

Dear Mr. McCusker

Submission – Electoral Reform

**Recommendations as to how electoral equality might be achieved for all citizens entitled to vote for the Legislative Council.**

My advice is that a degree of rural vote weighing in the Legislative Council be maintained in order to compensate for the large geographical area rural and regional MLCs must cover, the disadvantages faced by people living in rural and remote areas and to take into account that the majority of WA's indigenous community lives outside the Perth metropolitan area.

Area Covered by Regional Legislative Council Regions.

The three Legislative Council regions covering non-metropolitan WA cover a total of 2,532,795 square kilometres, with the largest, Mining and Pastoral encompassing 87.26 percent of our State. By contrast the largest metropolitan LC region covers only 0.14 percent of WA's total area. Reducing the number of MLCs covering regional WA would increase the area each councillor would need to cover, and, therefore their workload (Wikipedia). The best option, if reform is needed, would be to add one additional seat to each metropolitan region, reducing the imbalance, while preserving the current boundaries and representation of regional WA.

Disadvantages Faced by Regional WA

West Australians living outside the Perth Metropolitan Area face disadvantages in accessing services, have lower incomes and worse health outcomes compared to Perth residents.

In 2015-16, the average net household income of people outside capital cities was 29 percent less than that of metropolitan households. Twenty five percent of people in regional areas are in the lowest household income quintile, vs 18 percent in metropolitan areas. For Indigenous people the discrepancy is even higher.

Contributing to this income discrepancy is the higher cost of, and lack of access to, goods and services. For example in some remote areas food and petrol are ten to 20 percent more expensive than in metropolitan centres.

This, in turn, drives worse health outcomes. There is a strong link between poor mental and physical health and poverty. Transport and accommodation costs increase the obstacles faced by rural and remote people accessing health care. A lethal combination of higher costs and lower incomes reduce access to health care, contributing to poorer health outcomes (National Rural Health Alliance 2017, *Poverty in Rural and Remote Australia*, accessed 9.5.2021 from <https://www.ruralhealth.org.au/sites/default/files/publications/nrha-factsheet-povertynov2017.pdf> ).

Reducing representation of people in rural and regional WA risks further disenfranchising already disadvantaged people.

Indigenous Representation

Over 40 percent of Indigenous Western Australians live in the Kimberley, Pilbara (almost 15%) Gascoyne (almost 15%), Goldfields-Esperance (10%) and Mid West (10%). Less than 5% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Western Australians live in either the Perth, Peel or South West regions (Australian Indigenous Health InfoNet ND, *Western Australia*, accessed 9.5.2021 from <https://healthinonet.ecu.edu.au/learn/locations/wa/> ). Of the two Aboriginal people in the WA Parliament one represents a regional seat (Parliament of Australia 2017, *Indigenous Parliamentarians, Federal And State: A Quick Guide*, accessed 9.5.2021 from

[https://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/pubs/rp/rp1718/Quick\\_Guides/IndigenousParliamentarians](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1718/Quick_Guides/IndigenousParliamentarians) ) Reducing rural and regional

representation in the Legislative Council can only reduce opportunities for Indigenous parliamentary representation .

#### Economic Contribution of Regional WA

Regional WA plays an important part in the Western Australian economy. According to the WA Department of Jobs, Tourism, Mining and Innovation mining contributes \$135.3 billion to Western Australia, amounting to 43 percent of the economy. Agriculture, fisheries and forestry add a further \$5.4 billion (2%) to WA. Cutting regional upper house representation would disenfranchise many of the people who are driving our prosperity (2021, *Western Australia Economic Profile – April 2021*, accessed 11.5.2021 from

<https://www.wa.gov.au/government/publications/western-australias-economy-and-international-trade> ).

#### **Recommendations for the distribution of preferences in the Legislative Council's proportional representation system.**

There is certainly a strong case to reform preference distribution in Legislative Council elections. The current system produces results that verge on the farcical, such as the election of Wilson Tucker with only 98 votes, and increases the danger that extremist candidates, from either end of the political spectrum will enter parliament.

The simplest way to do this would be for the preference flow to stop after twelve candidates, in above the line voting, allowing parties / candidates to direct preferences to those contenders closest to them philosophically, while avoiding the need to direct a preference flow to bizarre or single issue aspirants.

People voting below the line could simply be required to select the six candidates they prefer.

#### **Conclusion**

Reducing the number of non-metropolitan Legislative Council seats would increase the workload of regional and rural Legislative Councillors, further disadvantage already disadvantaged communities and decrease the opportunities for Indigenous Western Australians to enter State Parliament.

Reform of preference distributions is sensible and has wide community support. This can be done simply by restricting preference flows to twelve candidates and / or requiring those voting below the line to number only the six candidates they prefer.

Thank you for offering the opportunity to comment on this important issue. Please accept my best wishes for your deliberations. I look forward to reading your recommendations.

Yours sincerely

Richard Ananda Barton