

**Submission to the Senate Finance and Public Administration
Committee inquiry on the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment
(Democratic Plebiscites) Bill 2007**

Allan Sutherland (Mayor, Redcliffe City Council)

I support the provisions of the above Bill.

I understand that the Bill amends the *Electoral Act 1918* to achieve two objectives:

1. Allowing the Australian Electoral Commission, (AEC), to conduct plebiscites in local government areas throughout Australia; and
2. Making state laws ineffective to the extent that they prohibit a person or body from or penalize a person or body for, making an arrangement with the AEC to conduct such a plebiscite or taking part in or assisting with the conduct of such a plebiscite.

I understand that the federal government has introduced the Bill in response to the Queensland *Local Government Reform Implementation Act 2007*, (Act), which contains provisions designed to prohibit local councils from conducting polls on questions about, amongst other things, the forced amalgamation of existing councils legislated by the Act.

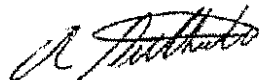
I consider the Act to represent an attack on the democratic right to free speech on the subject of forced council amalgamations.

I am acutely aware of the importance of this subject in the community of Redcliffe and I feel strongly about the need for councils' to seek the views of their communities by way of a poll when subjects of such magnitude are at hand.

The Bills seeks to overturn the state government's attack and I support the Bill for this reason.

I note that, at the time of writing, the Queensland Government has introduced a Bill to amend the Act by removing those sections designed to prohibit the conduct of polls. I support the Bill regardless of the state government's reversal as the Bill represents a form of protection against an attack of this nature occurring in the future.

I would welcome the opportunity to give evidence at any public hearing of the Finance and Public Administration Committee.



Allan Sutherland