

Members of the Victorian Remuneration Tribunal,

Thankyou for the opportunity to make a submission. I am firmly of the view that Councillor allowances are grossly inadequate.

Role of Council members

I am a sitting Councillor in one of Victoria's most populous Councils, [REDACTED]. First elected in [REDACTED], I represent [REDACTED] Ward. This is the largest Ward in the municipality, with more than [REDACTED] residents, a major university, large commercial and industrial precincts, a national growth zone, vast income and wealth disparity, and a highly diverse multicultural population.

On a daily basis I field constituent queries from all over the municipality. We have approx. [REDACTED] people living in [REDACTED] and many of them seek out Councillors they feel represent them, even if we aren't their Ward Councillor. I've had people call me after 10pm, on Christmas Day, every weekend – the phone never stops.

I have, at times, sat on as many as 9 council committees and external groups in my role as Councillor. At one stage I was Chair of 3 of these. These bodies are often vital for inter-Council or inter-governmental work, for policy development, and for community consultations and strengthening.

Councils have wide-ranging responsibilities under more than 120 pieces of Victorian legislation. Councillors are required to make decisions which relate to these responsibilities and to a large degree own the risk for making these decisions. That is an extraordinary amount of diverse and complex information to be across for any individual. As a Councillor I have no staff who work directly for me or assist me personally in discharging my role.

I regularly have multiple nights a week dedicated to Council meetings, often running from 5 or 6pm until 10 or 11pm. We receive no loading for night shifts or weekend work and no annual leave loading.

Purpose of allowances

I am not independently wealthy. Therefore, the hours I spend on Council work need to contribute towards my household income so that myself and my family can afford to live. It's really that simple. Having a substandard allowance makes it difficult for less wealthy people to participate in local democracy, including young people, single parents, pensioners, women, migrants and First Nations people. It also has the potential to have a negative impact on attracting people who earn higher incomes, as many are required to take a very big pay cut to contribute to Council.

A Councillor representing a Category 3 Council could realistically be paid less than \$10 per hour for a standard week of Council work at the lower end of the allowance range. Their CEO may be sitting around the same meeting table being paid 20 times as much. Senior staff in the charitable sector are often paid \$50-75 or more per hour. Council allowances do not even remotely compete with other roles people take in order to 'give back' to the community, let alone salaries in the corporate or government sectors.

Allowance category factors

Councillors representing larger municipalities necessarily have a higher workload. In my experience it is not the case that having more Councillors means that each individual Councillor works less. Relationships must be built and maintained with more colleagues in a challenging and often competitive environment. Councillors at large Councils will also have more senior staff to liaise with, more constituent contacts from across the municipality, and a more diverse local environment.

The Mayor

In my experience the role of the Mayor has been an ineffective one, and the large disparity between Mayoral allowance and Councillor allowances has been unwarranted. Mayors are not elected based on experience, skill or merit, and the role is largely awarded to members of dominant factions. Were the disparity in allowances less pronounced it may be treated less as a prize and viewed for what it is when performed properly – a complex and challenging role. This may be different at other Councils.

Best regards,

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