

Ministerial Expert Committee on Electoral Reform, WA, June 2021

Mr Malcolm McCusker, AC CVO QC, Chair

Preamble:

Thank you for the opportunity to make the following submission for your consideration.

The philosophy of Swiss Jean- Jacques Rousseau (1712) informs us that to be effective in governing a people, the inviolable aim must be to determine the '*general will*' – the 'public good' - of the '*sovereign*' citizen body. All '*particular wills*' - partisan interests of influence, wealth and power - must be subservient to that *general will*.

Rousseau asserted that the first quality of a political leader is '*integrity*', requiring independence of judgement and rejection of partisan edicts. He held to universal wisdom that for society to function effectively, truth in leadership is essential and integrity depends on truth being present. He further identified *reason* and *passion* as the two primary factors in the outworking of human interactions, both in personal relationships and, specifically in public leadership. *Reason* involves an individual's *conscience*. *Passion* becomes the agenda of the *collective*, and tends to *group-think*. It is evident in Australian politics that *group-think* – parties and party ideology – is the primary focus of government. Each party's major effort is towards gaining, or maintaining, '*power*' rather than governing in the interests of the public good. The conscience of each party member is denied by the system requirement of submission to party agenda. That inherent flaw is a matter for urgent redress in the interests of achieving true democracy, a discussion for another time.

Electoral Reform:

There are two main areas of consideration for an electoral process to be truly democratic:

1. **A structure** of the voting system ensuring fair, proportional representation.
2. **A process** preventing collective passion and 'group think' overpowering individual expression.

Structure:

Given the vastness of Western Australia, the diversity of activities contributing to the social and economic fabric of the society, and the uneven distribution of population, a way needs to be devised to ensure proportional representation and an equal voice for all citizens. I respectfully request you consider ascribing votes in rural and remote regions a greater value than 'one' (1) according to the varying demographics. The mathematics of such a device need to be worked out by those far cleverer than me, but I am confident that, *with good will for the public good instead of the party's power*, such an outcome is possible. I look forward to hearing of that.

Process:

For the electoral process to become appropriately just, it almost certainly means electoral reform at a Federal level, as a referendum would be constitutionally required. As that is not the remit of this current state investigation, there is probably little point in commencing

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discussion about a Unicameral System or Mixed- Member Proportional Representation and vote-splitting, although such systems have much to commend them, and are worthy of consideration for future Federal Government reform in Australia. If possible on a state basis to make any movement towards such proportional representation and the associated honouring of voters, such movement is to be encouraged.

What I hope will be considered in this present inquiry are ways to manage votes and preferences such that a minimum percentage of primary votes is required for a seat to be allocated; a way needs to be found to avoid 'flakey', single-issue potential representatives entering government. A way also needs to be found to ensure that rules are strengthened and enforced to eliminate collective passion influencing individual voter intent, that the public good is promoted as the primary aim of public information campaigns, that truth is required in campaign information, that all voters are enabled to express their particular wills in regard to the problems of public life rather than being forced by a limiting system to merely choose among individuals or groups / parties, and that a further 'party' be included and named 'The Independents Party'. Voters need to be assisted to become aware of the names and policies of all who seek election.

Good government is democratic: It's aim being *the public good*, it will always be popular with voters, such that political-trickiness will not be required; staying in power will not need to be, and must be eliminated as, the focus of government effort. Good, democratic government requires some radical changes, one being proportional provision of campaign funds from the public purse and the elimination of political donations which automatically carry with them an implied pressure to serve a partisan interest. Sponsored democracy is not democracy.

I wish you wisdom, compassion and grace in your deliberations.

Yours sincerely,

John White