would encourage more candidates to nominate for mayor, giving voters greater choice. We do not support the selection of mayor by councillors instead of by public election, as we believe residents are entitled to have a say in who leads the council.

Funding and disclosures

The SDDCA believes disclosure of campaign funding must be mandatory for all donations over \$1,000. Candidates should be required to disclose significant donations before and during campaigns as well as providing a complete disclosure of all funding after the campaign. This would reveal to voters which candidates may be

backed by particular interest groups such as the development industry, which have a strong vested interest in council decisions.

Electoral signage and advertising

The imposition of a 'media blackout' is no longer appropriate now that there are so many electronic alternatives to mainstream radio and TV (Twitter, Facebook etc).

Voting

The SDDCA supports the availability of postal, pre-poll and absentee voting (within the local government area) for local government elections on the same basis as state and federal elections.

Property franchise

The SDDCA strongly opposes the extension of eligibility to vote in local government elections to non-resident property owners. We believe it is inappropriate for those who can afford and choose to own investment property, to be given the right to vote in more than one local government election – whether multiple divisions within one council, or in different councils. The justification for this suggestion would support giving Rupert Murdoch 20 votes in every state election in Australia because of his investment in this country.

While non-resident owners and investors certainly have a financial stake in the area in which they own property, including being subject to council rates and decisions, their interests may be very different to those of residents. In a rapidly growing region like the Sunshine Coast, investment interests may directly conflict with those of existing residents – for example, the nature and rate of new development.

The SDDCA believes that the role of local government is to provide the best level of service possible to those who live in the community. The amenity and lifestyle of an area are arguably influenced most by the decisions made at the local government area. Non-residents may well give less priority to services and facilities provided by local government that determine amenity and lifestyle than do residents, as they are not using those services.

To allow non-resident owners to vote in multiple council elections would deny the principle of 'one person, one vote' and potentially lead to councils being controlled by business interests instead of the community.

Murray Lyons, President
SDDCA
Tel: 0417 198 887