

"This is the peer reviewed version of the following article: [Australian Journal of Public Administration, 2015, Online first 12 JAN 2015], which has been published in final form at [http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1467-8500.12057]. This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Wiley Terms and Conditions for Self-Archiving."

Is There a Case for Mandating Directly Elected ‘Semi-Executive’ Mayors
in Australian Local Government? Lessons from the 2012 Queensland Local
Government Elections¹

Bligh Grant

UNE Business School,

Armidale NSW 2351

Email: bgrant5@une.edu.au

Brian Dollery

UNE Centre for Local Government

Armidale NSW 2351

Email: bdollery@une.edu.au

Michael Kortt

Southern Cross Business School

Southern Cross University

Michael.kortt@scu.edu.au

¹ Address for correspondence: Dr Bligh Grant, UNE Business School, Armidale, NSW, 2351. Email: bgrant5@une.edu.au

Is There a Case for Mandating Directly Elected ‘Semi-Executive’ Mayors in Australian Local Government? Lessons from the 2012 Queensland Local Government Elections

Abstract: A ‘semi-executive’ model for Australian mayors, inclusive of direct election, is presently being promoted by some elements in the Australian local sector (see, in particular, Sansom, 2012). This paper takes advantage of the differences across Australia’s federation to examine the reality of directly elected mayors in Queensland, especially the results of local government elections held in 2012. It is argued that several factors contributed to the high turnover rates of both mayors and councillors, including the 2012 Queensland state election and the 2008 amalgamation process. However, the requirement for directly elected mayors was an important factor contributing to what the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ, 2012, 12) described as a ‘significantly high’ proportion of ‘corporate knowledge’ being lost. Moreover, the direct election of mayors, in particular those charged with ‘semi-executive’ authority, is fraught with problems and thus should not to be implemented in all Australian local government systems.

Keywords: Directly elected mayors; elected executives; leadership; local government; Queensland.

1. INTRODUCTION

In common with other countries (see, for example, Borraz and John 2004; Elcock 2008), leadership arrangements have commanded increasing recent interest in Australian local government. In particular, the option of directly electing mayors, as opposed to their selection through a ‘cabinet-style’ councillor process, has been the focus of reforms in several jurisdictions. For example, NSW introduced the option for electing mayors at large in the *Local Government Act 1993*, with 32 of the 152 councils in that jurisdiction presently choosing to decide on their mayors by this method (NSW Government 1993, §227; DLG [NSW] 2012). Similarly, several capital cities and other local government jurisdictions presently operate under a variety of directly elected mayoral systems (see, for instance, NSW Government 1988, §§23 and 23A; Government of South Australia 1999, §51).

In tandem to these legislative reforms, scholarly interest in Australian local government leadership proceeds apace. This line of inquiry has typically focussed upon the relationship between mayors and their appointed counterparts, together with an assessment of the benefits of direct mayoral election. For example, following a series of qualitative interviews, Martin and Aulich (2012, 16) concluded that ‘there is a body of opinion that a Mayor elected by a popular vote has a stronger role in relationship to the CEO than if elected by the council’.

While this research has been largely descriptive in nature, a *Discussion Paper* by Sansom (2012), published under the auspices of the Australian Centre for Excellence in Local Government (ACELG), has drawn on selected international examples

(specifically New Zealand and England) and argued the case for introducing a 'semi-executive' form of directly elected mayor across all Australian local government jurisdictions. It might be understandable that an organisation such as ACELG would argue for an increase in their constituents' authority. Indeed, in the current debate it is frequently assumed that any move toward installing directly elected mayors is necessarily progressive, in a fashion which is almost historicist. However, as Svara (2008, 112) reminded us, the council-manager form of local government (the system overwhelmingly prevalent in Australia) was originally introduced in 1915 in the United States in response to widespread claims of corruption being endemic to the mayor-council form – a type of local government that is endorsed in Sansom's (2012) preferred 'semi-executive' model (Sansom, 2012, 28; see also Grant, Dollery and Gow, 2011).

Given the lack of reflection that characterises the current debate, it is possible to develop an alternative proposition: Can the implementation of directly elected, semi-executive mayoral arrangements have negative outcomes? If so, what are these and – perhaps more practically – how are they to be assessed? One of the advantages of federal systems of government is that different jurisdictions are afforded the opportunity of pursuing different policies. In order to explore this issue, rather than casting abroad to examine 'strong mayor' models in multivarious local government systems globally (see, for example, Mouritzen and Svara, 2002) this paper examines the results of the 2012 Queensland local government elections. Local government in Queensland is distinctive in Australia in that mayors have been directly elected since 1920 (Tucker 1981, 382) with various forms of elected executive models being adopted

by the City of Brisbane since 1925 (Tucker, 1994). This fact affords us the unique opportunity of reflecting upon the consequences of directly electing mayors in the Australian context, in particular if direct election was an element to a 'semi-executive' form as has been advocated by Sansom (2012).

