

15th December 2025

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters  
Parliament House  
Hobart TAS 700

## Inquiry into the Conduct of the 2025 House of Assembly Election and 2025 Legislative Council Elections

As an independent candidate for the seat of Bass in the 2025 House of Assembly Election, I am pleased to be able to make a submission to the Joint Committee for this inquiry.

True to Tasmanian political form of recent times, the 2025 House of Assembly Election (the 2025 State election) was called early. The circumstances of how this came about have little to justify commentating on, other than to reflect upon the banality of egotistical hyper-masculinity that appears to have gripped both major parties decision-making like a parasitic fungus (I could see the same circumstances playing out if both parties swapped respective government/opposition positions).

The election was onerous in terms of timing, rationale and arguably relevance in terms of defining a clearer mandate. However, it also presented an opportunity to further advocacy on the types of issues I consider critical in this state, most notably reforming Tasmanian child safety and protection.

While my dalliance with the 2024 State election was compelled by complex factors that had more to do with my employment at the time than anything else, my entry into the 2025 State election was relatively straightforward and less contentious. I felt no pressure at all, and adopted a straightforward campaign in terms of conventional organising.

The 2025 State election gave rise to a few issues which I detail below. I have strayed away from making specific recommendations, although the implication is clear in some sections what I think should occur.

### Employment Issues

When the election was announced I immediately searched for information on the Department for Education, Children and Young People (DECYP) intranet regarding provisions for contesting elections, but could not find any.

I sought information from the Workplace Relations with DECYP, advising them that, despite having access to leave without pay (LWOP) for up to two months, I would

only be seeking selected dates off work. This was primarily because I had no time to financially prepare for an election being called as early and as unexpectedly as this one.

What followed was a series of confusing and contradictory messaging from within DECYP about leave entitlement for employees running for election, and more particularly the expectations of the department about my leave arrangements. I have outlined the chronology further below. Communication was primarily by email, but I have not attached the emails (but did keep copies).

It is clear to me that clear guidance within DECYP, but also the wider state service, was lacking in consistency or clarity. It became apparent that DECYP exercised their own interpretation on procedures published by DPAC. It does appear that they failed to account for disseminating information to education employees outside of the information networks focused around principals (i.e. staff not directly employed through public schools, such as professional support).

Furthermore, on 21st June I issued a media release responding to an article published in the Tasmanian Times that day, called A Story of Child Protection Gone Wrong (written by Nick Feik). On the 25th June I was made aware (verbally) that, after my comments in response to the article were published by the Tasmanian Times (on the same day), a request had been made from within DECYP, asking that I submit any further campaign media releases through the department's communications unit for approval prior to distribution. I refused, citing concerns about an election candidate being subject to editorialising by the government. There were no further requests made.

## Chronology

On 12th June I informed my senior of my intention to stand as a candidate.

On 16th June I consulted with Workplace Relations and was sent a copy of the DPAC document 'Contesting Commonwealth State and Local Elections Practices Procedures and Standards No-3' (attached, No-3 document). Amongst the pieces of information provided for staff there was a section outlining provisions available for leave in the event of contesting an election. These provisions included:

- Leave of absence without pay for up to two months, or;
- Request to access paid leave entitlements (subject to Head of Agency approval).

However, there is nothing in the No-3 document compelling a leave application.

On 27th June (the day after nominations closed) I was provided with an extract from Principal Matters (a DECYP internal publication primarily for principals and other senior school staff). The information contained the following (emphasis added):

*Where a nomination has been endorsed or candidature confirmed, an immediate application for leave without pay for up to 2 months or for recreation or long service leave **is to be made**.*

I was also provided with a document called 'Item 2 - Employees Contesting a State Election - June 2025' (attached, Item 2). This document summarised the No-3 document, notably stating that an employee was 'entitled' to apply for LWOP or could 'request access to paid leave entitlements.' The file properties indicate this document was created within DECYP on 17th June.

On 4th July I received an email from DECYP People and Culture, which repeated the options for two months LWOP, or access to paid leave entitlements. However, the email also stated (emphasis added):

*As a DECYP employee, **these provisions must be followed**. If you haven't already submitted your leave application, may I kindly ask that you do so at your earliest convenience?*

On 7th July I received an email chain that dated back to 30th June. The email chain is summarised below:

30th June - email from Payroll and Systems to Professional Support, querying whether I had submitted leave 'in order to contest the election'?

