

## Written submission to the Ministerial Expert Committee on Electoral Reform

*This submission is wholly my own and is not designed to represent the views of any group or individual other than myself.*

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Committee.

I note that in the past, members of this expert committee have published their opinion on this topic. I hope that their previous views do not bias the outcomes of this review.

### **Recommendations as to how electoral equality might be achieved for all citizens entitled to vote for the Legislative Council.**

Electoral equality in our system of Government does not, in my opinion, necessitate the implementation of 'one vote one value' across our vast State. In the Australian system of bicameral representation, the Lower House has been the 'people's house' and the Upper House representative of various geographic areas. This is why Western Australia and New South Wales have an equal number of Senators. This system has served Australia well, and the same principle has served Western Australia well.

The equal split of 18 MLC's in the country and 18 in the metro is in stark contrast to the 16/59 split in the Legislative Assembly. This split in the LA is completely reasonable as it is this House which is meant to represent population – **but the LC is not meant to be a house which simply represents populations.** The principle of the Legislative Council to represent communities of interest means that a 50-50 split between metro and regional is completely justified, and should continue.

The disparity between metropolitan and regional outcomes in all sectors is further reason why regional representation should not be diminished. Health, education, aged care, and communications are just some of the areas which see regional Western Australians at a stark disadvantage. Further decreasing their parliamentary representation will mean that they have even less voice inside Government and within Parliament to advocate for their needs. This is an important distinction - it is important that regional members advocate for their constituencies *inside Government*, as well as in Parliament.

This point is further reinforced by the location of far-flung Indigenous communities; practically all of these are contained within the Mining and Pastoral region – any reduction to the current Mining and Pastoral Region's representation would mean less of a voice in Parliament for these communities. If any demographic deserves a disproportionate voice in Parliament, it is surely our most remote and disadvantaged. It is my opinion that there should be no change to the current 50-50 split between metro and regional MLC's, nor any change to the number of regions in the metro and in the country.

The idea that it is the composition of the regions which leads to inferior electoral outcomes is hard to justify. As I will outline later, the abolition of Group Voting Tickets and 'preference harvesting' must happen. This will improve democracy.

But the outcomes in the LC under the current system have not been totally out of line with the wishes of Western Australians:

In 2013, the ALP recorded an LC primary vote of 32.5%, and won 11/36 LC seats (30.5%).

In 2017, the ALP recorded an LC primary vote of 40.4%, and won 14/36 LC seats (39%).

In 2021, the ALP recorded an LC primary vote of 60.3%, and won 22/36 LC seats (61%).

Electoral fairness appears to have been achieved using the current system. The Labor party has not been advantaged nor disadvantaged by the current system. Reduction in regional representation will only serve to disadvantage those that contribute much to our State while already living with a much lower level of service. Regional Western Australians deserve equal representation in our Upper House, to ensure they have a voice inside Government, and a voice in Parliament.

**Recommendations for the distribution of preferences in the Legislative Council's proportional representation system.**

The election of MP's from Primary vote totals under 100 is a farce. The fact that a Daylight Savings Party MP was elected in the region which most opposes Daylight Savings simply serves to highlight this. This makes a strong case for the abolition of Group Voting Tickets and any future possibility of "preference harvesting". Adoption of the Australian Senate voting style would provide synergy in explaining voting rules to people, and would also minimise the number of ballots ruled informal.

The necessity to amend our voting laws to do away with preference harvesting should not be used as a smokescreen to reduce the number of regional MP's.

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