

Local Government Electoral and Other Legislation (Expenditure Caps) Amendment Bill 2022

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Submitted by: Redlands2030 Inc.
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Committee Secretary
State Development and Regional Industries Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

Email: SDRIC@parliament.qld.gov.au

Redlands2030 submission on Local Government Electoral and Other Legislation (Expenditure Caps) Amendment Bill 2022

Redlands2030 Inc. is an incorporated not-for-profit association advocating good governance and community participation in government decisions, about matters and issues affecting the Redlands.

Redlands2030 welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Committee about this proposed legislation.

We have reviewed the proposed legislation and support its objectives of improving the opportunity for equitable participation in local government elections.

Election spending caps for Redlands

Approximately 118,000 people will be enrolled to vote at the March 2024 local government elections in Redlands.

For a mayoral race with less than 150,000 enrolled voters the proposed expenditure cap will be one dollar per elector. So the cap for any Redlands mayoral campaign will be about \$118,000.

As Redlands currently has ten single councillor divisions, the number of enrolled voters for each division will average 11,800 with a maximum variation of +/- 10%. The proposed laws say that the expenditure cap for any division with less than 20,000 electors will be \$15,000.

Redlands local council campaign spending

Major areas of expenditure on election campaigning in Redland City Council elections include flyers, corflutes, newspaper advertisements, social media advertising, how to vote cards and tee shirts for campaign team members. There could be office accommodation and general administrative costs.

Occasionally large advertising signs and billboards may be used in mayoral election campaigns.

Redland City does not have a television station of its own. Advertising on Brisbane metropolitan television stations is not cost effective for candidates in Redland City Council elections.

The story is similar for radio except that Redlands has a community radio station which accepts 'sponsorship'.

Expenditure during previous election campaigns in Redlands

For the 2012 Redlands mayoral election, Karen Williams disclosed that she received a total of \$138,372.80 in political donations. There were 93,402 enrolled voters for this election so if the proposed new laws had been applying, the maximum amount that could have been spent on this election by a mayoral candidate would have been \$93,410.

In her 2016 campaign for re-election, Karen Williams disclosed that she had received donations of \$81,605.65. There were 103,783 enrolled voters for this election so if the proposed laws had been in place at this time the spending limit would have been above the amount that Williams received in donations.

The report by the Economics and Governance Committee in 2020¹ noted that during the 2020 mayoral campaign, Karen Williams spent \$71,108 on electoral expenditure. If the proposed laws had been in place at this time the spending limit would have been above the amount that Williams spent on her campaign. But it is important to note that the 2020 elections took place in the midst of community panic about COVID 19 and this may have constrained campaign activities and expenditure.

There may have been a few instances in the past three local government elections where a small number of candidates have spent more than the proposed cap of \$15,000 for divisional councillor elections. However, these instances are likely to be exceptions rather than the norm for Redlands.

Reporting on electoral expenditure

We would like to see some definitive reporting by the Electoral Commission of Queensland (ECQ) of total amounts spent by each candidate for each election. This information should be published on the ECQ website after the period for submission of information to ECQ has closed and ECQ has had time to review the returns submitted by candidates and other election participants. We suggest that this work should be concluded no later than six months after the election date. An unambiguous requirement for this report to be published by ECQ should be included in the legislation. The reporting arrangements should include third parties, groups and organisations to acknowledge the power and influence these participants can exert.

Steve MacDonald

President

Redlands2030 Inc.

20 January 2023

¹ Inquiry into the feasibility of introducing expenditure caps for Queensland local government elections, Report No. 47, 56th Parliament, Economics and Governance Committee, Queensland Parliament, September 2020