



Meet The Candidates Forum - 2017 P.S. Council Elections

The debate on Council Meeting Cycles

Full transcript, 48 min – 56 min 37 Sec.

Moderator:

The first question that we have, this is a little bit of background to that, is that the current Council dispensed with a system, still embraced by a number of other Councils around our Local Government area, whereby Council meetings were held every second Tuesday of the month, which were classified as ‘Committee of The Whole.’ This meant that the agenda was discussed in an informal manner, where Councillors could ask the staff questions and speak more than once. Then an Ordinary Council meeting was held two weeks later, which dealt with the same agenda, but could amend and debate these recommendations again before making a final decision. This allowed sufficient time for the Councillors to consider the complex decisions properly and get advice from staff, and do their homework before they have to vote. This also allows public organisations like ours to consult with their Councillors. The current system of going into committee immediately before a formal vote has resulted in items being forced through without some proper consultation, and a large number of rescission motions being moved, so the question that we pose tonight is:

Question 1:

Would you support a Council meeting cycle that allows sufficient time for consultation of agenda items and community input together with live webcasting of the meetings?

Palmer:

“I 100% support this, I think it is about the getting the community involved in Council and there’s two, two parts to that question there, ah, if we are having a meeting with two weeks, ah, in between, we do have that opportunity to research a lot better than is happening at the moment, if you apply for, ah, public access at the moment, you are getting your five minutes before, and you, you might get a couple of seconds extra if you are lucky, and it might be voted on 5 seconds later.

We need to involve the community, and through webcasting as well, it will allow the audience that’s in this room tonight, the audiences that’s at Karuha, the audiences at the Tillegery, wherever they may be, to sit in their lounge room, and see what’s happening in Council, it’s about getting the community involved in Council, and the decisions that are getting made, so I 100% support this.

Maslin:

100%, same as Ryan. There's been a change in our Council that was done for a reason, the change was to force things through, to get things over the community that they didn't want, it was done by the voting bloc and now it has to change, and that is what we are going to do. As we said, we want the webcams in, we want you to know what's going on, we want to be a conduit to get people back to us, to make the decisions, and if we have the opportunity to do it we can be better Councillors, so 100%, we want to do this one, Thank you.

Dingle:

A separated Committee meeting and council meeting opens up transparency and consultation in the community. Now if you came to our meeting on the 27th of July, it was an agenda of over 500 pages, and supporting documentation that took the entire documentation out to about 1000 pages. Now there was no committee meeting that night, we went straight to a council meeting, normally we have a committee meeting, followed by a council meeting, which has become what we call 'Tick and Flick,' and the best result. The other difficulty with this is, the Council paper is on the public website on a Friday afternoon at five o'clock. It means that the community has really little time to apply for public access, they have until midday on Monday to do that. It also means that they don't have time in which to do their research, and it means that when we go to a Council meeting and we do a committee meeting, and we request information and additional opportunities for site visits, the only way we have to deal with that is to call for a delay, so we need to hold up the vote, so we can effectively provide opportunities to get that information. The whole reason for going to the Council/committee combination, as was correctly said already, is to flick things through quickly before the public knows what has happened, and that, that is not right. I mean it's about transparency, it's about making sure the community understands what's happening and we need to resolve that, and one way to resolve it is to separate committee and council meetings.

Dover:

Thank you. I'm just a little bit puzzled about this because every second week we have a Council meeting and now on the alternate weeks we have briefings, we have briefings every second Tuesday on all the items that are going to be coming up for Council. We have extra information which comes our way which helps us to make decisions about the agenda so, your suggesting that we have a Council meeting once a month? (Dingle interjected "The floor is suggesting, not me") well I support.....inaudable.

I think we should, I would definitely agree with the webcasting, it's a great idea. But I would certainly, If we can work a Council meeting cycle that allows fuller consultation, I'm all for it, but remember we already have every second Tuesday, extra information, extra briefings, extra site visits, and that gives us a lot of information as well for the Council meeting.

Nell:

Ah yes I am happy to support the webcasting of the meetings because it would hopefully will help to reduce some of the, ah, unpleasantness and ah, I guess the behaviour problems that some of us are have witnessed on the floor of the council.

As far as having the meeting cycle of having a Committee meeting followed by a Council meeting, it certainly makes a lot of sense, and given these debates and the like, however for TRRA to have been watching our meeting cycles very closely, some of our meetings over the last 12 months have actually been half and half needed.....Because policy items that are not worth coming back for are bad news to deal with, and could be dealt with in a committee followed by a council meeting and that needs to be said.

Simms:

I'll make it very simple, yes and yes. I went to the last Council meeting and it was quite honestly embarrassing sitting there and watch how they carried on so I'm for anything that's for transparency and consultation.

Abbott:

Ah, listening to the groans in the audience, I think it is quite clear that there is an issue here with transparency in the current Council, and I think we do need to change the current system now, none of this rushing through the agenda notice on a Friday afternoon for a Tuesday meeting, it's just not feasible for you guys, and it's not feasible for the Councillors, so I absolutely think that they need to change the system and go back to the old way to allow more time for that.

As for the webcasting, not only do I support that, but I also support uploading it to the Council website after a meeting and leaving it on the website, so if you can't tune in during a Council meeting on a Tuesday night, you can come back to it, you come back to it in months to come, and then go back and watch the Council meeting, that's what I support and that's what I would like to see if I'm elected to Port Stephens Council.