

Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters

Inquiry into the display of electoral posters and signage at voting centres

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to this inquiry.

I write from the perspective of a local government Chief Executive Officer with 44 years' experience, having worked across multiple local, state and federal election cycles. My observations below are based on direct, on-the-ground experience managing council facilities whilst holding many different positions within councils, responding to community concerns, and dealing with the practical impacts of electoral activity.

What Happens at Voting Centres

On polling day, many voting centres, particularly schools and smaller community facilities, become congested very quickly. Volunteers, signage and voters all converge at the same entry points.

In tighter locations, that leads to:

- People being funnelled through narrow access points
- Signage and structures getting in the way
- Car parks and drop-off areas are often difficult to manage

It doesn't take much for this to become a safety issue. Councils often own or manage these sites, so we carry the responsibility, but we don't have much control over what happens at the gate on the day.

No One Clearly in Charge

One of the consistent issues is the lack of clear responsibility.

- Electoral authorities run the vote
- Councils often manage the land and surrounds

But when it comes to signage and behaviour at voting centres, there's a grey area. In practice, that means issues are often left unresolved or handled inconsistently, which isn't good for anyone.

It Doesn't Feel Orderly or Neutral

Voting should feel straightforward and neutral. Increasingly, it doesn't.

Instead, people are often walking through a wall of signage, multiple signs for the same candidates, overlapping material, and campaign activity extending well beyond the entrance.

It can feel excessive, and in some cases, overwhelming.

Not Everyone Gets the Same Exposure

In practice, candidates with the most people or resources tend to secure the best positions early. In one instance, for a local government election, candidates arrived in the middle of the night to ensure this occurred.

Where space is limited, that leaves others with very little visibility. Whether intended or not, it creates an uneven playing field in what should be a shared public space.

The Impact Falls Back on Council

Most voting centres sit on Council-managed land. If not the actual land, definitely the roads surrounding the venue.

After each election, we deal with:

- Damage to lawns, gardens and potentially irrigation
- Clean-up of signage and materials (can be very significant)
- Staff time responding to complaints
- In the event of rain, sometimes the road verges are damaged as well

It's not a major issue on its own, but it's consistent, and it adds up over time.

We Get the Complaints

When things don't look or feel right, the **community contacts Council**.

We hear concerns about:

- The amount of signage
- Congestion at entrances
- The general tone and feel of the site
- Corflutes left up **long after elections (need enforcement fine/s)**

Even though we don't control most of it, we're seen as responsible because it's council-managed land (road reserves, Crown Land, parks, etc.).

Rules Change Depending on the Election

Another practical issue is inconsistency. The rules differ between local, state and federal elections.

For candidates and volunteers, that creates confusion. For councils, it makes it difficult to take a consistent approach or provide clear guidance.

Furthermore, those assisting parties often do so for local, state and federal parties and use the same method across all elections, not knowing there's a difference in rules.

Roadside Signage – The Bit That Doesn't Get Cleaned Up

Separate from voting centres, **roadside signage is an ongoing issue.**

During campaigns, signs go up across roadsides, intersections and roundabouts, often on public land.

That's expected to a point. The problem is what happens after the election.

In my experience:

- **Many signs stay up for weeks or months**
- **Some remain for years**
- **Over time, they fade, fall over or break apart**

They become visual clutter, a distraction for drivers, and a regular source of complaints.

And again, Council ends up dealing with it, sending staff out to remove signage and bearing the cost.

Sometimes the signs are placed high above the ground on trees, which creates an added difficulty, expense, and WH&S challenge to remove.

There's very little consequence for not cleaning up. Once the election is over, responsibility tends to disappear. **Fines need to be applied.**

What Would Make a Difference

This isn't a complex issue to fix. A few practical steps would go a long way:

- Set clear limits around voting centre entrances so access stays safe and manageable
- Remove the grey area around who is responsible for managing signage on the day: **AS LONG AS THE COST IS NOT SHIFTED ONTO COUNCILS.**

- Require all signage on public land to be removed within a short timeframe (e.g. 48–72 hours after polling)
- Introduce straightforward fines where signage isn't removed: again, not adding to the burden of local government (**the State Government is an expert in cost-shifting**)
- Allow councils to remove leftover signage and recover the cost from the Electoral Commission, which then has the burden of seeking recompense from the candidates. Invoicing by councils to the Commission shouldn't be a time-consuming or frustrating process, unlike reconciling some government grant processes.
- Consider a simple and robust bond system to encourage compliance. An example could be a **\$150 fine per sign, post-polling, if the signs aren't removed within 72 hours.**

Final Comment

This isn't about restricting campaigning. It's about basic standards and accountability.

At the moment, candidates can put up large amounts of signage with very few constraints, and in many cases, walk away from it afterwards.

The impact, whether it's safety, clean-up, or community expectations, often falls back on councils.

A clearer, more consistent approach, backed by simple **enforcement**, would resolve most of these issues without making the process any harder than it needs to be.

But whatever the government decides, it often results in **COST-SHIFTING** onto local government. I applaud the Committee **for not taking this option**, as the State has often done in the past when introducing new legislation and regulations.