



Our Ref: HPW [SystemRefNo]

Department of
Housing and Public Works

Committee Secretary
Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000
lacsc@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into the "*Electoral Commission of Queensland's (ECQ) online publication of preliminary and formal counts of the votes cast in the local government elections and state by-elections held on 28 March 2020*".

The project that produced the system to support the election has had a difficult few years. This submission seeks to provide some perspective on this, as well as what happened on the 28 March Election Night and what is likely to happen in the future.

The selection of the Konnech product, under the previous ECQ Commissioner (the Project's Senior Responsible Officer), resulted in numerous key issues that the Electoral Gateway Project (EGP) board had to resolve.

Key issues included:

- massively underestimating the scope of the product changes during the procurement exercise needed to satisfy Queensland's requirements
- underestimating the significant skills and capacity uplift required of the ECQ team to support the necessary code development velocity to deliver the extensive changes to the procured product
- an inadequate assessment of the maturity of the supplier during the procurement process to deliver such an extensive code development.

When the ECQ Commissioner stepped down in February 2018, the project had a considerable number of open "high" and "extreme" risks that were inadequately mitigated.

At this time the project was significantly challenged and lacked adequate governance capability to recover the project.

In May 2018 a new board structure was established with expert external-to-agency and external-to-government representation. From this point, the project:

- was well governed with regular assurance
- was consistent with Government policy
- had expert representation from the Department of Housing and Public Works and Queensland Treasury.

By February 2019 following guidance from the EPG board the project was able to provide a clear understanding of ECQ's functional requirements and the approach to progress towards achieving this functionality. Though the project still had a range of historic and new issues, these were under active and effective management, with the committed engagement from the new Electoral Commissioner and the ECQ leadership team.

Whilst the board continued to remain concerned with the velocity of code delivery in March 2019, a potentially significant and unknown change of scope, resulting from amendments to the *Electoral Act 1992 Act* became the most significant threat to project success.

In March 2019, following an independent project health check, and in response to the fixed election time frames and legislative scope uncertainty, the project was directed by the EGP board to ensure all resources were focused on delivery of the Minimum Viable Product (MVP) required for the March 2020 Local Government elections.

The Change to Legislation (CTL) scope amendments were partially clarified in June with project rescoping workshops undertaken in June/July 2019. Some requirements with a direct impact on the March election remained unclear until the legislation was passed in October 2019.

In August 2019, the EGP board directed the project to commence reporting a more granular code development status for each module of MVP functionality. This was based on testing of fortnightly code drops.

Despite these interventions, the tight timeframe and the impact of the CTL amendments meant that the project status remained Amber, but the EGP board confirmed that they believed an operational Electoral Management System could be delivered for March 2020.

From August 2019, the ECQ Director, Change and Wellbeing also attended EGP board meetings to provide assurance to the EGP board that robust business readiness and contingency planning were being developed and could be implemented if required.

The delivery of the project was further impacted in the final development and bug fixing stages during January and February 2020, as most of the coding resources were based in Wuhan China and were negatively impacted by the COVID-19 lock-down.

Despite all these issues and complexities, the MVP capability for the local elections was delivered for final acceptance testing by March 2020. This success resulted from:

- strong ECQ executive leadership
- dedicated hard work from the project team, the supplier and ECQ staff
- extensive governance oversight
- considerable back-up planning for every aspect of the system.

During the final acceptance (stress and penetration) testing undertaken by ECQ on the weekend of 21st March 2020, it became apparent that the results website functionality delivered by the supplier had unacceptable issues in security and load capacity. ECQ chose to implement the alternative backup solution designed and built as a contingency mechanism. This contingency website was successfully hardened, and security tested by the 26th March.

The new Electoral Management Solution and the ECQ website performed well during pre-polling.

The contingency results website went live as planned on election day. During the evening of Saturday 28th March, the overall process of posting results to the website was delayed by data quality issues related to the collection and manual data entry by Returning Officers.

ECQ had implemented a workflow for result accuracy which included ECQ personnel and machine-based data integrity and sense testing. Nevertheless, this process was susceptible to mis-keying and miscellaneous character input. Through tracing, ECQ identified the root of the problem and tightened the manual quality control processes on Election night and was able to present the available preliminary counts on the ECQ website by 11pm that evening.

There was no suggestion that the count data was incorrect and in fact it was verified twice before being uploaded. The sole issue was the upload process.

On Sunday 29 the ECQ Commissioner requested an urgent assurance review of the stability of the system and processes from the Department of Housing and Public Works. This review:

- assessed whether the system should be used for the remainder of the election period
- confirmed that the sole issue had been poorly formed data which had been rectified successfully.

I have offered staff from the Customer and Digital of HPW to provide an additional level of assurance through the technical working group to advise the EGP board and provide it with confidence that the Electoral Management System, the ECQ website and reliant media websites will function as required and will not delay or negatively impact the State Elections in October 2020.

Should you require additional detail on the contents of this submission please contact me on [REDACTED] or email [REDACTED].

Yours sincerely



Chris Fechner

Queensland Chief Customer and Digital Officer