The results of the 2012 Queensland local government elections were notable in this regard. First, it saw extremely high turnover rates of both mayors and councillors. The LGAQ (2012, 13) summarised the ramifications of these turnover rates by observing that: '[a] significantly higher proportion of "corporate knowledge" has been lost from the ranks of councillors in 2012 compared with 2008 and 2004'. Second, the 2012 elections also witnessed a high proportion of 'new mayors': of the 73 local government bodies (LGBs) in Queensland, 44 (or 60.3 per cent) saw new mayors elected to office. Furthermore, these 44 new mayors were comprised of only 13 sitting councillors; 31 were new to elected office in local government (LGAQ, 2012, 12). This electoral outcome sheds an entirely different light on the question of directly elected mayors compared to the much rosier hue painted by ACELG, particularly if these mayors are expected to exercise effacious 'semi-executive' authority.

In anticipation of a result along these lines, the LGAQ appointed the former Sunshine Coast Mayor, Bob Abbot, in December 2011 as its first 'mayor mentor' (LGAQ, 2011). It remains to be seen what the long-term consequences of such an election result will be. However, in the present context, the question to be examined is to what extent the electoral form of directly elected mayors was responsible for the loss in 'institutional memory' as noted by the LGAQ? Put differently, what other factors

could have led to such an extraordinary result? Moreover, what are the implications for the introduction of semi-executive elected mayors in other Australian jurisdictions?

In order to explore these questions, the paper is divided into five main parts. Section two provides an account of Sansom's (2012) directly elected semi-executive model alongside the primary justifications for recommending it to Australian local government *writ large*. Section three provides an account of Queensland local government and its politics more generally, arguing that the nature of local government in that state, alongside the forced amalgamation program of 2008 and the state election of 2012 must be viewed as factors contributing to the 2012 local government election outcome. Section four examines the results of both the (post-amalgamation) 2008 and 2012 Queensland local government elections, assessing the comparative outcomes of the mayoral and councillor elections. The paper ends in section five by offering some observations on the questions we have posed, especially the implications of adopting directly elected mayors across other Australian local government jurisdictions. We argue that given the experience of Queensland, directly elected mayorsought not be complusorily introduced across Australian local government jurisdictions.

2. THE ACELG's (SANSOM, 2012)'SEMI-EXECUTIVE', DIRECTLY ELECTED MAYORAL MODEL

The ACELG was formed in 2008 as a component to (then) Rudd Labor administration's championing of the Australian local government sector (see, for example, Grant and Dollery, 2011). Operating under a multi-faceted mandate (ACELG, 2013) but with an

emphasis upon being ‘practitioner driven’ (ACELG, 2009) the Centre has subsequently produced a quantum of research examining a range of issues pertaining to Australian local government, including structural reform, financial sustainability, rural-remote and Indigenous local government and governance and strategic leadership (ACELG 2013).

In 2012 the Centre issued a *Discussion Paper* ‘Australian Mayors: What Can and Should They Do’, authored by its then Director, Graham Sansom. After asserting *inter alia* that ‘the question of whether a “separation of powers” between elected councillors and managers is meaningful and appropriate in the local government context’ (Sansom, 2012, p, 10) and that ‘calls for more effective local leadership abound’ (Sansom, 2012, 19) the *Discussion Paper* moved to posit a ‘semi-executive’ model for mayors in Australian jurisdictions, based upon extant legislation in Australia, England and New Zealand. This model was summarised as such:

Table 1: Possible Mayoral Roles and Legislation

Function or prerogative	Legislative provision (and origin)
[1] Principal member of the council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead and control the business of the council (Brisbane) • Chair and manage meetings (All/Qld) • Speak on behalf of the council as the council's principal representative (NT) • Conduct civic and ceremonial functions (All)
[2] Community leadership and engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulate and promote a vision for the area (Auckland) • Provide leadership and guidance to the community (Adelaide) • Establish processes and mechanisms to engage with the community(Auckland)
[3] Selection of deputy mayor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appoint the deputy mayor (Auckland) OR • Mayor and deputy to stand for election as a team (Melbourne)
[4] Effective political governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish committees of the governing body and appoint the chairperson of each committee (Auckland) • Oversee the councillors in the performance of their functions and in the exercise of their powers (Tas) • Represent accurately the policies and decisions of the council (Tas)
[5] Strategic and corporate planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead the development and implementation of council plans, policies, and budgets (Auckland/Qld) • Propose the adoption of the budget (Qld)
[6] Guiding the chief executive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead, manage, and provide advice and strategic direction to the chief Executive officer on the implementation of council policies (Qld/SA) • Exercise, in cases of necessity, the policy-making functions of the governing body of the council between meetings (NSW) • Liaise with the chief executive officer on behalf of the other councillors (Qld/Tas) • Direct the chief executive officer in accordance with the council's policies (Qld) • Conduct performance appraisals of the chief executive officer (Qld)
[7] Inter-government relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in inter-governmental relationships at regional, State and national levels (Adelaide)
[8] Exercise delegated authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercise such other functions as the council determines (NSW/SA).

