

BREWARRINA SHIRE COUNCIL



All communications to be addressed to the General Manager

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OUR REF:
YOUR REF:

Thursday, 27 June 2019

Ms Sarah Blackwell
Director Local Government
IPART
P.O Box K35
Haymarket Post Office
NSW 1240

Dear Sarah,

Re; Review of Costs of Conducting Local Government Elections

I write to express concern with respect to the release of the recent report concerning the cost of conducting Local Government Elections and in particular the failure of the review to address the significant impact on rural and remote Councils.

Whilst the laws which govern the running of elections do not vary across the State, the size, number of electors and remote location are significantly different. In the past Local Government Elections were conducted by the General Manager and Council staff. In a small community the Council is usually either the largest employer or one of the largest employers and securing staff is a never ending problem. Having the election run by the General Manager and staff was practical, cost effective and efficient.

However, the Government identified potential issues with this arrangement; which had operated for over 100 years or more; and decided to appoint someone other than the General Manager as the returning officer and for elections to be run by the State Electoral Commissioner.(SEC)

Naturally, the immediate impact of this decision was to substantially increase the cost of running elections and to add another level of staffing and management in the process that is both costly and cumbersome for small rural and remote Council's such as Brewarrina.

At the last bi-election the SEC was unable to secure any local person to be the returning officer and had difficulties securing staff to run the polling booths on polling day. This is no reflection on the Electoral Office, it's simply a reality check for Government Agencies, there is not a readily available pool of people to provide this service.

The appointed Electoral Officer for Brewarrina lives in Cobar, three to four hours' drive from Brewarrina. Therefore, despite the fact that the election was being run by the SEC my staff were involved in all stages of the election, answering daily inquiries, handing out nomination forms, receiving nomination papers, sorting advertising, receiving and storing electoral material, organising the polling place and working on polling day.

**THE BREWARRINA SHIRE IS SITUATED IN THE LIVING OUTBACK OF NEW SOUTH WALES
WITHIN THE MURRAY DARLING BASIN, ON AUSTRALIA'S LONGEST RIVER SYSTEM.**

At the election there were 947 people enrolled to vote and 620 votes recorded. There were three voting centres spread over 200klms, 83 votes were taken by pre-poll in the days leading up to the election and the largest polling booth was the Brewarrina Visitor Information centre, with 375 votes taken for the day. My administrative staff were responsible for the pre-poll voting centre under 'supervision' from the remote Electoral Officer.

The chances of any potential savings from competition is absurd, to say the least and the SEC charged Council \$27,555 plus an additional \$1,087 for advertising to run the 2017 bi-election. Your analysis suggests that the cost of the election would increase by \$12,500 or 72%, this is absurd.


There is also a concern that the analysis includes shifting the responsibility and cost for the governance structure imposed on Local Government by legislative change to Local Government.

Councils can and have managed elections for over 100 years or more without the involvement of the SEC and the modelling fails to consider the theoretical cost, if Councils were allowed to undertake the election process in their own right, without any involvement of the SEC, as they have done so in the past.

The modelling also assumes that all Councils will share the cost of administration etc on a per capital or other basis. However, assuming that the larger metropolitan and city Council's choose to outsource the election to others, there is no suggestion that as a consequence, the SEC will reduce staff and administrative overheads. In a commercial reality, if the majority of Council's chose to outsource the entire running of the next election would there be any savings to the State Government in running and operating the SEC?

This Council has no choice but to use the SEC and should not have to pay more than it would have to run the election if it were run in-house. How the SEC manages the logistics of recruiting and employing staff in a remote community; appointing a returning officer remote from Council in compliance with the legislation imposed on Local Government; and managing an election process, once again imposed on Local government, are not relevant to the equitable determination or allocation of costs.

Yours Faithfully



Jeff Sowiak
General Manager