

**CoRBA - Melbourne**  
**Coalition of Residents and Business Associations**

Carlton Residents Association Inc.; Collins Street Precinct; Docklands Chamber of Commerce; Docklands Residents Association; East Enders Inc.; East Melbourne Group Inc.; Flemington Association; Hardware Precinct Residents and Tenants Group; Hosier Inc.; Kensington Association; Melbourne South Yarra Group Inc.; North and West Melbourne Association Inc.; Parkville Association Inc.; Parkville Gardens Residents; Residents 3000 Inc.; Southbank Residents Association Inc.; Yarra Park Association; The Pasley Streets Precinct Group; Wesley Historic Precinct Action Group; Wilkinson Publishing; Yarra Park Association

14 February 2016

Dear Councillors

**Future Melbourne Committee meeting 16 February 2016**

**Item 6.9 Program of actions for the conduct of the 2016 Melbourne City Council Elections**

I write to you, in regard to the above, as the Chair of the Coalition of Resident and Business Associations (CoRBA). CoRBA is comprised of over 20 organisations representing a constituency of 35,000 voters in the City of Melbourne.

In its submission to the State Government's 2015 Local Government Review, CoRBA stated:

*The CoM is a small electorate of only 37 square kilometres. It has Victoria's best public and private transport infrastructure and, unlike some suburban or regional municipalities, there is little physical or geographical impediment to attending a voting booth. Whereas, logistics and the residential built form of the electorate of the CoM create difficulties in the administration of a postal-only ballot.*

*Postal-only voting is inappropriate for the significant and increasing percentage of voters who reside in in the municipality.*

*High and medium density living is increasing across the entire municipality and is the predominant form in major CoM population centres such as the CBD, Docklands, Southbank, and St Kilda Road and will also be the norm in the proposed two large new suburbs of E-Gate and Fisherman's Bend. Apartment complexes generally have strict security access arrangements including mail delivery and visitors. Some of these complexes may have upwards of several thousand residents, the equivalent of a small country town.*

*The CoM also has the greatest concentration of public housing estates in Victoria; each tower within each estate has its own delivery and mailroom security issues. In 2008, at a very high cost, the VEC had to make extraordinary special private (non-Australia Post) arrangements for delivery of ballot papers to such dwellings due to the Office of Housings ban on political canvassing on housing estates. In such cases access negotiations had to be made with the Office of Housing for the special delivery of electoral material and ballot papers to public housing tenants.*

*An increase in apartment dwelling comes with an increase in the potential for lost ballot papers due to delivery problems. As was seen in 2012 CoM elections there is also increased security concerns with ballot pack deliveries to apartment blocks exposing ballot papers to vote-harvesting scams and theft.*

*The CoM also has the largest concentration of homelessness in Victoria, the present system of postal-only voting serves to further marginalise and exclude the homeless from*

*participation in society; whereas attendance voting affords a greater opportunity of participation for the homeless and other marginalised groups.*

*Many voters, especially the functionally illiterate, do not understand and cannot easily complete the complex ballot papers without the assistance offered at polling stations (48% of Australians are functionally illiterate [ABS]; this percentage is higher among Melbourne's disadvantaged groups.).*

*It is CoRBA's contention that the CoM should adopt the attendance voting method, thereby ensuring consistency with State and Commonwealth elections.*

*CoRBA recognises and appreciates that postal voting is convenient for corporate, offshore, interstate, and non-resident ratepayers. Therefore, CoRBA supports optional postal voting for those corporate, offshore, interstate, and non-resident ratepayers who do not reside in the municipality. CoRBA notes that the Local Government Act provides for this allied with of attendance voting, as do all the Australian States and Territories and the Commonwealth.*

As you can see from the above, CoRBA is not opposed to postal ballots but believes that a combination of attendance and postal voting is the most effective way of supporting a vibrant and inclusive democracy that encourages voter participation, minimises election costs, and reduces the opportunity for voter fraud through ballot theft. A combination of attendance and postal voting would also align the CoM's practices with those of both State and Commonwealth governments which, while notionally requiring compulsory attendance voting, have effectively moved to an optional postal ballot.

With regard to cost-effectiveness, CoRBA notes that since the last local government elections, Australia Post, while formerly offering a delivery schedule of three (03) business days, has introduced extended the delivery timeframe for ordinary mail six (06) business days and has significantly increased postal charges to \$1.00 for standard mail and considerably more for non-standard mail items such as election packs. These changes will obviously have a significant cost effect on postal ballots. This supports CoRBA's view that minimising the number of postal ballots would be a financially responsible action by the CoM.

We believe that the operation of a single attendance voting centre (for example, the Town Hall) open for two (02) weeks before the close of polls (as was previously the case in the CoM), with postal ballot papers sent to corporate, offshore, interstate, and non-resident voters would be both democratic and cost-effective.

This is also in accord with the State Government's recent direction to the VEC to 'optimise democratic participation by voters' (*Local Government Amendment (Improved Governance) Act 2015* (Schedule 2)).

If you have any questions, please contact me directly.

Regards



Michael Kennedy