



Policy Statement

Democracy at Town Hall

Endorsed by the Melbourne City Greens as local policy of the Australian Greens (Victoria). This policy is part of a broader Melbourne City Greens Policy Platform, to be released throughout 2008, prior to the November election.

Background

The Greens believe that the current electoral processes for Melbourne City Council (MCC) are undemocratic, that they contradict the principles of local representation for local government, and require urgent review.

The electoral roll of Melbourne City Council's un-subdivided district will near 100,000 in the 2008 election. The non-residential vote in the City (which is currently about 65%) strongly favours wealthy candidates with the financial capacity to reach the non-residents. As a consequence, residential voters are likely to be short-changed by the current arrangements.

The City of Melbourne Act (2001) also grants the eventual winner of the Leadership Ticket (the election for the Lord Mayor and Deputy Lord Mayor) council representation well above their voter support. As MCC has two elections, one for the Leadership Ticket and one for the seven other Councillors, the final make-up of the council sees the winner of the Leadership Ticket being granted two votes on council, plus another casting vote, on top of their support for the electorate-wide Councillor Ticket, thus unfairly boosting, often duplicating, their council representation.¹

Another bizarre consequence of the City of Melbourne's unique dual-election system is that candidates with strong voter support, who are often excellent potential Councillors, who stand for Lord Mayor or Deputy Lord Mayor but are unsuccessful, are barred from a council seat.

The dozens of other municipalities in Australia that have popularly elected mayors, such as the City of Sydney, allow mayoral candidates to stand as Councillors, and the duplication of council representation is minimised as deputies are generally not popularly elected. The Greens strongly favour an election process that minimises duplication of council representation, and therefore strongly reject the current election model.

Every other Victorian municipality is subject to an Electoral Representation Review at least once every eight years, but the City of Melbourne has its own Act of Parliament which does not allow for these reviews. The Greens believe that the Act needs to be revised, after extensive consultation among the City of Melbourne's electors, to bring about a fairer electoral process and allow for reviews every second term.

Furthermore, Council itself needs to be more accountable to its electors. The Greens believe that Community Forums need to be more than token gestures, and that there should be an opportunity for electors to ask questions of councillors without notice at appropriate Committee Meetings.

Policies

Greens on Melbourne City Council will:

¹ For example, the Act's electoral process has granted 'Melbourne Living' 56%, a majority, of the council votes on the current council despite that ticket receiving only 42% of the Leadership Ticket primary votes and 38% of the Councillor Ticket primary votes.

1. Request the Minister for Local Government to conduct an urgent Electoral Representation Review to examine the structure and entitlements in City of Melbourne elections.
2. Seek to have the following aspects of the City of Melbourne's electoral structure included in any review:
 - The method of election of the Lord Mayor and Deputy Lord Mayor;
 - The merits of wards versus the current un-subdivided district; and
 - Those aspects of the City of Melbourne Act (2001) which allow for electoral procedures and franchising arrangements that are different to every other Victorian municipality.
3. Seek to introduce attendance voting as the default for Melbourne City Council elections.
4. Expand Council's program of Community Forums and People's Forums to ensure that the community has regular opportunities to meet and talk about issues of importance to them.
5. Strengthen the measures of sustainability by which Council's performance is monitored and publicly reported on to residents.

A Green Lord Mayor of Melbourne will:

6. Request the Premier and state government to alter the City of Melbourne Act (2001) to require an Electoral Representation Review at least once every eight years, bringing the City in line with every other Victorian municipality.
7. Lobby Prime Minister Rudd to fulfil his election promise to have Local Government recognised in the Constitution.