Source: Sansom (2012, 30).

Examining the categories down the left-hand column of Table 1 (i.e., [1] through to [8]) we can note that some elements of the model are uncontroversial in the Australian context. For example, for mayors to ‘Speak on behalf of the council as the council's principal representative’ [1] and for them to ‘Articulate and promote a vision for the area’ [2] are familiar in a context where by far the dominant model of council authority is the (unitary) council-manager form, which nevertheless entails a ‘separation of powers’ between the mayor (elected from the body of councillors) and an appointed

executive (General Manager/CEO) – albeit a separation of powers based upon convention.

However, moving down the categories in Table 1, also discernible are roles that step over what Sansom (2012, 10) himself referred to as the ‘separation of powers’ divide. These functions include *inter alia* the appointment of deputy mayors by mayors themselves [3]; the authority to rearrange the internal structure of a council post-election [4]; the mayor having a guiding hand on ‘plans, policies *and* budgets’ (emphasis added) [5] and for mayors to fulfil an individual supervisory role over the appointed executive, inclusive of performance appraisals [6]. In short, while not recommending the replacement of the council-manager form with the mayor-council or ‘elected executive’ form of local government (see, for example, Grant, Dollery and Gow, 2011) the prescribed roles for mayors comprise a ‘semi-executive’ type.

Further, while the fine detail of these mooted reforms are critically evaluated elsewhere (Grant, Dollery and Kortt, 2012), in the present context it is possible to distill Sansom’s (2012) broad arguments for the implementation of such a model in the Australian context into three central claims. First, that directly elected mayors will increase the *democratic legitimacy* of local governments. Sansom (2012, 14) argued that the direct election of mayors results in the incumbents obtaining a ‘personal mandate’, which enables them to ‘appeal directly to constituents.’ Second, that directly elected mayors are *more effective operationally*. For example, Sansom (2012, 24) stated: ‘Even though mayors may not enjoy specific additional powers ... a personal mandate... [allows them] ... to work more effectively with central governments ... and to exercise

more influence within the council organisation'. Third, that directly elected mayors *increase accountability*, in the sense that '[w]here people know who is in charge, they know whom to call to account' (Lyons Inquiry; 2007, 17; for a detailed discussion on this point, see Svava 2008).

Changes of this type to the Westminster distinction between politics and administration are by no means uncontroversial in the Australian context. For example, Rhodes and Wanna (2007) advanced strong theoretical reasons against administrators encroaching upon decision-making in public policy in the name of so-called 'public value creation' (see, for example, Grant and Fisher, 2011). In what follows we argue that there are more prosaic reasons for exercising caution in blurring the politics-administration divide from the 'other direction', namely when local politicians are granted authority over those activities which, have been the legislated purview of administrators since the modernisation of all local government acts from 1989.

Further, seen in this light, the *assertion* of the LGAQ (2012) concerning the 'significantly high' loss of 'corporate knowledge' following the 2012 Queensland local government elections due to high turnover rates can be assessed as precisely that. What the LGAQ means by 'corporate knowledge'², and whether or not the length of incumbency is positively associated with it are empirical questions that lie beyond the scope of this paper. Rather, in what follows we argue that while other factors can be identified as contributing to high turnover rates of both mayors and councillors in the 2012 Queensland local government elections, the institutional form of direct election

² The authors would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing to the contestability of the claim by the LGAQ (2012).

itself has the capacity to imperil the stability of local government , particularly when wedded to a ‘semi-executive’ model. It is to the experience of Queensland that we now turn.

3. SETTING THE SCENE

3.1. *Nature of Queensland Local Government*

As we have seen, Queensland is the only state where mayors are directly elected for all local government areas. Additionally, the direct election of mayors in Queensland has a long and interesting lineage. J. D. Tucker (1981, 382) noted that the introduction of directly elected mayors was first mooted in Queensland in 1915 as an element to the Labor Party’s overall plan ‘to make local government more responsive to the community as a whole’, coinciding with the shift from ratepayer franchise to single-vote adult franchise and the introduction of triennial elections. Introduced to the Queensland lower house by the Ryan Government in 1915, this tranche of reforms was initially rejected by the Legislative Council, but was eventually enacted into law in 1920. According to Tucker (1981, 382), the effect was to ‘place Queensland’s local government system decades ahead of that of most other states’. In particular, ‘[t]he reforms also created the conditions necessary for Queensland’s long-standing high-profile mayor [or ‘chairman’ in shires] tradition, mayors having developed an executive role during the [previous] voluntarist period’.

