



**Organisation
Sunshine
Coast
Association of
Residents**

Mail: PO Box 105
Coolum Beach 4573
Mobile: 0417 577 881
Email: mail@oscar.org.au

Sunshine Coast Regional Council

Mr. Michael Whittaker

CEO SCRC

11/02/2020

Dear Mr. Whittaker/Michael

RE ICEO

OSCAR has been following up on the establishment and operation of the ICEO (Independent Council Election Observer) and the input from Councils and Councillors, apart from members of the executive of the LGAQ. Our communication with LGAQ goes back to the announcement of the establishment of this body by Justice Robertson at the conclusion of the LGAQ annual conference in October 2019.

We have attached 2 letters in relation to this topic and have quoted from both the attached and other correspondence in order for you to see the thread of our inquiries.

Please note that at all times OSCAR has stressed that we have no issue with Justice Robertson in any way. Our interest is with LGAQ and the process undertaken in the establishment of the ICEO. We apologise that this letter is lengthy, but in the interests of transparency it was felt important that you see why this has piqued our interest.

We should also state that LG election campaigns on the Sunshine Appear to be civilised and as yet there do not appear to be supposed fake news being reported. Our interest is in the process LGAQ followed.

The initial inquiry to LGAQ dated 29/10/19 was as follows:

“At the end of the 2019 LGAQ State Conference Mr Justice Robertson a Queensland judge was interviewed on ABC radio in relation to a “team” that he is chairing consisting of himself, lawyers from King and Co. Lawyers (LGAQ lawyers), together with other as yet unknown members. This team appears to have a role re the 2020 LG elections.

OSCAR is seeking information about this announcement. We would like to know the context, purpose and role of this “team” in the 2020 LG elections.

We look forward to hearing more about this LGAQ initiative”.

The response OSCAR received 7/11/19 was as follows:

Dear Ms Hobson,

Re: Correspondence regarding Justice Robertson chairing for 2020 elections

Thank you for your recent letter regarding the appointment of Justice Robertson as the Independent Council Election Observer.

This newly created role will serve as a completely independent entity and office, separate to the Local Government Association of Queensland and Queensland local governments.

[Type here]

As such, we have forwarded your inquiry to the newly created office with a copy of your original letter so they can respond independently and accurately to your questions regarding the role. Yours sincerely

Greg Hallam"

NB. There has been no response to that letter from the ICEO.

Subsequently in early December the Office of the ICEO released a media release. I have included the media release as an attachment although I would expect that you have it. The final paragraph of the release included the following statement:

"The ICEO has been funded by the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ). However, it will operate at arm's length from the peak body via a service company owned by the senior partners of a Brisbane law firm."

Given the reference to LGAQ funding and involvement of King and Co lawyers (LGAQ legal advisers), identification of the firm was verified by the PR company who issued the Media release, OSCAR wrote a further letter to LGAQ asking a number of questions. That letter is attached. We were particularly concerned re how councils across the state were involved in the decision. The following questions were some of those asked.

1. Was this initiative established by a vote of members on the conference floor?
2. Was a paper prepared re this initiative for councils to consider prior to the 2019 Annual Conference?
3. If the answer to the above questions is NO then who made the decision to go ahead with this initiative and on what grounds?
4. OSCAR asks, why LGAQ would invest rate-payer money in such an initiative without elected councillors being consulted and explaining such to their constituents?
5. (6)Remembering that LGAQ is funded by Local Governments from rate-payers, so for all intents and purposes, it is community money being used to fund this initiative. What then is the budgeted cost of this initiative?

The response OSCAR received is attached. Greg Hallam actually posted this letter of response on an Ipswich election Facebook page after he had sent it to us. The 4th paragraph of the response (unable to copy from PDF) is the section relating to involvement in this issue by councils across the State. The letter from LGAQ indicates that this issue and presumably the amount allocated was relayed to all councils "on all at least four times".

To cut a long story short our questions to SCRC are:

1. Was this issue raised with SCRC councillors?
2. Did any councillors raise questions about the establishment of the ICEO and if so what type of questions?
3. Did SCRC councillors see this as an opportunity to protect their own back?
4. Was the topic raised at an SCRC Ordinary Meeting and a vote taken? If so at which OM did this occur.

We will also be sending Noosa Shire Council the same letter to ascertain whether councillors were aware of the process and how they dealt with it.

Thankyou in anticipation of your response. OSCAR appreciates your willingness to respond to our questions.

Yours sincerely,

Melva Hobson PSM

President OSCAR