



MINUTE OF THE MAYOR

Dated: 25 November, 2019

RE: Proposed Referendum Question

As Councillors are aware, at the 2017 election the community was asked the constitutional referendum question: Do you favour election of the Mayor by Councillors for a term of two (2) years?

As per the requirements of the NSW Electoral Commission, constitutional referendum questions are asked without any background material provided to voters and no information can be provided within polling places. The referendum was passed 54.43% in favour to 47.57%.

Standing outside the polling booth, I lost count of the number of people who complained to me that without context, including arguments for and against, they did not understand why they were being asked the question or what it meant. Many people in the community were shocked to learn that as a result of a question they did not understand North Sydney had lost the position of a popularly elected mayor.

Councillors will also be aware that as a result of the ambiguous way in which the question was framed, we now have ten (10) councillors for the next term and have been required to review our ward boundaries. As we have seen in other councils, an even number of councillors often results in the mayor's name being pulled out of a hat. I don't believe anyone would have voted for that!

There are arguments for and against having a popularly elected mayor, just as there are arguments for and against a mayor being elected by the councillors. I believe our community is well educated and well able to make a decision about how its mayor is chosen. I believe they are open and willing to engage on this topic.

I therefore propose that we put a referendum question to the 2020 election. I also propose that, this time, we undertake an extensive communications campaign to ensure voters understand the context of the question and can consider the pros and cons before polling day.

Since Council has now agreed to two (2) wards, I am proposing that we seek community support for a Council of nine (9), inclusive of a popularly elected mayor.

I therefore recommend:

- 1. THAT** Council support a constitutional referendum question being asked at the local government election on 9 September 2020.
- 2. THAT** the question ask: Do you support reducing the number of councillors from 10 to 9, inclusive of a popularly elected mayor.
- 3. THAT** Council seek the advice of the NSW Electoral Commission on appropriate wording of the question.

4. THAT the General Manager advise the Council of the wording recommended by the Electoral Commission and prepare a communications plan so that the community can be fully informed of arguments for and against before election day.

**COUNCILLOR JILLY GIBSON
MAYOR**