Three other reforms of this period are of note. First, the consolidation of local government areas to the status of cities - as opposed to towns or shires - in

Queensland's regions, so that 'by 1919 the total number of local authorities was reduced from 186 to 171' (Tucker, 1981, 382). Second, the introduction of the Greater Brisbane Scheme in 1925, which saw the number of councils in Queensland reduce by 17 and authority for multiple functions being turned over to the Greater Brisbane Council (Tucker, 1981, 383). Third was the introduction, initially to Greater Brisbane Council and subsequently in 1936 to all Queensland local governments, of general competence powers, beyond *ultra vires* (Tucker, 1981, 384) – a status that was achieved several decades earlier than in other state jurisdictions (Wensing, 1997). As such, Queensland local government has historically been characterised by popularly elected municipal leadership exercising a broader range of powers than in other Australian jurisdictions.

3.2. 2008 Queensland Local Government Amalgamations

The second major influence upon 2012 Queensland local government elections was the amalgamation process commencing from 2004 and culminating, on 26 July 2008, with the forced consolidation of local authorities, reducing their number from 157 to just 73. While compulsory consolidation is typical of structural reforms to Australian local government, it was the nature of the reforms in Queensland that was to have a resounding effect.

Fearing that councils were to be subject to a program of compulsory amalgamation, from 2005 the LGAQ undertook several steps, including the release of the *Discussion Paper* entitled *Size, Shape and Sustainability (SSS) of Queensland Local Government* to manage reform of the sector. Dollery, Chong Mun Ho and Alin (2007,

2) have argued that ‘in essence, the SSS process involved cooperation and collaboration between state government agencies and local councils on a scale unrivalled in the history of Australian local government reform’.

Yet in a *volte face* on 7 April 2007 the Queensland government announced that it had renounced the SSS framework and instead appointed a Local Government Reform Commission ‘to make recommendations on compulsory council mergers by August 2007 to enable the election of new councils on 15 March 2008’ (Dollery, Chong Mun Ho and Alin, 2007, 3). After only two months, on 27 July 2007 the Reform Commission released its two-volume *Final Report* entitled *Report of the Local Government Reform Commission* (Queensland Government [Local Government Reform Commission], 2007), which recommended that the number of local councils be reduced from 157 to just 73.

In this particular episode of forced amalgamation in Australian local government, not only did the Queensland Government proceed arbitrarily, but the extraordinary threat of criminal action against individual local councillors who sought to hold local plebiscites on amalgamation led to a dispute between the (then) Beattie Government and the (then) Howard Government (see, for example, Spooner and Magarey, 2007). It also rendered the issue of amalgamation a party-political one, with the (then) State opposition subsequently promising to ‘giving local people a choice about de-amalgamation if elected’ (LNP, 2012).

Following the election of the LNP at the Queensland election 24 March 2012, compulsory polls were held in the former shires of Mareeba, Livingstone, Douglas and

Noosa on 9 March 2013 (DLGCR&R, 2013a). All four voted in favour of de-amalgamation, with the new councils (the boundaries of which were required to be the same as those prior to amalgamation) to ‘commence operations’ 1 January 2014 (DLGCR&R, 2013b)³.

3.3. 2012 Queensland State Election

The outcome of the Queensland election held 24 March 2012 was extraordinary. Of the 89 seats, a mere seven were won by the ALP, 78 by the LNP, with Bob Katter’s new Australia Party winning two seats alongside two independents. This represented a swing of 15.2 per cent to the LNP, or 13.7 per cent on a two party preferred (2PP) basis (that is, in seats where LNP and Labor candidates achieved first and second place under the preferential voting system employed in Queensland (see, for example, Green, 2012). In moving from 34 to 78 seats, the LNP had won the largest majority in Queensland political history. Conversely the ALP, in moving from 51 to just 7 seats, had suffered a 15.7 per cent swing against it, ‘the largest recorded swing in Australian political history’ (Holmes, 2012, 37; see also ECQ, 2012a).

Scott Prasser (2012) offered four ‘key reasons’ for Labor’s decline. First, the loss of Queensland’s AAA credit rating, followed by the sudden privatisation of several key utilities (rail, road, posts and forestry) had a detrimental effect upon trade union support for the ALP. Second, questions of integrity arose surrounding the Parliamentary ALP following scandals involving (former) Minister Gordon Nuttall and the controversial

³ The results of these compulsory polls were by no means resounding. Only Noosa registered a clear majority in favour (81.62 per cent) with Mareeba, Livingstone and Douglas recording majorities of 57.9, 56.59 and 57.64 respectively (ECQ, 2013).

resolution of the ‘death-in-custody’ of Cameron Doomadgee on Palm Island. Third, delays in infrastructure development perceived as vital to the burgeoning of the South East Queensland growth corridor depressed support for the ALP. Finally, following a rancorous history (see, for example, ABC, 2012, 2-4), the formation of a united single conservative party in Queensland politics – in the form of the Liberal National Party (LNP) – in July 2008 galvanised opposition support (Holmes 2012, 3).

