

**Submission
No 13**

PREFERENCE COUNTING IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS IN NSW

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29 September 2017

The Hon Dr Peter Phelps MLC
Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Parliament House
Macquarie St
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Email: electoralmatters@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Dr Phelps

Preference Counting in Local Government Elections in NSW

I refer to the Joint Standing Committee Inquiry into preference counting in local government elections in NSW.

LGNSW is concerned about the impact on the integrity of election outcomes of the current system of 'random selection' in the counting of preferences in local government elections.

The integrity of local government representation in NSW is undermined by any system of preference counting that potentially elects councillors other than those with the most community support (measured by number of votes). While first preferences are counted in full, the redistribution of preferences under the NSW counting rules is by random sampling with results extrapolated by a computer algorithm.

The source code for the algorithm is not available for public scrutiny.

Many analysts have found that this can affect the outcome, resulting in the election of a candidate who received fewer votes than another candidate who is not elected.

It also means that the actual preferences of significant numbers of voters are not counted.

The use of similar systems has been abandoned for Senate elections.

The only solution to this is to introduce a requirement that all preference votes are actually counted. While this may be time consuming under the current manual (pencils and paper) voting system, it is the only way to ensure an accurate count and election result.

LGNSW supports a system of distribution of preferences that ensures the candidates who receive the most votes are those elected to office.

This is an excellent opportunity to consider reform of the current system of preference counting in NSW.

Yours sincerely

Keith Rhoades
President