30th June - Response from Professional Support to Payroll and Systems, clarifying that I had made some leave requests, but also that there was a lack of clarity about whether I needed to take leave for the whole election period.

4th July - Email from People and Culture to Professional Support, repeating the view that LWOP or recreation or long service leave 'is to be made'. Furthermore, the email stated that I would need to take either LWOP or paid leave 'for the election period'.

On 9th July I sent an email to People and Culture outlining the basic chronology of what I had been told and when, and clarifying what leave I was seeking.

On 14th July I was sent a reply including the Item 2 document as attachment, and told that this document was distributed to staff on 16th June (the email stated 16th July, but I assume it meant the 16th June). I checked my email inbox but found no email for the 16th June, or indeed at any other date, with the Item 2 document beyond what I have highlighted above. The attachment I was provided in this reply was created on 17th June according to the document properties.

## Corflutes

The use of corflutes to promote candidates and/or political parties on business property raises issues about the potential inequity in political spending.

Unlike a person making a choice to promote a candidate/party on their property (or tenancy), businesses are abstract entities. The accessibility to businesses, presumably on the basis of a payment for advertising, heavily favours those with more access to funding. In particular, to political parties, or independent candidates if they have access to sufficient wealth. Essentially, who pays wins.

As abstract entities, businesses don't vote. Those that work for them, while probably having some consideration to the impact of the election on their business or place of work, vote on their own consideration. They cannot be compelled to vote solely in the interests of their place of business.

The extent to which corflutes influence votes depends on a number of factors, but permitting businesses to display corflutes (on any rationale) undermines the principle of an election being based on the decisions of voters on their own basis. A business displaying a corflute might imply that voting for a particular party/candidate will favour that business interest and/or industry compared to others.

This is different from paid advertisement on social media, because there are ways and means to circumnavigate reliance on paid material (such as through organic promotion). Similarly, paid adverts on TV and radio are specifically identifiable as being promotional material, not endorsement by the TV or radio carrier.

Corflutes also present an environmental issue. When I organised corflutes for the 2024 state election, the printer commented that this would probably be the last election they would be processing these types of print requests in terms of material. However, barely a year later and there is another election with new orders for printing.

Corflute material - polypropylene - is a plastic extracted from petroleum or natural gas. It is a fossil fuel in effect.

Corflutes are not easy to recycle and cannot be simply placed in kerbside bins.

I have been hearing of alternatives to corflutes for some time, but yet to see any significant or meaningful action to reduce or end their use.

## Registration to Work with Vulnerable People

While this wasn't a major feature of the election more broadly, the question of politicians requiring Working with Vulnerable People registration as qualifiers to stand for election has been brought up with me in more than one election. This opportunity for submission seems as good a time as any to give some perspective on this.

The Department of Justice (TAS) described the RWVP as:

*RWVP is a process to decide if someone is suitable to work or volunteer with vulnerable people, including children. It includes background checks and risk assessments of past behaviour to see if someone may pose a risk of harm. If someone is considered suitable, they will be granted a RWVP. This is valid for 5 years.*

*RWVP is also an ongoing process: once someone has a RWVP, they will continue to be monitored, to help keep vulnerable people, including children, safe.*

In short, I support RWVP registration as being a qualifier for becoming a candidate, similar to pre-conditions of residence in the state. I would only expect it to require a volunteer level of registration, since the day-to-day working of elected representatives would not ordinarily put them in ongoing contact with children or other vulnerable people.

The conversation about child safety is changing, and public expectations with them.

Elected representatives already hold mandated obligations in respect of child safety, being *prescribed persons* under the law<sup>1</sup>. Their capacity for access to potentially vulnerable people is significant, as people will approach MPs in relation to all types of matters. Establishing a formal standard of behaviour in return should not be onerous.

There is already precedent for establishing the *qualifications for Members* in legislation<sup>2</sup>, most notably conditions of residency in Tasmania, so in-principle application of further conditions should not be a barrier in itself.

