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To:

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[Consultation, LG](#)

Subject:

Feedback on Election Bill/Feedback on General and Meeting Regs.

Date:

Sunday, 6 April 2025 8:15:11 PM

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Hi OLG,

I have a few personal comments on the two discussion papers above outside of our Council submission.

I acknowledge these are late and may not be considered.

I would prefer this remains confidential in its entirety.

Thank you for the opportunity to reply and for your time.

Kind regards,

Rachel Summers

## **Local Government General and Meeting Regulations Discussion Paper**

### **PART C: PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (GENERAL) REGULATIONS 2015**

#### **Updated councillor allowances**

Councillors currently exist in an odd limbo when it comes to employment status. We're not employees of Council—after all, we employ the General Manager, who then employs the staff. This setup means we're excluded from entitlements typically afforded to employees, such as superannuation, workers compensation, and in some cases, access to the Employee Assistance Program. Councillors are also not subject to things like mandatory drug testing.

However, for tax purposes, the ATO treats us as employees. That contradiction needs to be addressed. There should be clarity—either we're employees or we're not. One possible solution is for Councillors to be classified as employees of the State Service, which would allow us to access some of the benefits and protections afforded to other public servants. Ideally, this could also open the door to the State Government taking on responsibility for payment of councillor allowances.

If we want to attract a more professional and diverse group of representatives to local government, we need to offer something comparable to what people might expect in other

sectors. Right now, we're mostly attracting retirees or those with a very specific agenda—because they're the only ones who can afford to do it.

### **Other ideas for Local Government General and Meeting Regulations:**

Consider removing the option for Councillors to abstain from voting. In practice, I've seen this used too often as a way to avoid weighing in on controversial matters—or, frankly, because the Councillor hasn't read the agenda or annexures. One Councillor abstained 21 times over four years.

We are elected to make decisions. It's our responsibility to ensure we are informed enough to cast a vote. An abstention is, functionally, a "no" vote, and should simply be recorded as such. If you're unwilling or unprepared to vote, perhaps you're in the wrong seat.

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### **Local Government Electoral Bill Discussion Paper**

**5. Increase the number of elector signatures required to support a notice of nomination to the lesser of 30 or one per cent of the number of electors in the municipal area.**

This is a reasonable idea—it shows that a candidate has at least some base level of support. However, I would suggest increasing the requirement to 2%. In the case of Flinders Municipality, that would be approximately 14 people.

Additionally, individuals should only be allowed to support *one* nomination. Signing up for multiple candidates doesn't demonstrate meaningful endorsement—it just muddies the process.

**10. Provide that all intending candidates (other than incumbent councillors) must complete a prescribed program of pre-nomination training prior to their submission of a notice of nomination.**

This is a great initiative. The training (or information session) should be accessible both in-person and online to ensure inclusivity and ease of access.

New candidates will benefit from a clearer understanding of the responsibilities, opportunities, and limitations of the role. It's important they enter the process informed, not just enthusiastic.

For the first election following the introduction of this new requirement, incumbent Councillors should also be required to complete the training. This will ensure a level playing field and a shared foundation of knowledge among all those elected.

#### **Other ideas for Election Bill:**

There needs to be a better process for dealing with Councillor vacancies when only one or two candidates come forward. We recently saw a Councillor elected unopposed with only 17 first preference votes out of 702. That is not reflective of genuine community support. Perhaps a threshold could be introduced—either a minimum number of first preference votes, or a minimum number of candidates (e.g., a by-election only occurs if there are at least three). Otherwise, we risk ending up with representation that doesn't reflect the will of the community.

As it currently stands, it's entirely possible for someone to receive one vote—and still end up as a Councillor.