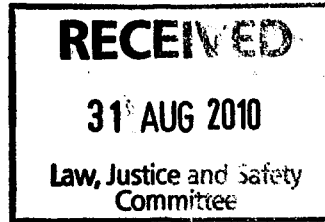




Submission 142



Cr Lorraine Pyefinch

30 August 2010

Ms Barbara Stone MP
Chair
Law, Justice & Safety Committee
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Dear Ms Stone

In response to the inquiry regarding local government electoral arrangements I would like to submit the following personal opinions.

1. Are the procedures for the division of councils adequate?

My experience is that the Divisional boundaries are often illogical where local "communities of interest" issues are ignored.

There has been a lack of consultation regarding the boundaries and the inability to vote in the closest booth if it wasn't your division caused considerable negative feedback at the last election.

We heard of elderly voters who had voted at the nearby school for the last 30 years being turned away because the school was not in their division. They were told to go to a booth over 25 kilometres away.

2. If the procedures for the division of councils are not adequate, what changes are required?

There was little consultation with Local Government regarding the conduct of elections by the QEC and unfortunately their lack of local knowledge impacted on the procedures for divisions and the conduct of the election processes.

3. Are the error margins of 10% in local government areas with more than 10,000 electors and 20% in all other cases sufficient?

These provisions are inadequate in areas with a very high population growth and as the QEC did not consult with Local Government about boundaries, they lack local knowledge about potential for growth and trends.

Decisions about Boundaries were poorly advertised and did not give the community enough notice – especially if they could not use their closest booth to vote.

More flexibility is needed.

4. Should the mix of divided and undivided councils remain? If so, should the decision to divide a local government area remain with individual councils?

According to a survey conducted by Bundaberg Regional Council in August 2010, the community is divided about this issue. Of those surveyed 52% wanted to retain Divisions while 48% wanted an undivided Council.

In my opinion, some Councillors to be more interested in their own Divisional area rather than make strategic decisions that are to the benefit of the Council as a whole.

5. Are there other matters the Committee should consider in regard to local government divisions?

No

6. Should the Electoral Commission of Queensland be responsible for the administration of the quadrennial local government elections or should this responsibility remain with Council CEOs?

Councils should have the right to make the decision whether they run the elections themselves or whether they contract out the task (perhaps to the ECQ).

Larger councils and local CEOs have better capacity to run a more efficient and cost effective election than the ECQ.

What happens if there is the need for a bi-election mid term? If ECQ runs elections then over time Councils will lose the experience and knowledge to run an election.

If ECQ runs the quadrennial elections then they should be better organized, better resourced and should involve the Local Government about the location of booths and conduct of the election. ECQ should be better resourced to deliver a timely election count. More consideration should be given to providing a better hand-over to CEOs who will need to complete the process (i.e. Declarations of political donation returns etc).

Information available to the public – via website and 1300# - should be of a higher quality and be provided earlier.

- 7. If the ECQ is to be responsible for local government elections should the new Act allow more flexibility in regard to the conduct of the quadrennial elections than the current Act does? If so, how?**

I do not know what you mean by this question.

- 8. Is the time for the close of the rolls and the date of the elections appropriate?**

Two months before voting day is reasonable.

- 9. What changes, if any, should be made to the timing of local government elections?**

Fixed four years terms with a March anniversary.

- 10. Is the nomination process adequate? Why?**

The ECQ process was disorganized and poorly resourced.

- 11. Does the current system encourage a diverse range of candidates to stand?**

No – the threshold for tax deductible electoral expenses is a barrier to potential candidates. It should be the same as for State and Federal politicians.

12. Should a candidate be required to live in the local government area in which they stand for election?

Yes

13. Should a Councillor be required to live in the local government area for their whole four year term?

Yes

14. Should a person be able to stand as a dual candidate for both mayor and Councillor?

No

15. Should the new Act allow Mayors to be appointed by their fellow Councillors?

No

16. Are the requirements for disclosure of campaign funding sufficient?

Yes

17. Should candidates make disclosures before, progressively during, and after an election period?

Progressively with a final return after the election period

18. Should all disclosure requirements, such as values, disclosure periods and who must comply, be standardised?

Yes but should be more aligned with State Government requirements

19. Should particular fundraising activities for local government elections be prohibited?

I am not sure what you mean?

