



Submission 100

Blair Meldrum

23 July 2010

The Research Director  
Law, Justice and Safety Committee  
Parliament House  
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Sir/Madam

**A NEW LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTORAL ACT:  
REVIEW OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTORAL SYSTEM**

As an individual, I wish to make a submission on the Issues Paper dated June 2010 in respect of the above.

Utilising the headings in your Issues Paper, I comment as follows:

**Divisions**

I believe that the Divided Councils concept is by far the most satisfactory from both a candidates and an electors aspect. Following the amalgamation of Councils, which resulted in Councils covering much larger geographical areas, it is important that the area be divided into individual divisions represented by a local representative who better understands the requirements of his/her specific division, is involved in their local issues and who better represent their interests.

In the interests of consistency and better management under the Local Government Act, it is believed that all Councils should follow the same system in order to save confusion to electors upon movement from one Council area to another.

**Conduct of elections**

*Administration of elections*

Even noting the recommendation by Mr Andy Becker that the ECQ should continue to conduct the quadrennial elections for local governments to ensure "absolute impartiality and integrity", there is no reason in my mind why the local government CEO could not be entrusted as the Chief Returning Officer. His impartiality and integrity should not be questioned, for in effect he operates at arms-length from the elected council representatives and would have no reason to act otherwise.

### *Timing of the elections and closing of the electoral roll*

The timing of every four years on the last Saturday in March should be retained, with the present time for the close of the rolls and the date of the elections appropriate.

### **Candidates – requirements and conduct**

#### *Nominations and candidature requirements*

##### *Mayors*

The nomination process needs to be amended to enable candidates to nominate for both the position of mayor and councillor in order that experienced candidates are not lost to the system in the event they are not elected as mayor. However, I do not support candidates standing for more than one division, rather they should give electors confidence in whom they are voting for as their local divisional representative.

Additionally, there is no reason why a candidate could not live in another division provided it is in the same local government area. Living in another local government area is not acceptable though, for if the candidate is committed to his local government area/division then he should be prepared to reside in that area. Should they change local government areas within the first three years of their term then they should resign and allow a by-election to take place.

Public election of mayors is vital to allow electors the right to make their own choice, rather than have councillors decide upon a person who might not be acceptable to the electors. They stand for and are therefore elected as mayor on their own ability as displayed to the electorate, not through possible “favours” to elected councillors.

#### *Campaign funding and disclosures*

Disclosure should be mandatory by candidates before and during campaigns as well as during the term of their term as a councillor. This would then reveal to electors any involvement by particular interest groups at any time. The amount could be increased to \$1,500.00/\$2,000.00

### **Electoral signage and advertising material**

The standardisation of how-to-vote cards, free from promotional content, would ensure consistency, and on that basis could be provided in all polling booths and postal vote packs. Allowing bunting and such material favours those candidates with “open” budgets and disadvantages those with limited funding, so it should be disallowed, rather restricted to limited signage of say 15 signs in total per candidate.

In this electronic age, “media blackout” serves little purpose and could safely be dispensed with.

## **Voting**

### *Compulsory voting*

Voting should remain compulsory to ensure a guarantee of a high percentage of votes. Allowing voters to choose whether or not they vote reduces the percentage of votes, and whilst could be considered more democratic does not give a true indication of overall voter choice.

### *Postal voting, pre-polling and absent voting*

The availability of postal, pre-polling and absent voting should be available for all voters. Not knowing the impact on the overall management of allowing voting on a local government area as opposed to a division, similar with state as opposed to local government area, then I do not feel qualified to comment on this aspect.

### *Property franchise*

This is a most interesting area of debate that becomes more and more complicated the more you think upon it, but it is my opinion that the right to vote in a particular local government area should be restricted to residing electors only. Non-resident Australian electors have the ability to vote in the local government area in which they permanently reside, so opening the voting system up to a "property ownership" basis would grant them a double or more vote. This could well influence an election in a particular local government area, especially the likes of the Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast where a number of properties were purchased for investment purposes only and the owner has limited or little interest in local affairs.

Additionally, some investment properties could be occupied by other family members.

This should also apply to overseas investors and multiple persons ownership and commercial/business owners. Allowing "non-resident" voting could well see councils controlled by outside interest to the detriment of local, "live in the area" residents.

## **Voting systems**

### *Optional Preferential voting*

### *First-Past-The-Post voting*

### *Proportional Representation voting systems*

Again, another interesting area of debate. However, even though I favour the STV system under the Proportional Representation voting system, it is my belief that the Optional Preferential voting system is the best for local government elections. This favours the most preferred candidate, the person who should be elected.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this Issues Paper.

Yours sincerely,