While an extraordinary political event in its own right, we contend that two components of the state poll held 24 March significantly affected the local government polls held 28 April 2012. The first can be described as ‘election fatigue’ due to the two elections being so close together. Second, the installation of the Mayor of Brisbane, Campbell Newman, as leader of the newly formed LNP from outside the ranks of the parliamentary party reinforced the strong leadership model historically prevalent in Queensland and the appeal of ‘outsider’ candidates (see, for example, Ward, in Holmes, 2012, 43).

In sum, 2012 was a tumultuous year in Queensland state politics, witnessing the culmination of several forces of change that had been present for some time. The historical constitution of Queensland local government, the acrimonious program of forced amalgamation and the 2012 Queensland State election all must be assessed as significant factors affecting the results of the 2012 local government elections. It is to a closer analysis of these and the role played by directly elected mayors, that we now turn.

4. QUEENSLAND LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS 2012: RESULTS

The LGAQ (2012) summarised the election results (ECQ, 2012b) which we consider and critically reflect upon. In terms of the nominations for both mayoral and councillor positions, several points are salient. First, seventeen mayors, or 23%, chose not to recontest the 2012 election. The LGAQ (2012, 3-4) noted that this was fewer than the 51 mayors (or 32%) who chose not to recontest in 2008. However, the number of local councils had been reduced prior to the 2008 elections, from 157 to 73. Accordingly, the percentages for the two elections are not directly comparable since 84 local government areas ceased to exist. More revealing is the fact that only 20 mayors had chosen not to recontest in the elections both of 2004 and 2000 (LGAQ, 2012, 3). This represented a mere 13% for the 157 positions that then existed. Thus, whereas almost one quarter of directly elected mayors ‘threw in the towel’ prior to the 2012 election, only 13% chose to do so for the two elections immediately prior to amalgamation. This is despite the fact that turnover rates for mayors and councillors combined had historically been high – 39% in 2004 and 36.6% in 2008.

The LGAQ (2012, 3) listed two reasons to explain the high turnover rates in Queensland local government. First, it cited ‘the demanding nature of the role of councillor’. Second, it emphasised the ‘increasing volatility in the electorate with local government issues now attracting greater media and public interest’, such that ‘the electorate can more easily influence and bring about changes at the local government level’. We conjecture that this rationale would more acutely impinge on directly elected mayors. In fact, both reasons – the demanding nature of the role due to the ‘personal

mandate' achieved, and the associated increase in direct accountability – conform to Sansom's (2012) arguments for direct election in his 'semi-executive' model. However, both are 'reciprocal' in nature, as suggested by the LGAQ (2012). Furthermore, without the direct support of fellow councillors (and in some instances, straining under conflict with them and with appointed executives) many mayors may well have decided to not contest more than one election.

Second, the LGAQ (2012, 4) noted that 'whilst the number of nominations [for both mayor and councillor positions] dropped by 6.3% [from 2008] interest in standing for Local Government election remained at high levels'. In addition, post-amalgamation, more candidates stood as a proportion of available positions (2.73 in 2012 and 2.95 in 2008) compared to the elections immediately prior to amalgamation (2.1 in 2004 and in 2000). Furthermore, the LGAQ (2012, 4) noted that 'nominations for the position of mayor remained at record levels', with an average of 3.8 mayoral candidates per council, similar to the 2008 election (3.9), and representing an increase from the number of candidates in the two elections immediately prior to amalgamation (3.4 in 2004 and 3 in 2000). Moreover, the LGAQ (2012, 4) also observed that 'in 54 councils (74%) there were fields [of candidates] for mayors more than twice as large as the [number of] positions available'. While this was remarkably consistent with 2008 (78%), the number of 'crowded' mayoral contests increased significantly post-amalgamation, with the comparable figures in 2004 and 2000 being 46% and 40% respectively. In addition, several large electorates had 'very large numbers' of candidates, with this figure increasing for the post-amalgamation elections (42% and

40% respectively for the 2012 and 2008 elections) from the pre-amalgamation elections (33% in 2004 and 30% in 2000).

The increasingly crowded nature of mayoral elections may simply have been a result of council amalgamations. There were far fewer positions available while a roughly proportionate number of people remain interested in running for office. Moreover, local government politicians in Queensland are remunerated at considerably higher rates than in other jurisdictions and then they were pre-amalgamation.

However, set against these arguments, it is also possible that the increased authority conferred upon directly elected mayors of considerably larger and financially more empowered councils may have a greater intrinsic appeal to a broader range of people. Similarly, it is difficult to completely dismiss, although equally difficult to measure⁴, what might be labelled the ‘Campbell Newman effect’: the idea that an ‘outsider’ directly elected by popular vote will be in a better position to ‘fix’ the perceived problems of an individual local government area.

