

Submission to Review of the Local Government Act 1989

From Cr Coral Ross

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I make the following comments regarding Chapter 3 of the discussion paper.

My concerns are about the prevalence of dummy candidates in Council elections. I am an elected councillor – I have been elected four times. I have been told numerous times that I am silly for not having “running mates” and I would have to say that a large number of councillors are elected as a result of “dummies” or “running-mates”.

Running mates are used for two purposes. Firstly, to direct preferences to the candidate and secondly to be elected when the candidate resigns.

With regards to the first purpose; running mates do not campaign, they just rely on the information sent by the VEC, which is paid by Councils. The “dummy” is deliberately chosen to appeal to different segments of the community and their voter information sent by the VEC. The information sent by the VEC also contains their “how to vote card” i.e. who people should vote for. I have seen the words of a Liberal running mate appearing to be more green than the Green candidate.

There are also instances of a successful candidate resigns during the course of the Council term to allow their “running mate” to be elected in their place. This happens in multi-member wards when the vacancy is filled by the count-back method.

A simple solution would be not to include a “How to Vote” card or preferences on the VEC election material, which is paid for by the Council. This would not prevent anyone from standing. But it would deter people from standing just to direct preferences to another candidate. If no preferences are given then obviously they cannot direct people how to vote after the voter has voted for them.

My comments relate purely to the election material sent by the VEC. There is nothing to stop a candidate from sending voters “How to Vote” cards or distributing them at polling stations – as happens in both Federal and State elections. Serious candidates send election information to residents and they can obviously send their “How to Vote” card.

With regards to some of the other issues:

- I do believe more information should be given to voters about candidates – and would support the recommendations of the Petro Review.
- I prefer postal elections as attendance voting can disadvantage independent candidates.
- Candidates should be Australian citizens
- Business tenants should not receive a vote – the vote should be those on the State/Federal roll plus those who own property.
- The Mayor should be elected by fellow councillors
- I do not support political donations.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Coral Ross".

Coral Ross