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LEGAL CONSTITUTIONAL AND
ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW
COMMITTEE

The Research Director
Legal Constitutional and Administrative review Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

Dear Sir/Ms,

**Re: *Voices and Votes*: A Parliamentary Committee Inquiry into Young People's
Engagement in Democracy in Queensland**

I would like to respond to the *Voices and Votes* discussion paper particularly in regard to
Point 1: Education/Information and the role of the Electoral Commission Queensland
(ECQ).

I was appointed ECQ's first and only Education Officer in early 1993 as a member of
ECQ's foundation Research and Education Division. As part of my role and
responsibilities, I managed ECQ's education program under the supervision of the
Research and Education Director until my position and the Division itself were abolished
in 1996. I stayed with ECQ for another two years trying to singularly maintain the output
of my old Division but minus the education program.

In 1998 I moved to the Department of Education and the Arts to introduce the
Discovering Democracy teacher development program into Queensland schools.

The position of ECQ Education Officer was a recommendation of the EARC Report into
the Queensland Legislative Assembly Voting System, a recommendation similar in
design and purpose to the position of Education Officer for the Queensland Parliament.

Following that EARC Report, S 8 1 (d) of the *Electoral Act 1992* charged ECQ as one of
its core functions to "promote public awareness of electoral matters by conducting
education and information programs and in other ways". It is clear from the EARC
discussion papers and reports that education and information were seen as related but
separate functions: the first focused on continuous electoral awareness programs for
teachers and students; while the latter focused on one-off advertising and awareness
campaigns for the general public usually conducted at the time of an electoral event.

The 1996 abolition of the position of Education Officer was used as the reason to
restructure ECQ by further abolishing the entire Research and Education Division. This
was done despite a Treasury review at the time documenting the many achievements and
successes of that Division.

Unfortunately, the plain English of the *Electoral Act 1992* was not sufficient protection
for ECQ to view education as a core function. In contrast, the Commission scaled down
its education program almost completely, relying instead on its advertising campaigns
conducted at election time to arguably satisfy the dual requirements of S 8 1 (d) of the
Act.

The total cost for the ECQ education program including the Education Officer's time plus the cost to produce and distribute the education materials was less than \$30,000 per year. The 1996 decision to abolish the Education Officer position was not based on cost alone or indeed based on cost at all.

The decision to abolish the education function was not based on quality either. ECQ's education programs were well regarded by all stakeholders and were highly successful (see ECQ Annual Reports 1993-1996; and Treasury Review of Electoral Program 1996).

It is ironic for the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee of the Queensland Parliament to now call for a re-strengthening of ECQ's role in this area, when ECQ itself has deliberately narrowed its purview to the more comfortable and familiar administrative responsibilities of conducting electoral events.

To address the needs and concerns raised by *Voices and Votes*, ECQ would be well advised to revisit the successes of its earlier education programs. Focus then was primarily on teacher professional development and materials development.

ECQ previously delivered more than 6 teacher professional development workshops per year for up to 100 teachers (pre service and in service) which were generally delivered in partnership with the Education Office of the Queensland Parliament.

ECQ previously contributed expertise to a number of education events such as the Queensland Schools Constitutional Conventions. As Education Officer, I developed the voting system, forms and procedures for these Queensland wide events designed to send up to 20 Queensland student delegates to Canberra to discuss constitutional issues of importance for young people. Queensland is the only state to offer an electoral model, all other states selecting their delegates by a teachers' panel.

While ECQ has largely abdicated from this area, the school constitutional conventions continue and I am invited back every year by Education Queensland, AISQ and OCBC to voluntarily conduct their student elections at the Brisbane Schools Constitutional Conventions.

Major ECQ education publications for teachers and students (1993 to 1996) included:

- *Elections Queensland*: an A5 booklet introduction to Queensland elections written for grades 8-10 but also used in upper Primary. Included the innovative OPV Tally Card and was distributed as class sets to Queensland schools. Highly successful with several reprints
- *Queensland Schools Election Kit* (how to run your class, grade or school election using OPV) complete with instructions, ballot papers, tally sheets and metal ballot box
- *A History of Queensland Elections*. This was the only complete record of Queensland electoral events. A valued resource for teachers
- *ECQ Electoral Fast Facts*. An extensive series of factsheets on electoral issues

- *Votewise Electoral Literacy Survey* of students and other client groups
- Contributions to *Parliamentary Educational CD ROMS* and *Videos*
- *Election Guides* with sufficient breadth to be used as education resources
- Training videos with sufficient breadth to serve also as education resources

ECQ education publications were widely acknowledged as some of the best in Australia and indeed some of the best world-wide. Unfortunately no new education publications have been produced by ECQ since 1996. Similarly the research output has plummeted from Australian best practice to the current more limited offerings.

It is a back-handed compliment to see that ECQ is still reproducing and repeating the templates if not the general text of its early 1990s research and corporate publications for its current output. On the other hand it is an indictment that ECQ lacks the expertise to properly maintain its publication output let alone produce anything significantly different.

Similarly, ECQ still uses a small proportion of its old education materials as its main information resources on the ECQ website, while almost nothing new has been produced over the last ten years. Sadly, important publications such as *Queensland's Electoral History* appear to have disappeared entirely.

I hope the Committee will recommend that ECQ abandon its long standing obfuscation and conform more closely to its responsibilities under the *Electoral Act 1992*, its own Charter and Corporate Goals. As such, ECQ should reintroduce an electoral education program that will effectively support the democratic culture of this state, especially as it applies to young people. Appropriately designed an electoral education program can be cost effective and highly successful. Reliance on one-off advertising campaigns is no longer good enough, if indeed it ever was.

As designer of ECQ's initial education program, author of the great majority of ECQ's education publications, materials and resources, as well as foundation Queensland *Discovering Democracy* Coordinator, I have a wealth of expertise in civics and citizenship education for young people, especially in electoral education. Please don't hesitate to contact me if I can be of any assistance to the Committee.

Yours faithfully,

Murray Campbell