Attached is my submission to the ministerial committee on electoral reform. Please let me know if there are any issues with the attachments or if you require any additional information.
Kind regards,
Helen Barratt

Submission to the Ministerial Expert Committee on Electoral Reform by Helen Barratt

I wish to make a submission to the Ministerial Expert Committee on Electoral Reform in my personal capacity as a resident of Western Australia who has worked at various locations throughout the state over the last few years and who has lived in several Australian cities over the last 20 years.

While I am supportive of efforts to address irregular election results, such as the recent election of the Daylight Savings Party candidate on 0.2% of the first preference vote in a region traditionally opposed to daylight saving, I do not agree that the region-based model is the problem. Rather, it is my opinion that these unwelcome outcomes are the result of the current group voting system and preference deals between candidates.

My submission in summary:
1. To achieve electoral equality for all citizens entitled to vote the current system of regions with equal representation should be maintained.
2. To allow voters to retain control over where their preferences are directed, it is appropriate that changes are made to allow voters to only mark preferences below the line for candidates they actually wish to vote for and to disallow group voting tickets.

(a) which model (whole-of-state electorate or region-based) is preferable to achieve electoral equality

The region based model is preferable as it takes into account the sparse population of most of Western Australia. While a whole of state model could arguably be appropriate for states such as South Australia and New South Wales, which are smaller geographically, it would be effectively impossible for an elected member to adequately serve the electors of the whole state from areas as different and far apart as Perth, Kalgoorlie, Port Hedland, Albany and Marble Bar.

Western Australia is a large and diverse land mass and the people living in the regions already face a number of barriers and disadvantages without also losing an effective voice to parliament. Regional West Australians have less access to health care, educational opportunities, employment, and a range of other services and could easily be outvoted by just one metropolitan electorate.

In the same way that sparsely populated states in Australia such as WA have a voice at the federal level preserved through unequal representation, so too the sparsely populated regions of the state need to have their voice preserved.

(b) the strengths and drawbacks of each model

The draw-back of the region-based model is that it intuitively feels unfair as it is not "one person, one vote." A majority of city dwellers may have, through no fault of their own, very little understanding of how policies that benefit them may have a detrimental impact on those living several days drive to the north. There has also been an unfortunate trend to dismiss regional citizens as having made "lifestyle choices" that they should have to live with, without recognising the essential contribution they make to the state's economy through the agricultural, pastoral and mining industries.

The draw back of the whole-of-state model is that WA is impossibly large for any elected representative to effectively serve.

My elected representative can drive across the electorate in about 10 minutes, traffic permitting, and can hold clinics in a range of parks or public areas that all constituents can easily visit with a short walk. My representative can easily understand the needs and desires of the electorate and is accessible and accountable.

My sister lives in a farm in the wheat belt and has to drive for over an hour to reach her representative in the nearest regional centre. Her representative has to fly, via Perth, to effectively cover the whole of her electorate. This is a massive cost in both time and money.

Regional citizens have less access to health care and education, they have lower quality internet, electricity and even water supply, they have to spend large amount of money on transport, and the further they are from the metropolitan centre the more expensive food and petrol are. Many services that are taken for granted in Perth are non-existent in the regions and those who live there deserve to have a dedicated representative who will stand up for their rights and focus on serving their needs.

(c) whether any other electoral model, not covered in this Discussion Paper, is better suited to achieve electoral equality, with reasons

I have no alternative electoral model to propose.

(d) what changes (if any) should be made to the distribution of preferences in the Legislative Council's proportional representation system, including group voting tickets

When I vote, I vote below the line and I am increasingly frustrated in the lack of information on some of the candidates.

In order to ensure my preferences are distributed as I would like them distributed, and not according to the private deals brokered between parties, I have to identify and research every candidate and assess their policies and values to determine how much they align with my own.

In this most recent election there were at least four candidates that I was unable to discover any information on. I messaged three of them who had provided contact details and one of them replied with an outline of her policies. This meant there were three candidates that I was legally obliged to vote for without knowing anything about them.

There should be an option to vote below the line for only those candidates that a voter wishes to support. Even having to decide which candidate to place last and which to place second last is a decision I would prefer not to have to make. I would rather not preference them at all.

Abolishing group voting and allowing voters to limit their preferences would lead to election results that better represent the will of the people of Western Australia.

Helen Barratt
30 May 2021