

Please see attached submission.
Thank you.
Jerry Maher

Review of Legislative Council electoral system – Submission

1. The electoral system for Western Australia's Legislative Council (LC) is undemocratic and requires substantial reform. The system is an embarrassment for a "first world" country such as Australia (as is the Senate electoral system in the Federal Parliament).
2. For example, under WA's current LC electoral system, a vote in a regional area can be worth as much as seven times that of a vote in the metropolitan area. Currently, there are approximately 11,600 electors per MLC in the Mining and Pastoral electoral region, compared with almost 75,000 electors per MLC in the South Metropolitan electoral region,
3. In the 19th century and first half of the 20th century, the argument could be made that distance from Perth and the vast size of electorates made it difficult for MPs in rural and remote areas to service their constituents, and to attend Parliament to provide adequate representation for their electorates.
4. After several "reforms" over about a century, the present LC arrangement was adopted in 2005. Under the system, the State is composed of six electoral districts, three in the Perth metropolitan area and three in rural and remote areas. Each electoral district has six representatives in the LC.
5. With about 70 per cent of WA's population living in the metropolitan area, this system has resulted in gross overweighting of country votes. Other States have successfully abolished, or greatly reduced, non-metropolitan vote weighting.
6. The distance of electorates from Perth is not an issue today with modern communications and transport system. People living in the remote Kimberley region, for example, have ample access to their MPs – and vice versa – and can be as well represented in Parliament as people living in Perth.
7. Although the need to rationalise the LC electoral system has been apparent for many years, reform has been prevented by conservative political parties who have enjoyed a great electoral advantage under the malapportioned system. This has given them uninterrupted control of the LC, regardless of which political party is in government.
8. A fairer and more democratic electoral system for the LC would be:
 - Retain 36 members in the LC.
 - 24 of these members would represent the greater Perth metropolitan area, stretching along the coast from Yanchep to Mandurah and including eastern suburbs from Gidgegannup to Byford.

- The metropolitan area would be divided by the Swan River into North Metropolitan and South Metropolitan regions, each with 12 members elected on a proportional representation basis.
- The rest of the State would be divided by the Tropic of Capricorn into North Province and South Province. The remaining 12 LC places would be allocated between the two provinces on a *pro rata* basis (e.g. North Province 4, South Province 8) with members elected on a proportional representation basis.

9. The end result would be:

North Metropolitan	12 MLCs
South Metropolitan	12 MLCs
North Province	4 MLCs
South Province	8 MLCs

10. The resulting LC electoral system would not be perfectly democratic in the sense that each MLC would represent roughly the same number of constituents, but it would be much fairer than the present system.
11. It also would be relatively easy to implement and simpler to administer.

Submitted by:

Jerome J. Maher