

# STAFF REPORT

**TO:** Mayor and Councillors

**FROM:** Electoral Officer

**REFERENCE:** E301

**DATE:** 17 May 2010

**SUBJECT:** **2010 Tasman District Council Elections – Report RCN10-06-03**

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## PURPOSE/REASON FOR REPORT

The 2010 Tasman District Council triennial general elections will be held using the “First-Past-the-Post” electoral system, Election Day being Saturday 9 October.

This report seeks:

- (a) Council’s approval for the voting documents in the 2010 Tasman District Council triennial general elections to be processed during the voting period; and
- (b) a decision as to the preferred option in regard to the order in which candidates’ names will appear on the voting documents in the 2010 Tasman District Council triennial general elections

For Councillors information the attached timetable applies for the 2010 triennial elections:

## BACKGROUND

### Early Processing of Voting Papers

This allows completed voting papers to be “processed” right from the time that they are received back from electors. Processing involves the envelopes being opened, the voting papers extracted, the votes for each candidate being recorded electronically, and the voting papers being kept in secure storage when not in the course of being processed. All early processing is carried out in the presence of a Justice of the Peace, who must certify whether or not that the whole process has been carried out in compliance with the relevant Acts and Regulations.

It is important to realise that the votes are not “counted” during early processing. A secure software programme stores the information processed during this period. Only after voting ends can a “count” be extracted from that information.

This year for the first time we have contracted out the vote counting to Electionz.com, a Christchurch based company that is contracted by a total of 36 Councils throughout New Zealand, to undertake various election services. The only difference voters will notice is

the address on the return envelope, however, the big difference will be the release of the result after 12 noon on election day. These will only be progress results as the final voting documents received in Richmond will have to be processed before the preliminary results can be provided. We are currently working on how best to get all papers received on Election Day to Electionz.com to ensure a preliminary result is received as early as possible.

Council has supported early processing of voting papers from its introduction for the 1998 Triennial Elections and the system has worked well. I am strongly of the opinion that Council should approve early processing for the triennial elections this year.

### **Order of Names on the Voting Paper**

Candidates' names have in the past been required to be listed on the voting documents in alphabetical order, by surname. Section 31 of the Local Electoral Regulations 2001 now allows Council to determine whether the names are to be arranged on the voting documents in alphabetical order of surname, pseudo-random order, or random order. In the absence of any Council resolution approving another arrangement, the candidates' names must be shown in alphabetical order of surname.

## **COMMENT/DISCUSSION**

### **Early Processing**

The advantages of early processing include:

- Reduces the number of times the voting documents are required to be handled;
- Less staff and equipment required on election day;
- Earlier release of results on election day.

### **Order of Names on the Voting Paper**

The features/issues of each option are as follows:

#### **(i) Alphabetical Order or Surname**

Alphabetical order is simply listing candidate surnames alphabetically and is the order traditionally used in local authority and parliamentary elections.

The issues related to this option are:

- Voters are easily able to find the names of those candidates for whom they wish to vote. Some candidates and voters over past years have argued that alphabetical order of candidate names may tend to favour those candidates with surnames early in the alphabet; and
- As most issues in Tasman District have small number of candidates it is unlikely that alphabetical disadvantages any candidates

**(ii) Pseudo-Random Order**

Pseudo-random order is where candidate surnames are randomly selected (i.e. from a hat) and the order drawn is the order in which the candidates' names will appear on all voting documents relevant to the issue.

The issue related to this option is possible voter criticism/confusion as specific candidate names are less easily found, particularly in instances where there are a large number of candidates.

**(iii) Random Order**

Random order is where candidate surnames are randomly selected and shown in a different order for each issue on individual voting documents. The order of candidate names would be randomly selected using computer software.

The issue related to this option is possible voter criticism/confusion as specific candidate names are less easily found, particularly in instances where there are a large number of candidates.

## **SIGNIFICANCE**

The decisions required to be made in this report are not considered to be significant in terms of Council's Significance Policy.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

1. **THAT pursuant to Section 79 of the Local Electoral Act 2001, the returned voting documents for the 2010 Tasman District Council triennial elections be processed during the voting period:**
2. **THAT pursuant to Section 31 of the Local Electoral Regulations 2001, the Council decide whether the name of candidates in the 2010 elections for Mayor, Councillors and Community Board members of Tasman District Council are to be arranged in:**
  - (a) **Alphabetical order of surname; or**
  - (b) **Pseudo-random order; or**
  - (c) **Random order.**

## **AMALGAMATION PETITION**

During April we were required to carry out the check of all the names on the petition submitted to the Local Government Commission by Councillor Aldo Miccio. As this would take many hours of staff time during a period when staff are already very busy, the work was contracted out to Electionz.com at a cost of \$3,200. While this may seem quite expensive, it compared favourably with our estimate of staff time had the work been carried out in house.

Unfortunately if Mr Miccio now canvasses for the shortfall of signatures and resubmits the petition to the Local Government Commission, every signature must be rechecked (as advised by the Commission's legal advisors).

The result will be that Tasman District will be paying close to \$6,500 in total to have the petitions checked and as the same happens with the Nelson City petition, similar costs will have to be met by the City.

For information only.

L L Kennedy  
Electoral Officer