

Submission
to the
Ministerial Expert Committee on Electoral Reform

Under the first point of the Terms of Reference, the Committee have been asked to put forward a recommendation on **'How electoral equality might be achieved for all citizens entitled to vote for the Legislative Council'**.

While it seems pretty clear after reading the Discussion Paper and the 'Minister's Opinion' the definition is meant to mean that each person's vote is to have the same value and there be no weighting of votes between elected Members.

Electoral equality could also be interpreted as a system that gives equitable representation for all citizens. Equitable representation seems to be a principle that the Minister endorses from his Opinion Piece where he says quote "There are no plans to change the system of voting in the Legislative Assembly, or Lower House, where each member represents a district and those in regional areas are given a weighting so that large electorates can be well served by their MP". In some cases the weighting is as high as 3:1 but says "we are not seeking to change this".

We also see a weighting of votes when it comes to electing Senators to the Federal Parliament with a weighting of Tasmania to NSW of 15:1. I don't think there would ever be a move from any government in Western Australia to re visit the make up of the Australian Senate and look at how 'electoral equality might be achieved for all citizens' of Australia.

Voter weighting while on the surface might seem to be unfair, the alternative is also unfair and inequitable. If Western Australia

eliminated the Regional System for electing Members to the Legislative Council we would likely see very few Members elected that live outside of the Perth Metropolitan area. South Australia, where there are no regions, has only three representatives out of 22 outside of the Adelaide metropolitan area. Those Upper House Members live to the East and South of Adelaide with no Member living in and able to represent the people in the large area to the North and West which includes major regional centres and many rural towns together with aboriginal settlements.

With Western Australia's vast area in which we have many industries and many communities with their unique set of issues, we need to maintain the Regional System, and I urge the Ministerial Expert Committee on Electoral Reform in their recommendations to strike a fair balance between electoral equality when it comes to electing Legislative Council Members and electoral equality when it comes to fair and equitable representation.

While it can be argued that the Upper House is a house of review and that constituents are represented by their Lower House Members, the Legislative Council has a major impact in what legislation is passed and it's important that we have people representing the various regions, communities and industries when deliberating on legislation.

With respect to point two of the Terms of Reference re **'The distribution of preferences in the Legislative Council's proportional representation system'**.

There would be very few people in Western Australia that would endorse a voting system that can elect a member with 98 primary votes which the current system has done. It clearly needs changing.

Whether it be that we require a minimum number of first preference votes to be eligible to be elected or, optional preferential, the anomaly needs to be fixed.

I think optional preferential would more accurately elect members in line with voter sentiment. Past a certain point it would be clear that a vote is no longer a preference when we take into account the true meaning of the word. It is more than likely under the current system a vote can end up being allocated to a candidate that is totally at opposites when it comes to views on various issues. One could hardly call that a preference and a good example is where the Daylight Saving Party had a candidate elected in the Mining and Pastoral Region by votes from electors who would be totally opposed to that candidate being elected yet their vote helped the candidate become a Member of the Legislative Council. In that case the candidate was clearly not a preferred option for a majority of voters.

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