

TRANSCRIPT

COUNCILLOR ANGELA VITHOULKAS, CITY OF SYDNEY

SPEECH – SATURDAY 6 SEPTEMBER 2014 –TOWN HALL PLAZA SYDNEY

I asked to speak at this public meeting today both as a Councillor and a City of Sydney small business owner concerned about proposed new business voting laws.

Last month two bills were introduced into Parliament on the same day dealing with the same issue under the proviso that they would simplify the voting process for non-residents in the City of Sydney.

Since then the issue has been hijacked by over the top political rhetoric punctuated by images of deceased animals, name calling and innuendo.

But, this is a very important issue for the 80,000 small business owners that make their living, build their businesses, innovate and contribute to this city day in and day out.

That means we need to get it right.

I do not believe that the proposed new Shooter and Fishers Bill will improve the democratic process for small business owners. Instead it will have the opposite effect.

That's because, amongst other inconsistencies, the Shooters and Fishers bill appears to restrict voting rights for occupiers and lessees who pay rent as tenants to two votes for one parcel of land.

So what does this mean?

It means that multiple tenants in office buildings and shopping centres around the city will have to choose only two people amongst them to vote in council elections. Yes that's right, only two.

How is the proposed new law democratic if only two of the businesses out of a possible hundred in buildings, shopping centres or creative spaces around the city are able to vote?

Who will make the choice among these business owners about who is going to vote?

It's just not feasible and rather simplifying the small business vote it will ultimately restrict it.

There's no doubt that something needs to be done to simplify the non-resident voting process. I know this from personal experience, because my business voted in the City of Sydney election in 2012 and let me tell you it was a confusing and frustrating experience.

The current system does not work, even when supported by electoral commission advertising. We know this because in 2012 only about 1700 businesses vote in the last election out of a possible 40,000.

But the good news is it's not too late to stop the political naming calling. It not too late for the Shooters to amend the bill to ensure that all small business owners who rent office and shops in the city can vote.

It's also not too late for them to fix the inconsistencies and give people a chance to put forward their ideas about how improvements to the non-resident voting process could work.

For the new voting laws to work we need to develop a process built on consultation.

The shooters and fishers bill is based on the Melbourne model. Sydney is not Melbourne and we don't need an inadequate response to the non-resident voting issue.

Today I am calling on the New South Wales government to send the Shooters and Fishers and Alex Greenwich non-resident voting bills to a parliamentary committee as a matter of urgency when parliament resumes next week.

Small business and the community don't need any more political hype. They don't need a rush job, they just need further consultation to get the process right.

Ends