

Media Release

Fairer democratic elections to return for City of Sydney

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The NSW Government is returning democracy and fairness to the City of Sydney by removing rules that favour the votes of businesses over residents in local government elections.

The City of Sydney Amendment Bill 2023 introduced by the Government seeks to reinstate the voting rules for non-residential electors that apply in all other LGAs across NSW.

In 2014, the *City of Sydney Act 1988* was amended to give eligible businesses two votes in council elections, compared to one each for residents.

As a result, businesses that own, lease, or occupy rateable land in the City of Sydney can currently nominate two people to vote on their behalf in council elections.

The Government's new bill will remove this unfair weighting and bring balance back to the system.

The changes will also remove the automatic enrolment of non-residential electors, which does not exist anywhere else in the state, and currently applies regardless of whether these electors wish to vote in City of Sydney elections or not.

Eligible people will still be able to apply to become non-residential electors, however, only one person will be entitled to be enrolled on behalf of corporations or multiple owners, lessees or occupiers.

The 2014 amendment being reversed by this bill cost City of Sydney ratepayers \$9.7 million to establish and approximately \$1 million per year to maintain.

It also resulted in an increase in the number of fines issued by the NSW Electoral Commission.

Following the 2021 council elections, 18,501 failure to vote notices and fines were issued by the Electoral Commission to non-residential electors. This equates to 39 per cent of all non-residential electors for the area.

If passed, this bill will:

- ensure the same rules that govern voting by non-residential electors in all other LGAs in NSW will apply to the City of Sydney
- make the preparation of non-residential elector rolls much less onerous and costly and relieve the City of Sydney of a significant administrative burden
- deliver cost savings for the City of Sydney that can be redirected towards services and infrastructure for the local community

Quotes attributable to Minister for Local Government, Ron Hoenig:

"The current City of Sydney Act gives businesses two votes in local government elections in a deliberate decision orchestrated by the former government to suit its political agenda.

“The amendments were made by the Liberals in a brazen attempt to oust Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore from office and give the party an electoral advantage in controlling the Sydney Town Hall.

“As expected, the amendments have clearly missed their target with thousands of non-resident ratepayers being slugged with fines for not voting instead.

“For nearly a decade, City of Sydney ratepayers have also been forced to foot an annual bill of approximately \$1 million to maintain the non-residential electoral roll.

“Nowhere else in this state do we see one group of voters favoured in this way. It erodes the democratic process and undermines the vital importance of giving residents and ratepayers a balanced voice in local council elections.

“The Labor Government is proud to return the balance to the City of Sydney democratic process, and plan to have the new laws passed and implemented for the September 2024 council elections.”

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