

Dear Committee Members,

I wish to submit an argument for reform of Legislative Council electoral regions to ensure that implementation of the principle of one-vote, one-value will supercede the gross malapportionment which exists between the Perth Metropolitan regions and those beyond our capital city.

I hope you will excuse the brevity of my submission. I suffer from arthritis and sciatic neuritis so it is difficult to work on a keyboard for very long or very often.

I am the son of farmers who was raised in my hometown of Beverley, in the Avon Valley, until 1977, after which I mostly lived and worked in Perth's western suburbs as an educator until 2009. I've returned to live in Beverley in order to support my elderly mother and to enjoy the many pleasures and joys of country life.

The ludicrous discrepancies between the value of my vote as a city dweller relative to those times in my life when I have been resident of Beverley--a town located a mere 120 kilometres from the Perth GPO--has always rankled with me. I recall challenging then-opposition Leader Bill Hassell about this absurdly undemocratic arrangement back in the mid-1980s when the Burke ALP government made an abortive attempt to reduce the extent of malapportionment in Council electoral divisions. At the time each of my parents in Beverley cast a vote worth more than eight times the value of my vote as a denizen of Wembley. I asked Mr Hassell on what possible rational basis could such a discrepancy be justified and he gave an entirely specious response premised on the shibboleth of a need to ensure adequate representation of voters living in far-flung parts of the state and the special interests of our primary producers.

As a farmers' son who was making an invaluable contribution to our society as a high school teacher in the 'Big Smoke' I bitterly resented the condescension implicit in his argument. It was manifestly a bunch of malarkey to protect partisan self-interest, namely the fact that the conservative parties had always dominated control of the Legislative Council since self-government was proclaimed in 1890. Had this power been used responsibly, I may never have become a fervent advocate of electoral reform; however, I had witnessed Liberal and Country party MLCs vote down Dr Tom Dadour's private member's bill for the abolition of tobacco advertising in 1985--an act of political bastardry on their part which ignited my desire for a massive overhaul of the electoral laws. In that one episode I saw with stark clarity how an unmerited electoral advantage, founded on a massive gerrymander, can corrupt a democracy and deliver terrible outcomes for the people of WA. It was symbolised for me in the handshake I witnessed in the public gallery between Bill Hassell, Leader of the Opposition, and Duncan Fairweather, CEO of the Tobacco Institute of Australia, moments after Dr Dadour's bill was defeated in the Legislative Council.

I concede that some degree of vote weighting, perhaps of as much as ten percent, such as once existed for electoral divisions in the federal House of Representatives for seats like Kalgoorlie in WA or Grey in South Australia, given their vast areas, might be reasonable, notwithstanding that modern telecommunication systems have largely eliminated the tyranny of distance for MP and constituent alike that once made such vote-weighting justifiable. But the idea that in 2021 a voter in the Mining and Pastoral region in the Legislative Council of WA should have a vote worth more than six times the value of any

vote cast by a citizen living in the Perth Metropolitan region is simply outrageous and scandalous. It represents a travesty of democracy and is inherently unjust.

As a "son of the soil" and rural Western Australian, I emphatically reject the notion that I should enjoy any privileges whatsoever over any of my fellow citizens, no matter where they live and how they contribute to our polity or economy, when I come to cast my ballot in a state or federal election.

I implore you to recommend to the McGowan government that legislation be drafted and brought forward to the Parliament which would, upon its passage and enactment, enshrine the principle of one vote-one value in our electoral laws.

Anthony Negus