

SUBMISSION TO THE LAW, JUSTICE AND SAFETY COMMITTEE**Inquiry into A NEW LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTORAL ACT: REVIEW OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTORAL SYSTEM (EXCLUDING BCC)**

Ken Garner

Nominations and candidature requirements

The current deposit of \$150 allows a 'speculative' candidate an opportunity to nominate. Proposal Perhaps the introduction of a higher deposit, say, \$500 or even \$1000 would differentiate between those who are committed and those who are hopeful of a 'lucky break'.

Possible alternative to handing out of How-to-Vote Cards on Election Day

With increasing concern for the environment, it would be well to consider the considerable waste that is generated each election day through the dissemination of How-to-Vote Cards by the candidates. It is reasonable to have some voters expect some direction as to how to vote, particularly if they have an allegiance to a candidate or a group, and wish to align their preference to such a particular persuasion.

Proposal A how-to-vote card be prepared by each candidate who wishes to indicate a particular direction of voting by voters. The candidates' names could be tabulated and preference(s) nominated in boxes beside each candidate's name and be of a nominated font and size. These cards could then be placed/attached in each voting screen or be made available to each voter where requested. Supervision of the polling booth by staff would include the condition of screens from time to time (as is now conducted), but including presence and condition of How-to-Vote card sheets.

Charts of How-to-Vote cards are already used for display for voters at Declared Institutions, so there is already a precedent set.

Postal voting, Pre-polling and Absent voting

There already exist a number of reasons why voters can now pre-poll either by postal vote or in person pre-polling in the two week period leading up to the election. It could be argued that many of those who now use postal votes or pre-poll, have no legitimate reason to postal vote or pre-poll, other than the convenience offered.

Proposal Postal voting and pre-polling should be made freely available to all voters who wish to avail themselves of this facility. Also, voters should no longer need to make a declaration (currently, sometimes untruthful) and this would have the advantage of simplifying the process and also have a cost saving advantage. Encouragement to postal vote or pre-poll would also reduce the 'pressure' on election day for both voters and election officials.

The current Act requires applications for postal votes received by 6.00 pm on the Thursday prior to election day to be posted a ballot paper. With a population that is more

'mobile', ballot papers may be requested from many interstate or even international locations. Any application received by 6.00 pm on the Thursday must be processed and ballot papers posted out. In many rural areas the 'mail closes/is cleared at 5.00 pm' and so ballot papers posted after 5.00 pm on a Thursday will not be cleared until 5.00 pm on the Friday. Obviously, they will not be delivered by 6.00 pm on the Saturday of election day, which is the cut off for completing the ballot paper. Late receipts only encourage voters to be dishonest and pre-date a declaration envelope to the Saturday date.

The situation with late postal votes could be further exacerbated if Australia Post were to pursue their proposal to "introduce non home delivery of mail, with collection points being set up". This would worsen the situation of late receipt of ballot papers.

Proposal Close off of applications for postal votes could be Monday prior to the election day at 6.00 pm.

If absentee voting was introduced for voters outside their own council area, this could be a difficult exercise. In the last Local Government election there were situations where there were large numbers of candidates for councilor, particularly in undivided councils. For Gympie Regional Council there were 41 nominations for the 8 positions. To carry "All District Packs" for mayor and councilors, plus all the separate ballot papers for divisions within councils, would amount to a huge logistical exercise with an additional heavy cost. As the local government councils are required to pay for their election, in addition to the cost of the exercise, the proportioning of costs would also be a difficult exercise. It is doubtful if the exercise of absentee voting would be worth the costs introduced.

Changes should be balanced with the need to offer every encouragement to vote.

Electoral Visits

The method for Electoral Visits could be modified. Currently the procedure requires a polling official to deliver the ballot paper and wait for it to be filled in, and then have the voter return it to the polling official.

Proposal Perhaps an option could be to deliver the ballot paper and, either await the vote, or offer the convenience/opportunity of a reply paid envelope to return a 'declared vote'. This would remove the pressure from the voter to have to immediately fill in their ballot paper.

As voters have to apply for an Electoral Visit in the same way as applying for a Postal Vote, perhaps the whole question of the need for Electoral Visits should be reviewed as this is an expensive exercise, and can be quite confronting for the voter. Also, it could be argued that this method of voting is open to 'abuse' i.e. some voters are capable of postal voting, and indeed, attendance voting.

Electoral Advertising

Proposal Electoral advertising could be restricted to newspaper advertising, letter box drops, letters, leaflets etc., but the displaying of external signs attached to trees, signs, in private front yards etc. could be prohibited. The practice of displaying external signs is distracting to motorists. As an individual, I find such advertising counterproductive.

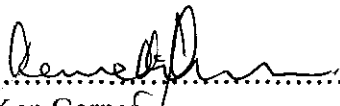
No advertising should be placed at polling booths i.e. core flutes, bunting etc. No How-to-Vote cards should be handed out at polling booths. Voters should not have to 'walk the gauntlet' when they go to vote.

Conclusion

In making this submission, I should point out that I have acted as the Returning Officer for the electorate of Gympie in the 2006 and 2009 State Elections, and as Returning Officer for the Gympie Regional Council for the 2008 Local Government Election. Whilst drawing on experience gained whilst acting in this capacity, I offer this submission as an interested private individual. My submission is therefore restricted to the actual 'mechanics' of the election process.

I can be contacted at the above address or on the given phone numbers, should any further explanation be required.

For convenience, I have also forwarded this submission by email to ljsc@parliament.qld.gov.au


.....
Ken Garner