



**PORT STEPHENS**  
COUNCIL

Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal

Email [ipart@ipart.nsw.gov.au](mailto:ipart@ipart.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Sir/Madam

**Re: Review of local government election costs**

Reference is made to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal's (IPART) draft report dated June 2019 - Review of local government election costs.

Port Stephens Council (Council) welcomes the review into the local government election costs. Council generally supports recommendations made in the draft report, with some concern in relation to the predicted increase in costs, a cost to be borne by the ratepayers.

For some time, Council has had concerns with the increasing costs associated with local government elections and the efficiency of service delivery by those conducting elections on behalf of Council.

In the past, Council has explored alternatives such as outsourcing the election (to a private provider), and requested that the Local Government (General) Regulation 2005 (Regulation) be amended to allow councils to conduct their elections by universal postal voting. Council had no success in having the Regulation amended to include universal postal voting for all councils.

Council is of the view that the major expense incurred when conducting an election relates to staff wages. This could be significantly reduced if the postal voting method was adopted, along with savings from a reduction in venue hire costs for polling places. The costs surrounding pre-poll voting would also be removed as pre-polling would not be required under the postal vote method. The draft report does not appear to examine the universal postal voting method in any great detail.

Council has engaged both the NSW Electoral Commission (NSWEC) and the private provider, Australian Election Company for past elections. It is pleasing to see that IPART is examining the options for service delivery and have identified opportunities to introduce performance measures. There is no doubt there are efficiencies to be achieved in the manner in which elections are conducted, and there is currently little incentive to ensure efficiencies are identified and achieved by some providers.

Council does not support the idea that a general manager of a council should be responsible for producing a valid election result, regardless of who conducts the election. Council does not believe that this concept is in play at any other level of government, and the current model provides options for councils to consider and/or address any perceived conflict of interests when making decisions on how the election is to be conducted in their communities. A model where the general manager is responsible for producing a valid election result, regardless of who conducts the election, would not allow for this level of flexibility.

Council has a level of concern with the idea of introducing an independent regulatory oversight body. If this can be achieved without additional costs being borne by councils, then Council may be more inclined to support this recommendation.

Overall, Council is concerned with any substantial cost increase that may be seen as cost shifting when the NSWEC is already providing a number of these services for the State election. Serious consideration needs to be given to any overheads and executive staff costs being allocated to local government.

Yours sincerely,



**Tony Wickham**  
**Governance Section Manager**

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Telephone enquiries  
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