

DRAFT SECOND READING SPEECH

HON [NAME] MP

Local Government Electoral Bill 2026

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Honourable Speaker, I move that the Bill now be read a second time.

I begin by acknowledging that Tasmania is approaching another local government election period, commencing on 5 September 2026.

Local government provides one of the most direct and important opportunities for Tasmanians to serve their communities. I encourage those who are considering standing for election to put themselves forward and contribute to shaping the future of their local communities.

As occurs at every election, a number of serving councillors, including mayors and deputy mayors, have decided that they will not seek another term. I take this opportunity to thank those councillors for their service to their councils and communities.

I also want to make clear that the Bill before the House will have no effect on the conduct of the 2026 local government elections.

Tasmanians need and deserve a local government sector that is democratically robust, professional and accountable, and which retains the trust and confidence of the communities it serves.

The role of local government has changed significantly over time. Our councils are important economic drivers, complex planning authorities, and major asset managers. They provide essential infrastructure and services and are at the frontline of supporting the wellbeing of their communities.

The responsibilities of councillors have evolved accordingly. Elected representatives are now responsible for significant strategic decisions, including decisions relating to the management of billions of dollars in public assets and the delivery of services that touch almost every aspect of the daily lives of Tasmanians.

Strong democratic institutions are fundamental to effective local government. Communities rightly expect their elected representatives to be accountable and representative of their needs, interests, and aspirations.

It is for these reasons that, as part of the Government's Local Government Priority Reform Program 2024–2026, we committed to establishing Tasmania's first standalone legislative framework for local government elections.

The Local Government Electoral Bill 2026 delivers on that commitment.

The Bill brings together the legislative framework governing local government elections in a dedicated Act and provides a modern foundation for the administration of those elections into the future.

In developing the Bill, the Government has undertaken extensive public and sector consultation, including through discussion papers and exposure draft legislation. More than 45 submissions have been received through these processes, and the Government has worked closely with the Tasmanian Electoral Commission on the technical and operational aspects of the legislation.

That consultation has helped shape a framework that will improve accessibility, participation, transparency and integrity, while providing the flexibility necessary to respond to changes in the way elections are conducted and administered.

The Bill builds on significant reforms to local government elections undertaken in recent years. These include the introduction of compulsory voting, which contributed to record voter turnout of almost 85 per cent at the 2022 local government elections, changes to ballot completion requirements to reduce informal voting, alternative voting procedures to improve accessibility, and reforms to councillor numbers and allowances.

Honourable Speaker, the Bill delivers five key outcomes.

First, it establishes a more flexible and accessible framework for conducting local government elections.

Tasmanian local government elections have been conducted by universal postal voting since 1993. Postal voting has served Tasmania well and has supported strong participation in local government elections.

However, declining postal service standards and increasing costs present a growing challenge to the long-term sustainability and reliability of an electoral system that depends entirely upon the postal network.

The Bill responds to this challenge by providing for alternative methods by which local government elections may be conducted.

The postal voting method will retain the distribution of ballot material to electors by post, while introducing the capacity for completed postal ballots to be delivered by hand to designated issuing and receiving places.

This provides electors with greater flexibility in returning their ballot and reduces reliance on the postal network during the critical final stages of an election.

The Bill also provides for elections to be conducted by attendance voting where necessary. The Electoral Commissioner may determine that an election is to be conducted by attendance voting only where satisfied that available postal services are inadequate to ensure the reliable conduct of an election by postal voting.

In making this assessment, the Commissioner may have regard to matters including the reliability of mail delivery and the geographic coverage of postal services. This provides an important safeguard for the future. It ensures that Tasmania's local government electoral framework can adapt if postal services can no longer reliably support the conduct of an election.

The Bill also preserves alternative voting arrangements by applying relevant provisions of the *Electoral Act 2004* to local government elections. These arrangements provide additional means of participation for electors who may otherwise face barriers to conventional voting methods.

The second key outcome is a stronger and more consistently administered local government electoral franchise, together with revised requirements for nomination as a candidate.

Importantly, the Bill establishes in clear terms that a person is entitled to only one vote in an election for an electoral area.

The Bill will also transfer responsibility for the administration of supplementary local government electoral rolls from the general managers of Tasmania's 29 councils to the Tasmanian Electoral Commissioner. Under this new framework, the Commissioner will maintain a single Local Government Electoral Roll.

This will provide greater consistency in the administration of electoral entitlements across Tasmania and allow the Commission to maintain the accuracy and currency of those rolls.

The Bill also clarifies eligibility for inclusion on the Local Government Electoral Roll, including through a clearer definition of an occupier of land within an electoral area.

Corporate bodies that meet the statutory requirements will continue to be able to nominate a natural person to vote on their behalf, subject to safeguards which prevent a person from exercising another entitlement to vote in the same election.

