

The Ministerial Expert Committee on Electoral Reform
11th Floor Dumas House
2 Havelock Street
WEST PERTH WA 6005

By email, submissions@waelectoralreform.wa.gov.au

Legislative Council's proportional representation system and distribution of preferences.

1. I am in favour of the current group voting system for the distribution of preferences.
The present preference distribution system gives minor parties, with a genuine agenda, but limited finances, an opportunity to have representation in parliament. Election advertising is very expensive and prohibitive for the smaller parties, which have genuine issues only possible to address once a representative is elected. We have seen wealthy businessmen, with frivolous agendas, make inroads into parliament backed by financial status. A change to the system could be discriminatory to parties with limited finances.
A change to the current preference system may be seen as major parties attempting to crush minor parties. The Minister's opinion, published in the West Australian newspaper 3/5/21, as unhelpful and appears to have the tone of 'sour grapes'.
Preference deals have always been made by the major parties without concern. Minor parties have only recently discovered the benefits of having preference arrangements with other minor parties.
The reason Daylight Saving Party succeeded in the Mining and Pastoral region, was only due to the way other parties organised their preferences and how they were to be distributed. A low number of 1st preference votes is not relevant when a voter wants their 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th etc. preferences also counted.
Minor parties have in the last two elections gained some success with the aid of a 'preference dealer', with a sound understanding of the system. I suggest outlawing the practice of an individual, or company, charging a fee for arranging preference deals.
2. With below the line voting, I am in favour of only a limited number of boxes needing to be numbered, thereafter the vote expires. My suggestion is for a minimum of 10 boxes to be numbered in order of preference. I am not in favour of preferential numbering, by the voter, for above the line voting as this could encourage increased 'donkey' votes.
To achieve electoral equality, I am in favour of a whole-of-State model. Candidates can indicate which region would suit them better to represent. With ever-changing populations, particularly in regional Western Australia, it will never be possible to have fair and even distribution of voters.

Yours faithfully,

John Watt

7th June 2021