The LGAQ (2012, 4) also observed that ‘whilst the increase in the actual number of female nominations experienced over the last four elections ceased, they were, as a percentage of total nominations, at record levels’, reaching 29.2% of all nominations in 2012, up from 28.7% in 2008, and 27% and 26% in 2004 and 2000 respectively. Further, women candidates comprised 23.6% of all mayoral candidates in 2012, compared with only 17% in 2008.

⁴ We would like to thank an anonymous referee for suggesting that we introduce this caveat to this line of reasoning so as to not overemphasise the point.

The LGAQ (2012) also made several observations with respect to the results for the mayoral elections. Ten mayors were elected unopposed; six of these were returning while one of the remaining four was a sitting councillor. Further, 29 sitting mayors were returned (including the six unopposed) comprising 40% of all mayors (LGAQ, 2012, 7). Set against this ‘rusted on’ (or at least experienced) leadership – as noted in the introduction to our discussion – the LGAQ (2012, 12) also stressed that ‘44 new mayors (60.3%) made up of 13 sitting councillors (17.8%) and 31 new candidates (42.5%) were elected’, of whom 21 ‘have had no experience in the role of mayor or councillor’. It is noteworthy that these figures were not remarkably different from the 2008 election results, which saw 33 new mayors (45.2%) comprised of 15 sitting councillors (20.5%) and 18 new candidates (24.7%’. Moreover, 46 new mayors (37%) were elected in 2004 (LGAQ, 2012, 12). Nevertheless, the number of new mayors did increase by 33% from 33 new mayors in 2008 to 44 new majors in 2012.

As noted earlier, the ‘novice mayor’ phenomenon caused the LGAQ (2012) the greatest degree of concern, and induced it to recommend the appointment of a ‘mayor mentor’ in late 2011 (LGAQ, 2011). It is at this point that the model of directly elected mayors, and in particular the ‘semi-executive’ model proposed by Sansom (2012) is at its most vulnerable. While the on-going implications of the Queensland election results are impossible to gauge at this stage, we return to its potential affects at the conclusion of our discussion.

In terms of elected councillors, the LGAQ (2012, 12) noted that ‘a much higher percentage of sitting councillors (70.83%) were successful in their bid for re-election in

2012, up 18.33% compared with 2008', whereas 'a slightly higher percentage of new candidates (26.1%) were successful for their bid in 2012, up 3.9% compared with 2008' (LGAQ, 2012, 13). It might be tempting to argue that these councillors, alongside appointed executives, are presently providing a relative measure of political stability in Queensland local government. However, this hardly fulfils the promise of directly elected mayors and the 'semi-executive' model held out by the ACELG (Sansom, 2012).

5. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

This paper has been primarily concerned with assessing the merits of directly electing mayors in Australian local government, and in particular the 'semi-executive' model proposed by Sansom (2012), in the light of recent experience in Queensland local government. We raised various questions. In addressing our first specific question – the extent to which directly elected mayors were responsible for the 'significant loss of institutional memory' in Queensland local government – we have argued that this assertion by the LGAQ (2012) while understandable, is an empirical question that lies beyond the scope of this paper. Further, we have described in some detail other factors that influenced the astonishing result of the 2012 local government elections. These factors can be listed as (a) the nature of Queensland local government; (b) the contextual influence of the 2008 amalgamation process; and (c) the contextual influence of the 2012 state election, where a 'place-based' leadership style was heightened, then

personified in Campbell Newman, to combine with a sense of electoral fatigue in Queensland politics.

It is conceivable that just as big a rout of councillor positions may have taken place if mayors were elected by the cabinet model in Queensland. However, this does not mitigate against the argument that, just as directly elected mayors may increase the ‘democracy’ (albeit of a particular type, exemplified in the idea of a ‘personal mandate’), the ‘operational capacity’ and the ‘accountability’ of local governments (as Sanson (2012) argued) so too these traits can be radically eroded through the mechanism of the ballot box due to the legislative requirement for direct election. This is principally the case with respect to operational capacity, which is a primary responsibility of local government. If a directly elected, ‘semi-executive’ mayor is charged with responsibility for (amongst other functions) providing a ‘vision’ for a local area, overseeing councillor roles, supervising the appointed executive, and liaising with other types of governance, it is difficult to envisage a novice mayor undertaking these roles with any degree of competence. It needs hardly be stressed that this would disappoint their constituents and, possibly, undermine the legitimacy of local government more generally.

