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## **NORTH & WEST MELBOURNE ASSOCIATION INC.**

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For those who live or work in North or West Melbourne

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### SUBMISSION TO THE STATE GOVERNMENT OF VICTORIA REVIEW OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1989 AND THE CITY OF MELBOURNE ACT 2001 BY THE NORTH AND WEST MELBOURNE ASSOCIATION INC.

The North and West Melbourne Association (NWMA) is a well-established community organization that has represented the interests of residents and small businesses from this area for many years. At its regular monthly meeting held on Tuesday 15 December 2015, Bill Cook and Kevin Chamberlin were authorized to lodge a submission to this review.

We welcome the opportunity to make a submission and be part of the process that will improve the system of local government in Victoria and particularly, the City of Melbourne, where we believe the standard of governance, decision-making and transparency has declined to an alarmingly low level.

The NWMA believes that in order to improve the standard of government at the City of Melbourne and the reputation of Victorian local government, in general, the following should occur:

- The recommendations of the Petro Georgiou Report should be considered in this review. While many of them are important, the Association does not necessarily endorse them all and would like the opportunity to discuss in detail the relevance of these recommendations to the Review.
- The NWMA considers that the deeming provision in the City of Melbourne Act should be eliminated completely as it is undemocratic and open to abuse. It is not possible to check with ASIC any signatures on ballot paper envelopes as ASIC does not have them in their system and hence, it is impossible to audit the signatures and guarantee the overall election result. We understand from ASIC that they have never been approached to check any signatures or other details.

- The company vote should be reduced to one vote per company – a basic premise of democratic process – one vote, one value.
- That wards should be re-introduced to re-establish the all-important local link between community and their council. In the case of our current council, a candidate is required to stand for council in an electorate that is greater in size than a federal electorate and three times the size of a State lower house electorate. This situation, along with the fact that over 60% of voters do not have a mailing address within the municipality, has led to the need for well-financed campaigns and promoted the development of the alarming developer/vested interests donation relationship with candidates. Ward boundaries should be reviewed every four years just prior to the election.
- In respect to the election of Lord Mayor and Deputy, the collegiate system should apply. The current situation has led many elected councillors having little or no history in, or knowledge of the municipality. Further, an unfortunate outcome of the current system is that many good, but unsuccessful lord mayoral candidates cannot serve on the Council as councillors.
- All candidates for election should be required to have been enrolled for at least two years. This is to avoid the situation where virtually unknown candidates are elected because they are on a well-financed ticket. However, when conflict of interest and quorum issues inevitably arise, they have been and will continue to be, well publicized in the media.
- Above the line voting and registered tickets should be eliminated from the voting papers. The preference system should be optional where the voter should only be required to number up to the number of positions to be filled, in order to cast a valid vote. Preferencing beyond this point should be optional.
- Exclusive postal voting should be abolished. The normal State and Federal process should be installed where attendance and postal voting is allowed. This is the only system that ensures the integrity of the voting system.
- That no candidate or supporter be allowed to correspond with the voter. The only mechanism should be the booklet provided by the Council in its formal communication with the voter. This will avoid the need for substantial donations to campaigns to finance numerous mail-outs.
- All donations of over \$500 should be declared on a State Government-controlled website within 24 hours of receipt. It has been alleged that sitting Councillors are currently in the process of organizing funds for the next Council election. The above 24 hour rule should apply in these circumstances as well.

- Voter eligibility should be confined to one owner and one rate- paying tenant per property, and all residents who are on the State roll.
  
- The role of the councillor be clarified and defined. The current situation is confused because of poorly-framed and confusing pecuniary interest legislation and the massive confusion that has arisen because of the Winky Pop decision. The community has a right to know :
  - of any conflicts of interest involving any councillor and a decision,
  - what their councillor stands for and
  - their likely voting intention.

By any measure, voter satisfaction with the City of Melbourne's performance has declined in recent years and this is the result of a flawed Council electoral system. We believe that this voter dissatisfaction is now affecting election results at other levels of government, particularly at State level where the City of Melbourne is the only municipality underlying the State seat of Melbourne.

The NWMA strongly supports action to address its concerns with the performance of the City of Melbourne. Members would welcome the opportunity to discuss and expand further on any of the issues raised in the above.



Bill Cook  
Committee Member

Kevin Chamberlin  
Chairperson

18 December 2015