



MELBOURNE SOUTH YARRA RESIDENTS GROUP INC.

Established by the residents of South Yarra in 1969

SUBMISSION TO STATE GOVERNMENT VICTORIA PROPOSED CHANGES TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ELECTORAL) REGULATIONS 2016 BY THE MELBOURNE SOUTH YARRA RESIDENTS GROUP INC

Candidates Information for Voters – City of Melbourne

As we have stated in our initial submission in December last year relating to changes to the City of Melbourne Act and Local Government Act and in all subsequent correspondence, the law regulating council elections in the City of Melbourne is grossly deficient in many ways but in particular encourages corrupt behaviour by making it necessary for candidates to raise large sums of money in order to stand for election. One of the proposed changes to the electoral regulations will make the position even worse.

It is the proposal that the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) will not include in the ballot information sent to voters the candidates' 'How to Vote' cards in which they express their preferences concerning the other candidates. We make the following comments about that proposal.

1. Having regard to the number of voters in the City of Melbourne (three times more than in any other Victorian electorate) and to the fact that 60% of those voters reside overseas or interstate, the main and perhaps only way that candidates can communicate with those voters is by post. As the cost of one mail-out will be in excess of \$70,000 it means the only candidates who can hope to compete for a position must have a large sum of money and that will preclude most candidates from even standing.
2. It also means that candidates who do stand will do all they can to solicit large donations which usually only come from large businesses and in particular property developers and those who wish to influence the way that candidate is likely to vote in future. The prospect of corrupt conduct is therefore greatly increased.
3. A candidate's preferences in terms of the other candidates is important information that all candidates will want the electorate to know about and if that information is not to be included in the material distributed by the VEC those candidates in the City of Melbourne must be prepared to spend at least \$70,000 each in order to inform the voters by mail. With voting being by post and with 60% of the voters in the City of Melbourne residing overseas or interstate candidates cannot knock on doors or put information in letterboxes and have no alternative but to use the post at considerable and often prohibitive cost.

4. It is nonsense to suggest that by including this information in the ballot packs the VEC will become involved in the political process and lose some of its independence. The VEC is merely posting information to electors about all candidates and is not expressing a view about any of them.
5. Furthermore, if the government and the VEC have any interest at all in encouraging people to stand for election and ensuring voters are as well informed as possible the VEC should be including such information in what they mail to electors.
6. As it is the government which has imposed upon the City of Melbourne the legislation which has such an adverse impact on the electoral process as well as other matters, the government should be assisting the democratic process by allowing all relevant information about candidates to be distributed with the VEC ballot pack.
7. There is no evidence of “dummy candidates” standing as is suggested in the explanatory information supporting this change.

Conclusion

Information about a candidate’s preferences concerning other candidates must be included in the postal ballot packs distributed by the VEC. To do otherwise is a further encouragement to corrupt behaviour and a further diminution in the effectiveness of the democratic processes this legislation should be supporting.

Melbourne South Yarra Residents Group Inc.
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