The Bill also establishes an appropriate threshold of elector support for a person seeking nomination as a candidate. A notice of nomination will be required to include the signatures of at least 10 electors, or a number equal to at least one per cent of the electors enrolled for the electoral area, whichever is less.

This establishes a meaningful but proportionate nomination threshold, particularly recognising the considerable differences in population between Tasmania's municipal areas, without imposing a financial barrier to nomination.

The third key outcome is to improve the quality and transparency of information available to electors about those seeking public office.

Candidate information statements are already an established feature of Tasmanian local government elections. The Bill places candidate information on a clear statutory footing.

Candidates may provide a personal statement as part of their nomination. Following the close of nominations, the Tasmanian Electoral Commission will be required to publish a candidate information package containing the list of candidates, relevant information about how each candidate is standing, and each personal statement provided by a candidate.

The package is to be published online and made available in printed form for distribution, including by mail where appropriate. This will ensure electors continue to have ready access to information about the people seeking to represent them.

For the first time, the nomination process will also require a candidate who is formally endorsed by a registered political party to identify that party. A candidate nominating as part of a group will similarly be required to identify the name of that group.

The candidate information package will identify whether each candidate is endorsed by a registered party, standing under a group name not associated with a registered party, or standing as an independent candidate.

These provisions will provide electors with greater transparency about the basis upon which candidates are seeking election and allow voters to make more informed choices.

The fourth key outcome is stronger regulation of electoral campaigning, electoral advertising and campaign finance.

The Bill establishes a comprehensive framework for electoral advertising and electoral matter, including clear authorisation requirements.

Electoral matter covered by the Bill will be required to include prominent and legible authorisation particulars. The Bill also establishes safeguards against electoral material containing specified misleading information, including material that misrepresents whether a person is a candidate or is endorsed by a registered political party, material likely to cause an elector to cast an informal ballot, and material that could mislead an elector into believing it is an official communication from an electoral authority.

These requirements will provide greater transparency and accountability in local government election campaigning.

The Bill also establishes a more timely disclosure framework for campaign gifts and donations. During the relevant election period, candidates and intending candidates will be required to disclose to the Tasmanian Electoral Commission a gift or donation of \$50 or more within seven days of receiving and accepting it. Gifts or donations from the same donor that individually fall below \$50 will also become disclosable where their aggregated value during the relevant period exceeds that threshold.

The Commission will maintain a gifts and donations register and will be required to publish relevant disclosed information on its website within seven days of receiving the disclosure.

The framework also contains safeguards relating to unlawful gifts and donations, including restrictions on certain cash donations, donations for which required donor information is not provided, and donations from foreign donors.

Together, these measures will significantly improve the timeliness and transparency of information available to Tasmanians about the financing of local government election campaigns.

The fifth and final key outcome is to strengthen the integrity and administration of the local government electoral process.

The Bill provides the Electoral Commissioner with investigatory powers necessary to support compliance with the new electoral framework, including powers relating to the production of information and documents. It also modernises electoral offences and sanctions and provides greater alignment, where appropriate, with the standards applying to Tasmanian Parliamentary elections.

The Bill further provides that the Electoral Commissioner must not fix the closing day for a local government by-election, where doing so would cause its polling period to fall within the polling period for a Commonwealth election or a Tasmanian Parliamentary election.

This will help avoid competing electoral processes and support the effective administration of elections by the Tasmanian Electoral Commission.

Honourable Speaker, this Bill has been introduced alongside the Local Government Amendment (Electoral Reform) Bill 2026.

That Bill contains complementary reforms to the *Local Government Act 1993* which further support the integrity and effective operation of the local government electoral framework. I will address those reforms separately during the second reading of that Bill.

Together, these Bills represent a substantial modernisation and future-proofing of Tasmania's local government electoral system.

Given the scale of these reforms, the Government determined that the new framework should not apply to the 2026 local government ordinary elections.

A limited number of priority reforms have instead been progressed through the *Local Government Targeted Reform Act 2026*.

The broader electoral framework established by these Bills will commence by proclamation, allowing implementation to be appropriately staged. This approach recognises the significant administrative and operational changes required of the Tasmanian Electoral Commission and councils. It will provide sufficient time for new electoral processes, systems and supporting arrangements to be developed and implemented in an orderly way.

The Government's intention is that the framework will be fully operational within the first twelve months of the new council term, providing ample time for the new arrangements to be established ahead of the 2030 ordinary local government elections.

This Bill establishes a modern, transparent and adaptable legislative framework for local government elections.

It strengthens the integrity of the electoral process, improves the information available to electors, provides greater transparency around candidates and campaign financing, modernises the administration of the local government franchise and ensures that Tasmania's electoral system can respond to changing voting and postal service environments.

Above all, it provides a strong legislative foundation for the democratic institutions that serve Tasmania's local communities.

Honourable Speaker, I commend the Bill to the House.