There may be an argument to make about having registration in place prior to any election called, especially in the context of early elections (which in this state has become the norm in the last decade). However, there is an established mechanism to limit frivolous nominations, specifically through the nomination deposit.

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<sup>1</sup> s.14(1)(jb) *Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997 (TAS)*

<sup>2</sup> s.14 *Constitution Act 1934 (TAS)*

Furthermore, the provisions on residency also apply a time-scale for having resided in the state - a newcomer must wait two years before being eligible, for example. Any aspiring nominee in that circumstance would therefore have sufficient time to resolve any other expectation in that period, including RWVP registration (which takes less than two years to complete). In other words, the bar for nomination is already lower than the one that might be set by RWVP registration being a requirement.

Providing a qualifier of having registration of RWVP in place before nominating (not merely application), would reinforce the existing principle.

The biggest barriers would be less principle and more practical, but I don't believe they are insurmountable by any stretch.

The first potential issue is the risk of applying onerous levels of barriers; this being excessive requirements that effectively limit nominations to only a selected cohort of individuals. It is a fair question to ask at what point does one draw the line on what is a reasonable expectation versus an unreasonable, potentially autocratic, set of conditions that excludes whole sections of people.

In the case of a RWVP registration being applied, I am sure some would broach this issue in terms of 'mission creep'. However, my view is that the RWVP is the exception to the rule in this case; we use the RWVP as primary qualification for safety (and not just in respect of children, but any vulnerable person). It is an universal application of a basic level of measurable safety; not a discriminatory barrier based on arbitrary criteria applied on a whim.

Another potential difficulty is the practical limitation it may pose on a nominee if they become elected, but lose their registration while as MP. There are already provisions for *vacation of office for other causes*, which outline a number of scenarios that would disqualify an MP. A notable one is committing a crime that leads to a sentence of imprisonment exceeding a year.

That expectation on sentencing has other implications (discussed elsewhere in this submission), but in this case it might suggest a criteria at a level much higher than the RWVP. Most particularly, criminal law is subject to a much higher burden of proof. However, a separate condition relating to bankruptcy, is generally resolved through civil law.

A RWVP might confirm relevant prior convictions, but it does not operate at the evidentiary standard of criminal law. It also potentially takes into account other applicable issues not covered by criminal law.

The long and short of this is that there is no criteria for disqualifying MPs that currently exists that RWVP falls short of. Losing registration would be a reasonable cause for compelling a vacancy.

There may be some unusual circumstances that also require some thought to navigate. One would be if a nominee had registration at time of election, failed to win a seat, allowed their registration to lapse, but a vacancy occurred where they would otherwise be eligible to contest. It is unlikely this would occur, because of the five year period a RWVP lasts. Any potential nominee would be free to decide if they wish to renew and hold out the chance of election through vacancy (emphasising the responsibility of the nominee to take active responsibility to participate, rather than nominate on basis of whim).

Resolution of problems like this should not be a problem in terms of wording legislative change.

Perhaps the biggest barrier to applying RWVP registration is the limitation of the registration itself. RWVP registration is a basic level of risk management, in the sense of *only* literally being better than nothing. There are many concerns relating to the soundness of the RWVP registration as being a sufficient measure of safety (concerns I share).

The expectation should be enhanced standards over time and the rigorous review of its integrity to ensure as reasonably as possible that it is not deficient in promoting safety.

However, it is still considered a primary formal measure of safety in respect of working with children or vulnerable people. It is mandatory in its application. Whatever improvements can be made, it is a legislated standard for deciding if someone is suitable to work or volunteer with vulnerable people.

Understanding the scale of the change needed to make the state safer for children, and vulnerable people more generally, requires an acknowledgement that the way of doing things in the past has been significantly flawed. Amongst other things, this means no longer taking convention for granted, but consistently and critically interrogating the assumptions we hold. In terms of applying the RWVP to elected representatives, it is the beginning of setting and improving standards, not the end.

An interim measure as this is considered more carefully, and one that may help in promoting the idea to candidates initially, is that nominees be offered the option of including confirmation of RWVP registration in their publicly available information. This need only be a registered (or number provided) or not registered type option, and would be on voluntary basis. This would at least give opportunity for public access to the information, and provide the means for journalists to ask candidates why they were or weren't registered, or hadn't answered.

