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The Hon. Mr Harry Woods, M.P
Minister for Local Government

Dear Mr Woods,

I am writing as a voter in the LGA of Hawkesbury City. I have often noted that many aspirants to Council are quite vocal in espousing a particular platform prior to their election. As someone who has followed the affairs of my local Council keenly for many years, I am also aware of how a Councillor's voting patterns in Council meetings often stand in stark contrast to the platform upon which they stood, once they are elected.

Our Council adopted an electronic means of voting in meetings some years ago. By means of two buttons at their desk, Councillors can activate a red or green light beside their name on a central panel, and which then tallies and displays a number for the total vote for and against any given motion. Trivial or uncontroversial motions are still carried by voice.

At present, only the success or failure of a motion *in toto* is recorded in the Council minutes. I understand that the 1999 Meetings (Regulation) amendment to the 1992 Local Government Act permits Councillors to request to have the minutes note their dissent from a decision, or to call for a division. I have never, in many years, seen this prerogative invoked, and there is no recourse for the public to force a division at all.

My letter to you today is to request that your Government act to enforce far greater accountability on Councils, and ensure that on *most* matters the votes of individual Councillors are recorded in the Council minutes.

Most people in the general public, even those with a keen interest in politics, do not attend Council meetings. Without the acute attention of the Press or from people in the gallery, the fleeting results of a motion are lost- and the electronic board is cleared within a couple of seconds of the success or failure of the motion as a whole being known. Voters are denied vital information they are entitled to. At the end of the four year term, the majority of voters have no idea of who has voted for what- information they would certainly choose to have if it were available.

I can quote innumerable examples from the current crop of Hawkesbury Councillors who sought *re*-election at the last poll. Examples where, had the public known of the gross hypocrisy between platform and subsequent voting behaviour, those Councillors would have most certainly been unsuccessful in their campaign. A

Councillor who advocates Women's services in our City but votes for the establishment of a brothel. Councillors who undertook to preserve the Rural character of our region, but who, at present, have supported practically every development application put to Council! I am sure that the situation in other LGA's is similar or worse.

I have spoken to our City's General Manager, Mr Gary McCully, who agrees that since the system currently in use is already capable of recording individual votes, it would be a simple procedural matter to have them recorded in the minutes, either manually or through a computer log- something he indicates is technically feasible to implement.

There are obviously matters when individual votes are of no interest to anyone, even myself. Procedural motions that are currently carried by voice vote could indeed still be done in this way. On matters that are significant enough to attract public attention, the vote is invariably registered electronically as it is, meaning that no disruption or delay would occur to meetings as a result of this additional entry to the minutes.

Another potential advantage would be seen in the event of a matter of great public interest coming before the Council. A procedure could be legislated whereby a petition of sufficient size could be submitted to the General Manager before a Council meeting. The existence of this petition would be announced by the Chairperson before any vote on the issue in question. The petition would compel the Council to publish the votes of individual Councillors on that vote in the next issue of the local paper.

I do not foresee any legal or technical reason why this innovation could not be introduced State-wide at the earliest opportunity. It would clearly allow voters to force far greater accountability upon Councils. If a Councillor believed that voting contrary to their pre-election platform was warranted by specific circumstances, they are quite at liberty to justify themselves, as well they ought to. At present, they often escape scrutiny altogether.

Respectfully Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nathan Zamprogno', written in a cursive style.

Nathan Zamprogno.