

**Submission
No 9**

INQUIRY INTO THE 2015 NSW STATE ELECTION

Name: Mr Ron Hoenig
Position: Member for Heffron
Date Received: 24/08/2015



Mr Jai Rowell, MP
Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

23 August 2015

Dear Sir,

I refer to the Inquiry that is currently being conducted by the Electoral Matters Committee and wish to make the following submission.

Joint Polling Places servicing multiple Electorates should be eliminated

My experience at the last State Election has demonstrated that the Electoral Commissioner having multiple electorates voting at the same polling places has caused confusion amongst electors and considerable delays on polling day.

Whilst no doubt the Electoral Commissioner will say that this is an efficient way of minimising absentee voting whilst being able to obtain results of the election quickly, the Electoral Commissioner's efficiency should not just be confined to himself.

In an election, there are multiple participants, which include not just the candidates, the major political parties, the volunteers and the booth workers, but also a range of other people. The efficiency that the Electoral Commissioner maintains should be the efficiency both inside and outside a polling booth. What is on the outside of the polling booth, I venture to suggest, the Electoral Commissioner thinks is not his concern, and if that be his view, it must be considered erroneous.

An example of the bedlam and pandemonium at joint polling booths is the St Francis of Assisi Church in Paddington. At that polling booth, electors voted in the electorates of Sydney, Vacluse and Heffron. This was not a minor booth for any of those electorates. Each electorate had a range of candidates with a range of political parties and independents. The safe Liberal seat of Vacluse had campaign workers from Vacluse chiefly for the Liberal Party, the Labor Party, the Greens Party as well as other candidates and minor parties. The seat of Sydney, held by an Independent, was bitterly contested by the sitting Independent, the Greens Party, the ALP, and the Liberal Party. The sitting Labor member, the Liberal Party and the Greens and other minor parties contested the seat of Heffron.

Outside that polling booth was absolute chaos. There had recently been quite a major redistribution. There were so many campaign workers from so many campaigns in so many seats that electors weren't sure what seat they were in, there was no prospect of candidates' campaign workers getting the right how-to-vote for the right electorate to the right elector. I could only describe it as a shambles.

That was not an isolated example. The polling place at Rainbow Street Public School that serviced the electorates of Coogee, Maroubra and Heffron, was itself an utter mess. At Erskineville Public school, which is located on the boundary between Newtown and Heffron, the long queues within the school caused by multiple queues for both electorates going into the same room created such delays that voters were walking away.

I've just highlighted three examples. In my submission, polling places need to be contained wholly within the electorate so that campaign workers who also participate in our democracy, at least have the opportunity of giving the right how-to-votes to the right electors coming to the polling places.

The Electoral Commissioner has a view that any polling place forecasted to have more than eighty votes was going to be a joint booth. The matter is easily resolved by having one polling booth servicing only one electorate. If there be exceptional circumstances whereby that cannot be reasonably accommodated, then a joint-booth ought to have separate entrances to the premises to avoid confusion.

Training of Presiding Officers

It is important that the Electoral Commissioner have the appropriate training for presiding officers at polling places. At [REDACTED] a new Presiding Officer had ordered removal of all candidates' posters from the school fence otherwise she would cut them down. It was a ridiculous thing to do. The school fence was some 100 meters from the entrance to the polling booth. The posters were cut down and remained so until the Returning Officer could be contacted to enable to posters to be placed back on the fence several hours later. Presiding Officers such as the one from [REDACTED] probably did not have sufficient training or had never been at any other polling booth in the state where posters are located along school fences.

Pre-polling Places

The major pre-polling place for Heffron was located in an industrial complex in Alexandria. This was not the Electoral Commissioner's first choice but was a most inappropriate location nonetheless. The polling place was located virtually in the middle of the complex probably 200-300 metres from the driveway fronting O'Riordan Street, Alexandria. There was no parking either on the street or within the complex. A person could only park if they could pay. There is no public transport accessible to the site and consequently, the numbers of pre-poll voters at that main pre-poll booth were quite low. In my submission, the Electoral Commissioner needs to be far more selective about the location he chooses. I also submit that the Committee not accept anticipated response from the Electoral Commissioner that is electors can go to another pre-poll booth within another electorate. The Electoral Commission should be required to provide a suitable pre-poll booth within the electorate that is easily accessible to electors

Yours faithfully,

[REDACTED]

Ron Hoeng MP