

SUBMISSION TO THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT

Ministerial Expert Committee On Electoral Reform

ELECTORAL REFORM OF THE UPPER HOUSE

PREMISE

There are two major reasons reform of the Western Australian Upper House should be undertaken:

1. Mismatch of elector numbers and vote weights across the six existing Upper House regions.
2. Group voting has led to the election of members with absurdly low number of votes.

Factors which are often raised when arguments against electoral reform of the Upper House are put forward include:

1. Distances involved, and the size of regions make it difficult for regional members to adequately meet with, and represent, their constituents.
2. The interests of regional areas will be overpowered by the interests of the metropolitan area.
3. Regional interests are inadequately represented in the Upper House.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

1. Abolish the Upper House

- Many Parliaments around the world have a single House.
- Upper Houses were initially designed to provide checks and balances on the Government, or to provide protection of various interests.
- Generally Upper Houses are now merely a reflection of the Government, although in WA it has long been the House of the ruling classes.
- The initial purposes for establishing Upper Houses have been lost in party politics, eg. the Senate in Australia was to ensure the protection of individual States' rights; a worthy, but long-lost aim.
- Is an Upper House essential in today's world, or it merely a delay to getting things done?

2. Establish a State-wide Electorate for the Election of Upper House Members

- Establish the whole of the State as a single electorate.
- Remove group voting.
- Elect 36 representatives using proportional voting.
- Each representative is elected on achieving 2.77% of the vote.
- President of the Upper House has a vote in Upper House votes.
- In the case of a casual vacancy a by-election would be held.
- Remove the ability for the Upper House to block Bills, allowing them to delay the passage of a Bill for no longer than 6 months. Alternatively, any Bill not passed by the Upper House could be voted on by a joint sitting of both the Lower and Upper Houses.

3. Establish Three Regions for the Election of Upper House Members

- Establish three regions by dividing the State into three equally populated parts.
- Elect 12 representatives from each region using proportional voting.
- The three regions would be established:
 - NORTH: Existing North Metropolitan region plus 1/3 of the regional population to the north
 - EAST: Existing East Metropolitan region plus 1/3 of the regional population to the east
 - SOUTH: South Metropolitan region plus 1/3 of the regional population to the south
 - The boundaries would be drawn to achieve approximately an equal number of electors in each of the three regions.
 - This would provide a mix of metropolitan and regional electors in each region.
 - The 12 regional representatives then all effectively represent their regional *and* their metropolitan constituents.
- Each representative is elected on achieving 8.33% of the vote.
- President of the Upper House has a vote in Upper House votes.
- In the case of a casual vacancy a by-election would be held.
- Upper House members are required to have both a Metropolitan Electorate Office and a Regional Electorate Office with Government funding for Electorate Offices sufficient to properly serve their constituents.
- Remove the ability for the Upper House to block Bills, allowing them to delay the passage of a Bill for no longer than 6 months. Alternatively, any Bill not passed by the Upper House could be voted on by a joint sitting of both the Lower and Upper Houses.

Respectfully submitted for consideration by Western Australian Government's Ministerial Expert Committee on Electoral Reform.

Rob Giles