

8 June 2021

The Ministerial Expert Committee on Electoral Reform
11 Floor Dumas House
2 Havelock Street
West Perth WA 6005

To whom it may concern

Thank-you for the opportunity to participate in this review into;

1. How electoral equality might be achieved for all citizens entitled to vote for the Legislative Council; and
2. The distribution of preferences in the Legislative Council's proportional representation system.

Electoral Equality

The Legislative Council has played a central role in ensuring strong and democratic representation for Western Australians over many years and I believe the Legislative Council's future role is as important as ever in ensuring the equitable treatment of Western Australians irrespective of where they might live.

In respect to electoral equality, I consider that the Terms of Reference incorrectly implies that representation in the Legislative Council is somehow not equal and therefore lacks fairness. Our democracy is strong and fair because legislative pioneers and those elected members who came before us recognised the relative disadvantage of those living in regional areas and sought to address this through representation delivered through the Legislative Council's electoral system.

It is undeniable that disadvantage in regional communities is growing as the population in many regions but particularly within the Wheatbelt, continues its steady decline. Vibrant communities still exist but access to essential services and cost of living increases are squeezing living standards which in turn promotes further disadvantage. The Wheatbelt demographic is ageing and people in low socio economic positions are making up a higher and higher percentage of our populations.

The State's population is already heavily urbanised and this will continue and even accelerate if the state of our regional communities is not given due attention within the WA Parliament. This attention and the equitable treatment of regional voters is underpinned by the current electoral system.

The representation offered to regional people is not resulting in urban disadvantage but any change to representation could alternatively result in significant disadvantage and inequality for the minority of our population living regionally. The cost of food, fuel, transportation, medical and aged care support and ongoing access to adequate power and communications infrastructure will challenge those elected to represent regional people for years to come. The dilution

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of their voice should not be considered and certainly not considered in the context of trying to establish more equitable representation for Western Australian voters.

I say the equality of Western Australian voters is best served by maintaining the status quo in respect to regional and metropolitan representation in the Legislative Council.

Group Voting Tickets

Reform of group voting tickets is long overdue and the inadequacy of this system is so clearly demonstrated by the election of Wilson Tucker of the Daylight Saving Party earlier this year.

Group voting is the dominant method of voting with 97.5% of all voters using the “above the line” group voting method in 2021. To state the obvious, the problem with this method is the lack of transparency in respect to where parties are directing their preferences.

Above the line group voting tickets must be scrapped and replaced with a more people rather than party driven preference system.

The precise mechanism is for others to determine however, optional preference voting, despite the risk of exhausted votes would seem a preferred method for the future election of Legislative Council representatives.

Yours sincerely

Quentin Davies
President
Shire of Wyalkatchem