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Law, Justice and Safety  
Committee

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Submission 075

30 July 2010

The Chair  
Law, Justice & Safety Committee

Re: Review of the Local Government System (Excluding BCC)

**By: Glenda Mather – Rockhampton Regional Councillor**

**Preamble:**

My 18 ½ years in Local Government, gives me sufficient experience to voice personal opinion as to what works best in this area t

Taking into account the 79 rural communities, and large tracks of rural land which envelop Rockhampton City itself, the region has its own characteristics which must be considered according to their geographical locations, and our physical ability to service them.

I first represented a large rural area under divisions within a growing coastal shire. Under EARC, the shire's divisions were abolished, and I then worked for several terms with one external boundary (12 clrs + Mayor).

At amalgamation Rockhampton Regional Councillors chose 10 divisions, which are working well.

The varied experience I gained under *both* Councils, and *both* systems, gives me confidence to relay what I know to be true.

**Electoral Divisions**

- 1) I believe the current divisional arrangement for our Council is working well
- 2) The 10% margin appears sufficient
- 3) Individual Councils **must** have the ability to decide whether they are divided or undivided – they know how to best service their areas. Rural areas feel they have lost their identities if the LG is undivided, as they have no one-personal representative to understand and pursue their needs.

**It is fact** that in an undivided Council, representatives do spend most of their time in the populated areas, because that's where the votes come from – their own admission.

## Conduct of Elections

- 1) Due to the wide mix of populated areas, numerous townships and isolated rural areas, history has shown that the 2008 LG Elections which were conducted by the Commission, had many difficulties, because it was unfamiliar with the areas.

For these reasons, **our election should be conducted by the Council itself** to overcome the problems of the past. Council knows how to best-serve its residents during elections.

- 2) **The rolls should be closed no closer than 3 months prior to election**, giving all persons ample opportunity to either enroll or change address. This eliminates confusion and disappointment on election day if a name is missing from the roll, and persons are denied their right to vote.
- 3) **The timing of elections should remain March/April as in the past.**  
The public is familiar with these arrangements - unlike State and Federal elections which are called at different times, depending on the flavor of the political field.
- 4) I prefer 3 year terms because Councillors tend to become complacent with 4.  
The demands of the job do cause fatigue and often ill-health, resulting in resignations. By-elections are costly to a Council.

## Candidature

### Nomination:

- 1) The nomination process **appears to be working well**, so no change is necessary.
- 2) The current system enables a variety of candidates, **as long as the divisions remain**. If this region were to resort to one open boundary, it would resemble a federal electorate, which would be very costly to campaign, and impossible to physically meet the people from all areas. The campaign costs for those less financial would prevent them from becoming a candidate. Only the wealthy could afford to run

### Residency

- 1) A candidate should definitely be required to live in the area he/she represents. It demonstrates loyalty to that area, and *remain* in that area for the full term.

### Dual Candidacy

- 1) **No to dual candidacy**. It's having two bites of the cherry, and would cause much confusion for the electors. They are confused enough with the state and federal systems.- This would cause an increase in Informal votes. .

### Mayoral Election

- 1) Mayors should be appointed by the people on a separate ballot paper.

The Mayor should be answerable to the people, not the councillors. If the councillors so chose, the Mayor may lose his position with a simple resolution, and any number of persons may be appointed from the table during a term. **If a Mayor was appointed by the table, this would encourage “TEAMS” or PARTY POLITICAL BLOCKS which would monopolize and corrupt the Democratic system.** (I have witnessed this to the extent the opinions of other competent councillors were ignored).

### Campaign Funding & Disclosures

- 1) It is suggested all fundraising over a dollar value (eg in excess of \$100) should be declared along with the donor / organizer.
- 2) It would serve no purpose to have donation disclosures before AND after the election, as anyone wishing to suppress information prior to the election, could simply delay the disclosure.
- 3) Full disclosure of donations and donors within a 3-month period should be sufficient.
- 4) ALL candidates should comply.
- 5) Rules should be standardized across the state, not selected by individual councils.

### Electoral Signage

1. How-to-Vote cards should DEFINITELY be free from promotional content. A face of the candidate is sufficient, even helpful, to associate the how-to-vote recommendation with the candidate. No Political Party ID should be included.

**This would be especially helpful if there were 2 candidates with the same, or similar name.**

2. It *would be helpful* to the voters to have the H-to-V cards standardized.
3. I have always advocated that a H-to-V card for each candidate should be displayed in each polling booth. That's why a photograph on the card would be helpful in cases of same /similar-name candidates.
4. When voters are “harassed” at the entrance to a polling station, they often take a sample of each card offered, irrespective of their choice, so there is no offence. Having the card sample in the booths, along with faces, would simplify their choice, producing less Informal votes.
5. Signage at the polling station should be allowed for each candidate, but restrictions on size, and number of displays..

6. There is no need to standardize the placement of signage across the electorate, as each one is different, and opportunities are often restricted due to geographical, or populated reasons.
7. There should definitely be a blackout 48 hours prior to election, on all electronic outlets – TV and radio. The public has regularly displayed its displeasure of having to “cop it” right up to election day. They need a breather. Printed material is ok, the voter can choose to read or discard.

### **Voting**

- 1) Compulsory voting should remain, although many would argue against this. History has shown that good men and women lost their lives trying to be heard through the ballot box. We must never lose that fact.

If we allow the complacent people to dictate a trend of apathy, allowing this right to be undermined, we have failed in our duty to respect our freedom to steer our country / communities through our elected representatives.

A growing number of electors have lost confidence in their political leaders, at all levels, and they have good reasons to, but we must not let apathy undermine the sacrifices made to ensure an informed society.

All politicians should be reminded of this, and made to lift their game to reverse the apathy.

- 2) Voting rights should be restricted to those electors living in the electorate in which they reside
- 3) Multiple property owners in various electorates should NOT be allowed multiple votes. They should decide which one takes priority for their influence.
- 4) The allocation of multiple votes has the potential to create corruption.

### **Voting System**

- 1) First-past-the-post voting should be used in both divided and undivided local governments.
- 2) This is the clearest indication the public needs to indicate that the candidate with the most votes is the democratic winner.

### **In conclusion**

I trust these comments, which are based on wide, and first-hand experience, assist your determinations.

Yours faithfully, Glenda Mather.