

18th July 2019

To: IPART Tribunal Members
Dr Paul Paterson, Chair
Mr Ed Willett
Ms Deborah Cope

Re: IPART Review of local government election costs Response to Draft Report

Dear Mr Paterson, Mr. Willett, Ms Cope,

I would like to thank you, on behalf of Scytl Australia Pty. Ltd., for the opportunity to comment on the “Draft report (of the) Review of local government election costs”. Scytl is a provider of election modernisation technology across the world, and the provider of the software for the iVote core voting system for the NSW Electoral Commission.

In this submission, we will provide a short introduction to Scytl, some reasons to support the use of iVote for Local Government Elections (LGEs), recommendations and conclude with how this links into the Draft report.

About Scytl

Scytl is a global leader in secure election modernisation solutions. Scytl has worked in the area of secure electronic voting since before 2000 and has delivered electronic voting projects across the world – from Canada, to the United States, Norway, Switzerland, Australia and others.

In Australia and New Zealand, Scytl has successfully delivered electronic voting projects in:

- NSW – the iVote®¹ project – still the world’s largest state government online voting event
- Victoria – Secure electronic voting for the visually impaired
- Western Australia – the project
- Auckland Council kids voting election (a trial)

Scytl sees secure electronic voting, and specifically secure internet voting, as a means to collect those votes that are otherwise “hard to get”, those with accessibility issues, and an ideal substitute for declining postal voting services.

Reasons to use iVote

- **Voter satisfaction very high with iVote**

Satisfaction levels are reported by the NSW Electoral Commission following an election. The following results were published in a report by the Ipsos Social Research Institute, in their report “New South Wales State General Election Research: Prepared for the NSW Electoral Commission (June 2015):

Notably satisfaction was highest among iVote users, with 97% satisfied by the service. The next most satisfied were postal voters at 95%, and voters who

¹ iVote® is a registered trademark of the NSW Electoral Commission

attended a pre-poll in-person at 93%. Among those who voted in-person on election day 87% were satisfied.

In general voter satisfaction with voting services is quite high, and the most impressive results are reserved for the cohort of voters using the iVote system operated by the NSW Electoral Commission.

- **The decline of the postal service**

Universal Postal Voting (UPV) is planned to be introduced for LGEs. By the time this is in place, there is a risk that the postal system, its costs and availability, will be different than current modelling allows for. The Australia Post website shows that postal fees for a large letter from Sydney (2000) to Wagga Wagga are estimated to take 3-4 days and cost \$2.00². Postal votes generally require postage to the voter and in return, doubling the per voter cost for the standard mail effort. This is a substantial change in timing to postal services roughly 4 years ago.

The impact of the changes in service provision from Australia Post have been discussed in electoral circles for some time. According to the "Report on the ACT Legislative Assembly Election 2016":

560 (80%) of the 701 postal votes that were rejected because they were received too late were postal votes sent to and received from an address overseas³.

Whilst the overall successful postal return rate was much higher than the example above, it does show the increasing challenge of receiving votes from overseas. As time moves on, and postal services evolve, the risk increases that delivery times will extend within Australia, increasing the risk that a voters correctly filled out ballot will be rejected due to late return.

Online voting, such as supported by the iVote system, is an ideal solution to the challenges faced in running elections requiring postal services. The security model of online voting has direct parallels with postal voting – it has a comparable risk model and adds the benefit of the capability for a voter to verify their vote.

The NSW Government has investigated the security of the iVote system in the Wilkens report⁴ to Parliament resulting in security feature updates and continued use by the NSW Government.

- **Accessibility**

The use of iVote supports accessibility features giving visually impaired voters, and other voters who can't access a polling booth, the ability to cast their vote securely and in private. ScytI received an Innovative Practice Award by the Zero Project⁵ for Its Support of Independent Living and Political Participation. The Zero Project is a joint initiative of the EsSl Foundation, the World Future Council and the European Foundation Centre, that promotes the rights of persons with disabilities and also has the support of organizations such as the United Nations, IFES and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

Costs of elections

In putting together this submission, ScytI has not looked in detail at the costs relating to the running of an election by the NSW Electoral Commission or other service providers, as that is a matter for them. There are two points that ScytI can comment on related to the costs of running elections using the iVote system.

² <https://auspost.com.au/parcels-mail/calculate-postage-delivery-times> in July 2019

³ https://www.elections.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/1044016/Report-on-the-ACT-Legislative-Assembly-Election-2016.pdf p38.

⁴ <https://www.elections.nsw.gov.au/About-us/Reports/Commissioned-reports/Reports-on-the-iVote-system>

⁵ <https://zeroproject.org/practice/pr191431aus-factsheet/>

- **Existing investment – it's there to be used**

The NSW Electoral Commission has invested significant time as well as human and financial resource in implementing the iVote system. This was done initially to support the collection of votes from the visually impaired and the system has gone on to show benefit to travelers and others with difficult to collect votes.

1. Scytl has invested significant research and development in order to be able to securely collect votes from voters and support strong electoral processes. This system is now in place and the online voting software component can be readily used for the collection of ballots for an LGE.
2. Due to the levels of investment made to implement the system, and in order to manage costs for the running of an LGE, Scytl can see potential for the iVote system to be made available to all voters at an LGE regardless of election service provider. Running multiple online voting platforms for an LGE would lead to increased overall costs related to collecting electronic votes.

Recommendations

Scytl recommends that the IPART Tribunal:

- Look to allow the use of iVote for the upcoming Local General Elections as an alternative to postal votes, by requesting appropriate legislative change from the NSW Government.
- Make the iVote system available for use to all electors, possibly through the NSWEC making the service available to alternate election service providers

Conclusion

The level of services provided to the community on-line is extraordinary. Councils themselves take their payments electronically, increasingly communicate to their residents via online means, and promote their services via the internet.

Young people are growing up in a world that is always on, always connected. They are used to sitting exams and tests online, banking online, being paid online, finding they landed a job online. This is to the extent that a number of them may not even think of checking their letterbox⁶.

Online voting, when used by a large number of voters, has potential to impact the cost profile of delivering elections for councils through the removal of alternate costs such as remote polling stations and costs related to postal ballots.

Yours Sincerely,

Lachlan (Sam) Campbell

Director, Scytl Australia Pty. Ltd.

Please do not hesitate to contact myself on any of the matters raised in this submission.

⁶ <https://www.crikey.com.au/2017/08/11/if-we-have-to-vote-on-marriage-equality-cant-we-do-it-electronically/>