The other consideration would be how this would apply to staff of elected representatives. In practice, many are privy to the same information and contact with constituents as their elected employer, and so it is arguable they too should have the requirement. My feeling is that they should be required too, but this would be a broadening of the expectation and a change for many staff members (especially for those currently employed).

## Voting age

The voting age in Tasmania should be lowered to 16. We live in a country where 16 year olds are already old enough to:

- Consent to simple health care treatments
- Control what goes into their My Health Record and who has access to it
- Can consent to medical and dental treatment in the same way adults can
- Can undertake casual or part-time work (with permission)
- Can get learner permits or licenses to drive cars
- Apply for a Minor's Permit to use a firearm
- Use social media legally

They cannot gamble or purchase alcohol until they are 18. However, they can be subjected to advertising for these things even as younger children.

Setting aside the implication that voting is seen in policy terms as being akin to gambling, drinking and taking drugs, it does appear that conventional political thinking has misplaced ideas about young people aged 16-17.

Ironically, the Commonwealth legislative change on social media has opened up a perfectly sound argument for reducing the right to vote. If 16 year olds can be legally judged to make a sound determination to be exposed to potentially harmful material, and be discriminating in what they do or don't access, this surely sets a higher standard than the determination of which individuals they want to preference for making decisions about their welfare and the issues that matter to them.

It's a sad world where politicians might argue that the processes they govern and legislate on are more dangerous to 16-17 year olds than unrestrained social media posts by paranoid QAnon acolytes, ranting about bushfires being started by space lasers, and the CERN particle accelerator being used to create a portal to other dimensions (and possibly destroying Earth in 2012 leading to a replacement by a parallel universe).



It can be easy to jest, but somehow we are a state where a 16 year old can legally discharge a firearm, drive a car, and make basic (and some complex) decisions about their health, but somehow cannot decide how to place a minimum of seven numbers on a ballot paper in any order (as if donkey votes by adults weren't a thing).

It's important to note here that reducing voting age might only have peripheral practical benefit in terms of improving engagement and registration, without other work being undertaken. However, having a vote is not primarily about the practical benefits of people being engaged in politics on a regular basis. Many voters are not, and vote according to a variety of whims or feelings.

The right to vote, like all fundamental rights, is not there to serve a practical benefit for a narrowly defined cohort of people. Rights exist in the sense of supporting dignity and wellbeing, recognising that their existence and defence promote better outcomes than their being denied, on both a singular and collective basis.

Young people aged 16-17 years old make sound, rational and informed decisions every day, and without much fuss or concern. Socially and culturally, we allow for (or push) their independence on decisions that could have major ramifications for the rest of their lives (career aspirations spring to mind). There is no sound reason to limit their right to vote, when the rationale to do so is so definitively undermined by a host of inconsistent and contradictory decisions.

## Public debates, forums and media

While recognising the limitation of being able to actively compel change in this consideration, I do think there needs to be some regard given to the role of public debates and forums in elections.

During the 2025 election, I attended the following debate/forums in Launceston:

- Wilderness Society
- Invasive Species Council of Australia
- Newnham Neighbourhood House Forum

I was not aware of any other debates or forums being held during the election that I could attend. Of the three events above, only the Newnham forum was attended by a broad range of candidates across party/independent representation.

The Newnham forum was significantly limited in terms of speaking time, and practically impossible to cross debate with other candidates (deliberately so, not seeking to be a back-and-forth debate).

The other events might have allowed for more engaged debate, but lacked attendance by candidates that might take a significantly distinctive position counter to the environmentally focused audiences.

All three events were relatively well attended, but numbered in the dozens, not hundreds.

I was only aware of media presence at the Newnham forum (a local reporter from the Examiner I believe), and I don't recall there being a significant newspaper article about it.

I was aware of debates being held for the Legislative Council elections on ABC radio, as is usual, but not being a resident in the seats contested, I took little interest in the content. However, I know from experience that these debates do offer a significantly greater potential for cross-examining other candidates. They also have advantages for broader messaging, because the broadcast is across the state. However, their timing can sometimes be very late into the campaign, and is probably futile if conducted after postal votes are sent out (i.e. the week before the election day).

