

## UQ UNION PRESS RELEASE REGARDING THE DECLARATION OF REFERENDA

Today, on the 27<sup>th</sup> of November 2018, the Returning Officer declared the results of the recent Referenda. The Returning Officer has declared both questions to have been resolved "Against". The Union will be supporting an appeal of the Returning Officer's decision to the Electoral Tribunal. The basis for this appeal is as follows.

During and after the voting period the Union received a concerning number of complaints that students were unable to vote, as their votes had already been cast. A number of those students also reported they had received no response from the Returning Officer when they contacted the email address flagged on the voting portal. The Union believes there to have been a serious electoral breach that has compromised the integrity of the result.

In the Union Regulations Rule 129A.2 gives the Returning Officer the responsibility of creating a secure identifier that students must use to prove their identity before voting. In these Referenda, the Returning Officer chose that identifier to be the students' surname and student number. UQ student numbers and last names can be found in multiple public databases, as well as on Clubs and Societies membership lists, as a verifier in social media groups and through email contact lists. Although the Union has no reason to believe the Returning Officer's electoral roll has been compromised, it is likely that some students had access to thousands of students voting information through those databases and membership lists, which may have resulted in a breach.

The Union issued to all eligible UQ students a trackable link to vote in the Referenda via email, as well as advertising in *Semper Floreat*, and on posters published around the Union Complex and on social media. Additionally the Union had volunteers roaming the Union Complex and at the free exam dinners with tablets encouraging students to vote. The number of votes submitted from those sources totals around 1100 votes. The Returning Officer has counted 6383 votes in deciding the Referenda.

On Tuesday morning of the election the Union determined an electoral breach had occurred for a number of reasons. First, there was an anonymous tip to *Semper Floreat*, second, multiple students provided evidence of not having voted but being unable to vote, and finally, because the Returning Officer declared several thousand more votes had been cast than the trackable data the Union had access to indicated could have been cast. When communicating with the Returning Officer on the same day the Returning Officer informed the Union that a script had submitted 2218 votes "Against" both Referendum questions from a sole IP address located off campus.

An individual admitted to using a database of student numbers and last names with a script to submit mass votes "Against" both Referendum questions on a social media platform. The Union provided this information to the Returning Officer. The Returning Officer had the power to identify every vote stolen by the script and return franchise to the thousands of eligible students. They chose not to.

R 128.3 states that if a student casts more than one vote, their votes are to be ruled invalid. In the Returning Officer's declaration, they have chosen not to rule the 2218 'stolen' votes as invalid and have counted those votes in the final tally. Removing those votes would change the outcome of the Referenda.