20. Should how-to-vote cards be free from promotional content?

"How-to-vote" cards should be banned.

21. Should how-to-vote cards be standard for all candidates? If so, should these be provided in all polling booths and postal vote packs by the Electoral Commission of Queensland?

“How-to-vote” cards should be banned.

22. What promotional material, such as bunting (continuous signage) and coreflutes, should be allowed during the campaign period and at polling booths on Election Day?

No Bunting or Continuous Signage. There should be a standardized local law to address the issue of coreflutes.

23. Should the placement and amount of election campaign material be standard across all local government areas?

Yes

24. Should a ‘media blackout’ period apply for local government elections? Why? For how long?

Even if paid advertising is banned, will there be a blackout on editorial as well?

25. Should voting remain compulsory for local government elections in Queensland?

Yes.

26. Should the option of a postal vote be extended to all voters in every area?

Yes – this reduces the cost of holding elections. But Australia Post no longer puts a date stamp on letters – how will postal votes be validated?

27. Should a full postal ballot be automatic for some local government areas? If so, why and for which areas?

Councils should have the option of choosing a full postal vote within their own shire.

28. Should the criteria for pre-polling and postal voting be abolished?

Yes.

29. Does the restriction on voters to attend only polling booths in a division in which they are enrolled adversely affect voters? If this were altered what impact would that have on the administration of the elections in that local government?

People should be able to vote in any Division within the Shire

30. Should the new Act allow absent voting? If so, should this be restricted to absent voting within a local government area only?

No

31. Should the right to vote in Queensland local government elections be extended to non-resident property owners within an area? If so, should this apply to overseas investors?

No

32. Should voting rights be extended to non-resident occupiers (e.g. commercial lessees such as business owners who lease premises within an area but live outside of it)?

No

33. Should multiple persons be able to claim non-resident voter eligibility for one property (e.g. two or more non-resident owners or lessees of a property)?

No

34. Should people, based on the number of properties they own, be entitled to more than one vote per division?

No

35. Who should be responsible for the creation, verification and maintenance of a non-residents' electoral roll?

No comment

36. Which voting system is most appropriate for local government elections – Optional Preferential voting, Compulsory Preferential voting, First-Past-The-Post or Proportional Representation? Why?

There needs to be some flexibility but Optional or Compulsory Preferential voting is probably more suited to Divided Councils whereas First Past the Post is better for Undivided Councils

Proportional Voting would encourage Politically Aligned Councils which are not wanted by our community.

37. Would different voting systems work better for different sized local governments? Why?

Geographical issues – eg Councils with a large footprint – may benefit from a Divisional System where it is assured that they would have a local representative on Council.

38. Should Proportional Representation be introduced for Queensland local government elections?

If so, why and

- a) **which model/s should be implemented?**
- b) **how would this be implemented in divided and undivided councils?**
- c) **should it apply for all councils? If no, which councils should proportional representation apply to?**

No - Most Queensland Councils are not divided along political party lines and this style of representation is not popular in regional Queensland.

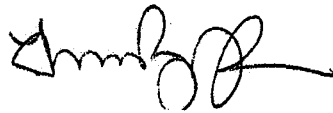
39. What other issues should the Committee consider in relation to this inquiry?

- General Comments about the lack of resources at the last election and the poor execution of the nomination; voting and counting responsibilities.
- Returning officers were not provided with essential equipment and resources in a timely manner meaning that they were often not ready when the nomination period began.
- The lack of consultation between the ECQ and Local Governments meant that there was little understanding of what was required for the election and no appreciation of how diverse council areas were. (Running out of ballot papers in booths that were known by Local Government to be big, was a typical comment)
- Restriction of only being about to vote at a booth in your Division caused considerable confusion and a backlash from the community on polling day.

- The Post Office no longer puts a date stamp on envelopes they process so this means that in future, postal votes will be impossible to validate that they were posted prior to voting day.
- Councils should have the flexibility of choosing a system and election process that best suits their individual need and situation. The issue of Divisions and question of who runs the election should be determined by the individual council.

Once again, I would like to note that these opinions and comments are based on my own personal beliefs and experience. This is not the formal adopted position of the elected members of Bundaberg Regional Council.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lorraine Pyefinch', written in a cursive style.

Cr Lorraine Pyefinch
Mayor - Bundaberg Regional Council