I make no comment on the content or organisation of the respective debates I attended. My issue is not the content itself, but the accessibility of debates in general to voters, including relevance and value, and their purpose.

To my knowledge, no recording was made of any of the debates, including on social media. Beyond the confines of the venue, it is unlikely many more people had knowledge of the event, much less it affected their vote.

This is consistent with my previous experiences of debates and forums.

I think it highly unlikely that any debate or forum on such a local basis has a major influence on voter intention. Indeed, my purposes for attending a debate are less to do with practical benefit as a candidate, but more for practical benefit in terms of broader politics. This includes:

- Being able to promote particular issues, causes or arguments;
- Gaining insight into contrary perspectives and candidates
- Getting a 'pulse-check' on the interests of specific cohorts of voters or interest-groups (primarily from the questions being asked)
- Democratic principles of transparency and engagement

I have a similar view of media presentation, in that there is a limit to the influence it might have on voters (and more particularly, given news media is directed to a state-based audience, the voters that matter the most). This is especially the case for an early election, where media presence is only really effective in the context of ongoing

messaging, which should have been established months prior. Even political parties would struggle to do more than promote their message beyond conventional perception, rather than specific issues.

I doubt there is much room (or justification) for governmental or parliamentary organising of public debates, but I do think consideration needs to be given to the engagement of voters more broadly, and the accessibility of candidates.

It does seem to me that any candidate should be very well informed and aware of the limitations of debates and forums. This is especially important for inexperienced candidates who might have higher expectations of the outcome, or commit a great deal of time and effort to achieving very little result.

Normally, I wouldn't suggest general advice on campaigning is the type of information the Tasmanian Electoral Commission should advise on. However, I would suggest that if we look at this from a wellness perspective, a broader set of advice and guidance for candidates would be beneficial.

For example, general advice about pacing yourself, setting realistic targets, researching organisations and also considering imposition on time, can all help candidates (especially inexperienced ones).

Guidance could also help promote the role of debates and forums, by giving some basic advice to organisations about setting-up and promoting debates.

None of this need be onerous and can be passive, presented as simple advice given through a handful of dot-points.

This could also have benefits in minimising misconceptions for candidates.

The reason I make this point is because if we value democracy and the act of running for election as being a valued participation, even if we disagree with the politics of particular candidates, we help promote the idea of elections. This means having some care and attention given to candidates and their welfare.

Elections can be gruelling and stamina draining, even for the most experienced, and like any other public activity, we should have an emphasis on promoting safe conduct for participants. To put another way, we give public advice about climbing mountains, or visiting remote areas, because we want to encourage safe access. We give guidance for voluntary organisations on conducting their work and activities safely. Why should the principle be any different for elections?

Elections should be fairly and transparently portrayed as being the difficult and challenging scenarios they are, but we also want to encourage a sense of positive participation.

It is also apparent that broadcasting on social media should be a standard practice for any organisation conducting a debate, because even if not watched live it provides the opportunity for people to view at a later time (compared to the nonsense that was the leaders debate on Sky News).

## Electoral Roll

Like any nominated candidate, I was provided with the opportunity to acquire a hard copy of the electoral roll. The electoral roll can be an important document to be used in elections, because it can assist with voter outreach, including leaflet, direct mail and door knocking. However, being listed alphabetically by name, the hardcopy is practically useless in that regard.

However, I note the distinction made between the access for registered parties compared to nominated candidates, in that political parties (and sitting MPs for that matter) have access to an electronic version<sup>3</sup>. The practical effect is that independent candidates do not get access to an electronic version of the roll.

The reason for this is not clear to me, but it clearly leads to discrimination against independent nominees (if they are not elected). I also note that s.40(6) of the *Electoral Act 2004* states that:

The Commission may provide to any other person, body or organisation, as it may approve, a copy of the State roll or any part of that roll in printed or electronic form.

This means that, in theory, a non-candidate has more access to an electronic copy of the roll than an actual nominee.

Independent candidates are an increasing presence in elections. The process of limiting access to the same resources as political party candidates serves only to act as an exclusionary device, when a democratic election should promote equity.

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<sup>3</sup> s.40 *Electoral Act 2004*