

## SUBMISSION TO THE EXPERT COMMITTEE ON WA ELECTORAL REFORM

### ELECTORAL EQUALITY:

There is a view that electoral equality can only be obtained with “one vote one value”. This is a theoretical view that does not take in to account the reality of our vast and sparsely inhabited State, where the regions produce so much of Australia’s export income and industries are only found where natural resources occur.

One vote one value does not take into account the difficulty of servicing our state politically. A city constituent can visit their Member in about half an hour, a country constituent could take two days there and back. Natural justice should aim at giving all as near as possible to equal representation.

As a former member of the Agricultural Region, from 1993 until 2021, I have an understanding of practical difficulty of representing a vast area from Kalbarri in the North to Esperance in the South covering over 100 Shire Councils as well as the proportional voting system in place that is more a lottery than an electoral system and is badly in need of reform.

A member of parliament can only satisfactorily represent an area if they understand it and that requires a need to travel, not only to have some idea of the area, but to talk to a representative group of constituents. In Agricultural Region there are about 1000 Shire Councillors, 100s of schools, many police stations and many local events such as field days and local shows where the Member is expected to make an appearance. People will only approach a Member with problems if they feel they know and trust the person. In my case, the cars I drove had computers and in eight years, I had 15 cars and averaged 70,000 kms a year. If one worked 50 hours a week that is 20 weeks a year behind a steering wheel, plus many air hours, both in commercial and small charter aircraft.

Agricultural Region is probably the most difficult electorate anywhere to represent, as most of it can only be visited by car, except for Esperance and Geraldton which have commercial air services. A member has an obligation to attend functions when invited if at all possible, and I found that difficult and it meant there were places that it was easy to miss unless one made an effort. Shire Zone meetings were a must. In no way did I think I over serviced the electorate, but wished I could have visited more. It raises the question, is the electorate too big? I think it is.

This can best be solved by reverting to the old province system, with say two members elected one each election representing a smaller electorate, say two assembly seats, the 4 year fixed term for the Assemble means an 8 year term in the Legislative Council, but it is still the better option. In the metropolitan area there could be more assembly seats in a province, to maintain the current balance of half the members of the Legislative Council from the Metropolitan area and half from the country. The current 6 members for a huge Region is impossible for the Members and confusing for the electorate as few understand the system or know their Legislative Councillor. The old system of two members, one changing at each election, has the advantage that it gives continuity just as occurs in the Senate.

While mentioning the four year fixed term, it is time to consider the need to have the Legislative Council to come more in line with the Assembly. This year, the new government has been sworn in and the old Council will continue for another three weeks. With the fixed term, both Houses should change at the same time, although, having recently heard some of the valedictory speeches in the Legislative Council, I thought that was one advantage of the current system, perhaps a way could be found of giving defeated Members a similar privilege in the Assembly.

In the Federal electoral system, it is recognised that the smaller states with special interests need protection and have the same number of Senators, not one vote one value. The same logic should apply to the Regions.

Government is formed in the Assembly, where the vast majority of members are from metropolitan seats. The purpose of the Legislative Council is to review legislation and amend it if required, which has occurred many times under the current balance of equal numbers of rural and metropolitan Members. No legislation can be passed unless it has the support of both Houses. Supporters of change need to demonstrate where if ever legislation has been passed that has been to the detriment of metropolitan population, or where the rural areas have benefited unfairly from the balance of equal Members from country and city, in practice not theory!

#### DISTRIBUTION OF PREFERENCES:

The election of the daylight saving candidate in Mining and Pastoral has demonstrated the system is dysfunctional and needs reform. Proportional representation has much to recommend it, but it can't function if combined with preferential voting (PR). There are many countries that use PR quite successfully, including EU. If the Regions and multiple members is to continue the problem is easily solved with little change to the current system.

Basically, use the current system of listing all candidates above the line. Quotas can be determined as they are now. If anyone has a quota on the first count, that person is elected, including independents. If the first person on a party ticket is elected, the surplus above quota votes are past in full to the second on the party ticket, and if sufficient votes have been cast to give the second candidate a quota, the surplus is past to the next on the ticket until all votes have been distributed. At that point, perhaps there will be three of say six positions filled.

"The highest remainder" system now comes into play. The candidate with the next highest votes, say .8 of a quota is then declared elected, then the next highest, say .7 is declared elected, then the next highest of the remainder until all positions are filled. This is a simple proven system and gives as near as possible, proportional representation.

It would also enable a quick result of the election, which would enable the Legislative Council to be sworn in at the same time as the Legislative Assembly.

In summary, amendments to the Electoral Act that have been in place since the 1989 election have not been an improvement to the electoral system and need to be changed.

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