

Submission to WA Ministerial Expert Committee on Electoral Reform
By Philip Smith

I believe in the principal of One Vote for One Value for both Houses of Parliament and that this should be the basis of all decisions the Committee makes.

Firstly, there should be a voting nexus between both Houses. When the Assembly goes to the Polls, the Council should go at the same time. At present, the dates for taking seats after an election are set at different dates. If, in the future, the Assembly is forced to another, probably, earlier date, both Houses should face the electors at the same time and take their seats on the same date.

The Council should be One vote -One value. Logically, the whole State should be the Electorate. This is unlikely to be acceptable to the 4 major parties. As any group would only need about 3% of the vote to win a seat, it is likely that a large number of minor groups would win seats. This would give a more complex situation of groups than at present, for the major parties to negotiate with to form a government & to be in power.

Under normal circumstances, it would be likely that neither of the major parties (Labor/Green or Liberal/National) would win a majority. They would have to negotiate with a wide range of groups with a wide range of ideas & demands, to create a coalition to govern.

I feel, using the whole State as the Council Electorate could lead to destabilization, so I am proposing a variation on the present situation.

I am proposing there be only 3 Electorates; the Metropolitan area, divided into North & South by the Swan River; and, the rest of the state.

The number of Members elected in each, to be in proportion to the total State population. With this equal voting situation, it is probable there will be a huge regional area with relatively small number of members.

The complaint is then going to be about the huge area each Member has to cover.

As a previous State Member (Bunbury), I found that, while I was in constant demand, in actual fact, it was my office staff (only one in those days) that did most of the Electorate work, while I did most of the hand-shaking.

With modern technology (if it is available), no resident is more than a few seconds away from contact with the Member's office. Zoom & Messenger allow for remote, face to face conversations. So, the complaint that electors in large Electorates, cannot see their Member, no longer applies.

As compensation, I propose that each regional Council Member be allocated three, fully resourced, Electorate offices, each with a minimum of two staff. At least one office to be allocated to a specific area by the President of the Council (or similar body). This should ensure offices are spread around the Electorate. There should also be generous travel entitlements.

A similar allocation could be recommended for large Assembly Electorates like Kimberly & Pilbara.

The less-than-desirable action of preference-harvesting could be solved by adopting a similar voting system to that used for the Australian Senate.

Good luck with your deliberations; you won't please everyone but I hope you end up with recommendations that satisfy a large majority.