



Minister for Local Government,
Minister for Racing and
Minister for Multicultural Affairs

1 William Street
Brisbane Queensland 4000
PO Box 15009
City East Queensland 4002
Telephone +61 7 3719 7560
Email lgrma@ministerial.qld.gov.au
Website www.dlgrma.qld.gov.au

Our ref: MC20/2378

ABN 65 959 415 158

Your ref: A552501

8 May 2020

Mr Neil Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
Queensland Parliamentary Service
TableOffice@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Mr Laurie

Thank you for your letter of 23 April 2020 about petition No. 3311-20 received by the Queensland Legislative Assembly on 22 April 2020 requesting the postponement of the 2020 quadrennial Local Government elections due to concerns about the COVID-19 pandemic.

As you are aware, the Local Government elections were successfully held on 28 March 2020. More than 1.2 million Queenslanders took advantage of early voting arrangements and a record of almost 560,000 postal votes were distributed to electors across the State in the lead-up to the election. Many other voters took advantage of the increased opportunity to cast their votes over the telephone. In addition, almost 760,000 people attended polling booths on election day to cast their votes.

I have noted the concerns about the spread of the COVID-19 of the signatories to this petition. As we all know, the impacts and risks from COVID-19 are very serious. As you would expect, the decision to proceed with the elections was not taken lightly.

An important factor that the Government had to consider was that the elections provide an essential service to Queenslanders by ensuring continuity of government. Dr Jeanette Young, Queensland's Chief Health Officer, advised the Electoral Commission of Queensland (ECQ) that the Local Government elections were safe to proceed and highlighted the importance of having Mayors and Councillors in place to help lead the community response to COVID-19 at a local level. This is so important, especially in many of our most vulnerable, smaller and geographically-dispersed communities in Queensland.

Additionally, ECQ continually monitored the advice of health experts when implementing its election plan in order to adhere to recommended hygiene standards and social distancing measures.

Some of the measures ECQ put in place during the early voting period and on election day on 28 March 2020, included:

- providing supplies of hand sanitiser for use by voters and staff
- extending opening hours during the early voting period (16 to 27 March) to provide additional options for in-person voting, including an extra full day of voting on Saturday 21 March
- requesting voters to bring their own pen and pencil to vote
- employing extra staff to assist with queue control and monitoring numbers of people in attendance
- positioning vote-issuing tables and screens to maximise distance between all people where possible
- providing alternative services, such as telephone voting, to people in aged-care facilities and those in the community with health issues or who were in isolation.

In addition, the Government introduced a range of measures to minimise the risks associated with the election, giving ECQ the power to issue directions prohibiting the distribution of how-to-vote cards and canvassing at polling booths, plus increased flexibility around postal and telephone voting.

The Government is confident it took the right decision in allowing the elections to proceed in light of the expert medical advice it received and the various measures it took to prevent unnecessary exposure to voters.

I would like to thank the petitioners for raising this issue and I trust that this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely



STIRLING HINCHLIFFE MP
Minister for Local Government,
Minister for Racing and
Minister for Multicultural Affairs