



Patrick Gorman MP
Federal Member for Perth

Tuesday, 25 May 2021

Submission

Ministerial Expert Committee on Electoral Reform
Hon. Malcolm McCusker QC AO
Professor John Phillimore
Professor Sarah Murray
Associate Professor Martin Drum

Via email: submissions@waelectoralreform.wa.gov.au

Dear Committee Members,

Your Committee inquiry provides a unique opportunity to harmonise the electoral systems for all three levels of government with proportionally elected members.

I urge you to recommend less complexity for Western Australian voters. We need an SOS for the Western Australian electoral system – we need to simplify our say.

Having a Senate, Legislative Council and Local Governments with as similar as possible voting systems will increase the franchise and reduce informality across all levels of government.

It goes without saying that I support the principle of one vote one value. Many submissions will speak to this argument and I do not intend to reproduce those arguments here.

Harmonisation with the Australian Senate voting system

Western Australia has the opportunity to modernise our electoral systems to provide for a more representative system, much as the 1948 reforms of the Chifley Government did for the Senate.

The Senate voting process is the most logical of the voting processes for the Committee to model your recommendations on. It's also a process which Western Australian electors engage more frequently with, when compared with the voting process in the Legislative Council.

The changes introduced for the 2016 Federal Election have proven across two elections to more effectively capture the intent of voters.

Adopting a model that allows a voter to allocate their own preferences amongst groups of candidates would improve the franchise for Western Australian voters.

Preventing the advocacy of informal voting

Increasing formality of votes is essential to your mission of increasing the franchise through reform of the Legislative Council.

Inconsistency between current systems of voting in Western Australia causes confusion. Voters may indicate their preferences above the line in the Senate, may only indicate their preferences below the line in the Legislative Council, and in Local Government elections are forced into either a first past the post or a multiple non-transferable vote system.

The first past the post system used in Local Government elections fails to accurately capture the intent of electors. Where multimember preferential voting occurs in Western Australia, it is essential that, as far as practical, it is consistent across Local Governments and the Legislative Council.

Currently electors place the numeral one (1) or a tick (✓) for their preferred candidate(s) on their ballot paper in order for it to be an eligible ballot. A voter who is willing to vote in a voluntary election will be willing to have their vote properly counted through the allocation of that voter's own preferences. This is particularly so in Local Government elections given the ballot is much smaller than in the Legislative Council.

Formality will be lower in the Legislative Council for as long as legislation allows immature forms of voting to be used in Local Government elections, as it implies it may be a formal vote in a State or Federal election.

We should prevent the use of the first past the post or a multiple non-transferable vote in Local Government elections.

If we are to improve democratic elections in Western Australia, then we need to acknowledge that the Legislative Council is not the only place where our electoral system is broken.

Democracy education in Australia

I encourage the Committee to explore further investments in democracy education. Whatever system is utilised, it is important that voters understand how to best express their voice.

Further, any changes to our system of voting should be matched with an independent public education campaign conducted by the Western Australian Electoral Commission.

I wish the Committee well in your deliberations.

Yours sincerely,

Patrick Gorman MP
Federal Member for Perth