The alternative scenario, where a mayor is selected by all councillors – thereby achieving an *executive*, as well as a popular legitimacy – and where councillors can move collectively to both govern and administer, is far more reassuring. In examining the relationship between state and local politics, as we have sought to do in the account of Queensland presented here, it is possible to speculate that a requirement for overall

political stability in the face of radical change in state politics may well override the agendas of reform-driven mayors. This requirement is far more likely to be achieved by mayors elected through the 'cabinet mode'. It may well be the case that in a situation of rapid councillor turnover, the mayor is selected by default (i.e. the last person left from the previous council becomes the mayor for the new term). At least this option is available under the cabinet model, whereas under direct mayoral election it is not. In this sense, the layers of Australia's federal system balance each other; in this sense also the centrality of the cabinet model to that system is emphasised.

This leads to the final consideration of the paper. In light of the study of Queensland presented here, the idea that directly elected mayors be compulsorily legislated for across Australian local government jurisdictions ought to be rejected. If there is a perceived requirement for stronger, more popular leadership in Australian local government, it can be accommodated adequately – and democratically – with the implementation of the method in NSW whereby a referendum to move to popular election can be held.

REFERENCES

- ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] News. 'Queensland Votes. 2012 Queensland Election Summary.' URL: < <http://www.abc.net.au/elections/qld/2012/guide/preview.htm> >. Consulted 8 November 2012.
- ACELG [Australian Centre for Excellence in Local Government]. 2009 '2009 Annual Report.' URL: < http://www.acelg.org.au/upload/documents/1273456881_ACELG_Annual_Report_-_2009.pdf >. Consulted 21 November 2012.
- ACELG [Australian Centre for Excellence in Local Government]. 2013. 'Home >> About ACELG'. URL: < <http://www.acelg.org.au/aboutacelg.php> >. Consulted 2 July 2013.
- Borraz, O. and John, P. 1994. 'The Transformation of Urban Political Leadership in Western Europe.' *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 28(1): 107-20.
- DLG [NSW] [Division of Local Government (NSW)]. 2012. 'NSW Council Directory'. URL: < 2006. URL: <<http://www.alga.asn.au/newsroom/hansard/hansardsenatemotion7906.pdf>>. Consulted 25 October 2011.
- DLGCR&R [Department of Local Government, Community Resilience & Recovery (QLD)]. 2013a. 'Communities to vote on de-amalgamation' (Media Release). URL: < <http://statements.qld.gov.au/Statement/2013/3/7/communities-to-vote-on-deamalgamation> >. Consulted 2 July 2013.

- DLGCR&R [Department of Local Government, Community Resilience & Recovery (QLD)]. 2013b. 'De-amalgamation'. URL: < <http://www.dlg.qld.gov.au/bc/> >. Consulted 2 July 2013.
- Dollery, B. E. Chong Mun Ho and Alin, J. 2007. 'A Critical Appraisal of the Queensland Reform Commission's Final Report.' *Working Paper 13-2007*, Armidale: UNE Centre for Local Government. URL: < <http://www.une.edu.au/clg/working-papers/13-2007.pdf> >. Consulted 7 November 2012.
- ECQ [Electoral Commission of Queensland]. 2012. '2012 Local Government Elections'. URL: < <http://www.ecq.qld.gov.au/elections/local/LG2012/groupIndex.html> >. Consulted 8 November 2012.
- ECQ [Electoral Commission of Queensland]. 2012. '2012 State General Election. Election Summary.' URL: < <http://www.ecq.qld.gov.au/elections/state/State2012/results/summary.html> >. Consulted 8 November 2012.
- ECQ [Electoral Commission of Queensland]. 2013. 'Election information and results'. URL: < <http://www.ecq.qld.gov.au/elections/index.html> >. Consulted 4 July 2013.
- Elcock, H. 2008. 'Elected Mayors: Lesson Drawing from Four Countries.' *Public Administration*, 86(3): 795-811.
- Green, A. 2012. 'Post-election pendulum for 2012 Queensland election'. URL: < <http://blogs.abc.net.au/antonygreen/2012/05/post-election-pendulum-for-2012-queensland-election.html> >. Consulted 5 July 2013.

- Government of South Australia. 1999. *Local Government Act 1999*. URL: < <http://www.legislation.sa.gov.au/LZ/C/A/LOCAL%20GOVERNMENT%20ACT%201999/CURRENT/1999.62.UN.PDF> >. Consulted 8 November 2012.
- Grant, B. and Dollery, B. E. 2011. 'Symbolism and tokenism in constitutional reform of Australian local government'. *Working Papers, UNE Centre for Local Government*. URL: < <http://www.une.edu.au/clg/working-papers/> <. Consulted 1 July 2013.
- Grant, B. Dollery, B. E. and Gow, J. 2011. 'Local democracy and local government efficiency: The case of elected executives in Australian local government'. *Australian Journal of Political Science* 46(1): 51-67.
- Grant, B. Dollery, B. E. and Kortt, M. 2013. 'Recasting leadership reform in Australian local government: A taxonomy from political theory'. *Local Government Studies* (in print)..
- Grant, B. and Fisher, J. 2011. 'Public value: Positive ethics for Australian local government'. *Journal of Economic and Social Policy* 13(2): Article 7.
- Holmes, B. 2012. 'Queensland Election 2012.' Parliament of Australia, Department of Parliamentary Services, 'Background Note', 7 June. URL: < http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/library/prspub/1695517/upload_binary/1695517.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22library/prspub/1695517%22 >. Consulted 8 November 2012.
- LGAQ [Local Government Association of Queensland]. 2011. 'Bob Abbot to be Mentor to Queensland Mayors.' News Release, Thursday 22 December. URL: <

