

Equal Access to Democracy News

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16. Purpose of Equal Access to Democracy News

Welcome to the third edition of Equal Access to Democracy News. This newsletter has been prepared in accordance with the New South Wales Electoral Commission's (NSWEC) Equal Access to Democracy Plan, and aims to provide NSW Peaks, consumer advocacy, and industry organisations with key election information in the lead up to the 2008 Local Government Elections.

The NSWEC encourages Peaks, consumer advocacy, and industry organisations to disseminate this information through established community networks and organisational newsletters. We appreciate feedback to enable us to be more effective in communicating with stakeholders.

17. Remember to vote

The NSW Local Council Elections are on Saturday 13 September 2008. Whatever you're planning for this weekend, you need to plan to vote.

You can vote any time between 8am and 6pm, but only in your council area or ward. Voting is compulsory wherever a council election is being held. Details of your local candidates and polling places have recently appeared in the local press. If you can't vote in your council area or ward on election day, you may be able to vote beforehand at your local pre-poll voting centre. Remember voting is compulsory.

Why it is important to use your compulsory vote.

By voting in your local council election you will:

- Influence local issues
- Choose who you want to represent you in council
- Avoid being fined \$55 if you fail to vote

For locations where you can vote visit www.elections.nsw.gov.au or call 1300 135 736.

For enquiries in languages other than English call our interpreting service on 13 14 50. For hearing and speech impaired enquiries, call our telephone typewriter (TTY) (02) 9247 3568.

18. How to cast a valid vote

Different voting systems are used in local government elections depending on the number of vacancies to be filled, and whether candidates form into groups on the ballot paper.

To cast a formal vote you must follow the instructions on the ballot paper.

Electing one councillor or the Mayor

You must place a "1" in the square next to the candidate of your choice. You may vote for other candidates by giving preferences starting with "2" and consecutively numbering as many other candidates as you wish.

Electing two councillors

In an election where there are two or more vacancies, candidates can form into groups on the ballot paper and have a group voting square for 'above the line voting', if two or more groups request it. In this case you can either vote above or below the line.

To vote above the line, you must place the number "1" in a group voting square for the group of your choice. You may allocate preferences for other groups, starting with the number "2".

To vote for individual candidates below the line, you must place a "1" in the square next to the candidate's name of your first choice. You may allocate preferences starting with "2" to other candidates of your choice.

Electing three or more councillors

The number of preferences required is at least equal to the number of vacancies as shown in the 'Directions for Voting' on the ballot paper.

Where there are group voting squares on the ballot paper you can vote above the line by placing the number "1" in one group voting square. You may allocate preferences starting with "2" for other groups of your choice.

By placing a "1" above the line in only one group voting square, you have indicated preferences for all the candidates in that group, in their order on the ballot paper. The vote stops with the last candidate in that group and preferences do not continue to any other candidates on the ballot paper.

If you vote above the line and give your first preference to Group A, your second to Group B and third to Group F, and each group has seven candidates - you have given preferences 1-7 to the candidates in Group A, 8-14 to the candidates in Group B, and 15-21 to the candidates in Group F. In this case the vote stops with the last candidate in Group F and preferences do not continue to any other candidates on the ballot paper.

Alternatively, you can vote below the line for individual candidates by consecutively numbering from "1" in the order of your choice for at least half the number of vacancies. You may continue numbering as many other candidates as you choose to give them your preferences.

The ballot box

When you finish marking the ballot papers fold them so the votes cannot be seen and place the ballot papers in the appropriate ballot boxes as you leave the polling place.

19. Braille ballot papers

Applications for Braille ballot papers are now closed. We received 52 applications, comprising of 31 requests for postal voting, 3 requests for pre-poll voting and 18 for voting at a polling place.

All Braille ballot papers have now been manufactured, and were distributed in the week beginning Monday 25 August 2008. If you requested a postal vote and have not yet received your ballot paper, please contact Mr Simon Waterhouse on (02) 9290 5986.

If you requested a pre-poll vote, your ballot papers will be available from your nominated pre-poll centre. Pre-poll voting commences on Monday 1 September 2008, and concludes on Friday 12 September 2008.

If you are voting on election day, your ballot papers will be available at your nominated polling place. We will be in contact with you in the week before the election to confirm these arrangements.

Braille voters can request further information on the candidates in your council area/ward by contacting our Elector Inquiry Centre on 1300 135 736. To ensure your call is directed to the correct area, please advise our customer service officers that you are a registered Braille voter, and require candidate information for your local area.

The NSWEC will assess the success of Braille voting following the elections in consultation with Peaks, consumer advocacy, and industry organisations.

20. E-voting

Electronic voting as an alternative to marking the ballot paper was explored by the NSWEC after the 2007 State Election. However, it was not possible to implement such a fundamental change in time for the September 2008 Local Government Elections.

Electronic voting is an area which needs legislative change to implement, even on a trial basis, due to the prescriptive nature of the legislation. We will examine issues such as cost-effectiveness, security, accessibility, and trials held in other jurisdictions. In addition, we will explore the legislative changes that would be required to allow for the development and trial of e-voting technology for New South Wales' electors.

I-voting is a potential initiative which could benefit electors in rural and remote areas and people with disabilities by broadening their voting options. It is an open question whether i-voting as an alternative to e-voting is the most appropriate means of providing electors with a disability, such as the vision impaired, with a suitable option to cast a secret ballot. This is an important area that we will examine in greater detail.

To form a clear view on i-voting and e-voting, we will consult with representatives from the disability sector and seek their views on whether i-voting would be an effective and generally acceptable alternative to e-voting. We will then present the views of the disability sector, together with the available options to the Premier for consideration.

Please note that a significant increase in Government funding and commitment to legislative change will be required before either e-voting or i-voting can be implemented.

21. Review of wheelchair accessible polling places

We recently completed a comprehensive review of the accessibility status of all polling places for the 2008 Local Government Elections.

All polling places have been assessed and rated as either full wheelchair access or no wheelchair access. Information on all polling places, including their accessibility status, is available on the NSWEC website at www.elections.nsw.gov.au. You can also call the Elector Inquiry Centre on 1300 135 736 for further information.

22. Facilities available at the polling place

Wheelchair accessible voting screens

Wheelchair accessible polling places will have wheelchair accessible voting screens available for electors in a wheelchair or for electors who require a chair when voting.

These screens are lower and wider than a standard voting screen. Table top voting screens will also be available at all pre-poll voting centres and polling places.

Luminance contrast design on election furniture

Certain cardboard furniture used at the election will have luminous contrast markings to assist electors with depth perception.

Hand held magnifiers and user friendly pencils

All polling places and pre-poll voting centres will have hand held magnifiers and user friendly pencils available to all electors. Electors should ask an election official if they require either of these items.

Assistance

Electors with a disability who require assistance to vote can ask an election official or take a companion to help them. The election official can assist the elector by marking their ballot papers in accordance with their wishes or to deposit their vote in the ballot box.

Any person assisting someone to cast their vote is required to mark the ballot paper in accordance with the elector's wishes.

Important election dates and times

Election day	8am to 6pm, Saturday, 13 September 2008
Pre-poll voting	From Monday, 1 September 2008 Until Friday, 12 September 2008
Postal voting	Postal vote applications close: 5.00 pm, 8 September 2008 Return of postal votes must be received by: 6.00 pm, Monday, 15 September 2008
Results	Election night results: From 6pm with most results becoming available by 7pm Check count and Declaration Vote results: From Sunday 14 September 2008 Distribution of preferences: Starts Tuesday 16 September 2008



Colin Barry
Electoral Commissioner