<http://www.lgaq.asn.au/web/guest/public-home/->

[/journal_content/56/10136/1621973](#) >. Consulted 7 December 2012.

LGAQ [Local Government Association of Queensland]. 2012. 'Queensland Communities Decide 2012. Some Facts, Figures and Insights about the Local Government Election held on Saturday 28 April 2012', 8 November. URL: < http://www.lgaq.asn.au/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=3e828712-a480-49c3-b63d-627ef89116e2&groupId=10136 >. Consulted 7 November 2012.

LNP [Liberal National Party]. 2012. 'LNP *CANDO* ACTION: Empowering Queensland Local Government. Part of Our Plan to Get Queensland Back on Track.' URL: < http://www.lgaq.asn.au/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=c59c15cc-1184-4bc2-83ac-10c4d58167e5&groupId=10136 >. Consulted 8 November 2012.

Lowndes, V. and S. Leach. 2004. 'Understanding Local Political Leadership: Constitutions, Contexts and Capabilities.' *Local Government Studies* 30(4): 557–75.

Lyons [Lyons Inquiry into Local Government]. 2007. *Place-Shaping: A Shared Ambition for the Future of Local Government*. London: Stationary Office.

Martin, J. And Aulich, C. 2012. 'Political Management in Australian Local Government. Exploring Roles and Relationships between Mayors and CEOs.' Australian Centre for Excellence in Local Government, University of Technology, Sydney, September. URL: < <http://www.acelg.org.au/news-detail.php?id=267> >. Consulted 25 October 2012.

- NSW Government. 1993. *Local Government Act 1993* [New South Wales].
URL:<http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol_act/lga1993182/>.
Consulted 16 April 2011.
- NSW Government. 1988. *City of Sydney Act 1988*. URL: <
http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol_act/cosa1988179/>. Consulted
8 November 2012.
- Prasser, S. 2012. 'The Forthcoming Queensland Election.' Democratic Audit
Discussion Paper. URL: < [http://democraticaudit.org.au/wp-
content/uploads/2012/01/prasser_qld2012.pdf](http://democraticaudit.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/prasser_qld2012.pdf) >. Consulted 8 November 2012.
- Queensland Government. 2009. *Local Government Act 2009* [Queensland].
URL:<http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/qld/consol_act/lga2009182/>.
Consulted 14 April 2011.
- Rhodes, R.A.W. and Wanna, J. 2007. 'The limits to public value, or rescuing
responsible government from the Platonic Guardians'. *Australian Journal of
Public Administration* 66(4): 406-421.
- Sansom, G. 2012. 'Australian Mayors: What Can and Should They Do? Discussion
Paper, Australian Centre for Excellence in Local Government, University of
Technology, Sydney, September. URL: < [http://www.acelg.org.au/news-
detail.php?id=272](http://www.acelg.org.au/news-detail.php?id=272) >. Consulted 25 October 2012.
- Spooner, D. And Magarey, K. 2007. 'Commonwealth Electoral Amendment
(Democratic Plebiscites) Bill 2007.' Parliament of Australia, Department of
Parliamentary Services, Bills Digest No. 34, 2007-08, 28 August. URL: <

http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/library/prspub/1695517/upload_binary/1695517.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22library/prspub/1695517%22 >. Consulted 8 November 2012.

- Svara, J. 2008. 'Are Elected Executives needed to Achieve Accountability to Citizens? Performance Issues and Form of Government in Large US Cities', in *Public Sector Leadership. International Challenges and Perspectives*, eds Raffel, J. A., Leisink, P. and Middlebrooks, A. E. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Tucker, D. 1994. 'Changing Practices and Conceptions of the Executive Function in Urban Government: The Greater Brisbane Experience.' *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 53(4): 508-520.
- Tucker, J. D. 1981. 'Queensland'. In *Local Government Systems of Australia*, eds J. Power, R. Wettenhall and J. Halligan. Advisory Council for Inter-government Relations Information Paper No. 7. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.
- Wensing, E. 1997. 'The Process of Local Government Reform: Legislative Change in the States'. In *Australian Local Government. Reform and Renewal*, eds B.E. Dollery and N. Marshall. Melbourne: MacMillan.