

Hon. JAMES HAYWARD MLC
Member for the South West

To whom it may concern,

RE: INVITATION FOR SUBMISSIONS – ELECTORAL REFORM

Please accept this as my submission regarding proposed electoral reform and my opposition to a whole-of-state electorate, which I believe will in effect remove almost all regional representation.

Furthermore, I wish to share with you my recommendations for creating a fairer voter and electoral system.

Under a one-vote-one value system, using current electoral enrolments, with a quota of around 46,400 votes, regional representation would be tarnished with no consideration to the disparity between living in a metropolitan or regional area.

That would in effect deliver the Agricultural Region 2 seats, The Mining and Pastoral Region a single seat and the South West Region with 5 seats.

This would see a reduction in regional representation to just 8 or maybe 9 members, down for the 18 members currently.

The major parties are most likely to win those seats and that means there is a greater chance that the representatives themselves may be token members assigned by a political party, rather than members who have a genuine connection to the regions which they represent.

The decrease in regional seats could be considered political gerrymandering. By decreasing the number of regional seats, the two major parties are set to benefit as minor-parties who have been born from a lack of regional representation and focus will struggle to have influence in Parliament.

Political parties have used regional seats to place metropolitan people with little connection to the area to achieve a political outcome.

So, on current numbers a state-wide upper house based solely on an equal quota system might in real terms only mean 5 genuine regional members.

Those are members who live in Regional WA and who have a genuine connection to their electorates.

Effectively wiping out regional representation. Removing effective regional voices from the Upper House.

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If you consider the difficulties and challenges faced by electors across each of the regions but specify the Mining and Pastoral region, there is no way a single voice for their area could be considered fair or equitable.

Its also unlikely that the entire region would support a single political party which would mean there would mostly, not be any member at all in the Mining and Pastoral Region.

Five for the SW region is close to the six currently held by the region. But the reduction across the state of other regional voices will also impact the ability for the South West members to advocate against the overwhelming city majority and would be significantly difficult.

The retention of regions is essential to maintain a fair and equitable balance within the Legislative Council.

A single regional electorate is also unworkable with regional members in that model will almost all be from the South West Region. This would, as does the state-wide model wipe out representation for the Mining & Pastoral and Agricultural Regions.

The assessment of electoral equity needs to be made at the end of the equation and not the beginning.

As an anecdote, if the state government was to provide every family with a litre of milk but only made that available in Perth, then what would result is fresh milk for Perth families and sour milk for regional people. That would be the result if special arrangements were not put in place for the distances required.

This is what I mean when I say you need to measure equity at the end and not at the beginning.

On face value, providing the milk to everyone and making it available in Perth is a uniform approach, but it does not deliver fairness or equity.

The same is true for regional representation. A simple uniform approach may appear fair, but it ultimately delivers unfair outcomes and experiences for the people the system is meant to serve. As there are additional challenges to delivering a uniform milk service in Regional WA from Perth, there are also political and social challenges in delivering fair representation for regional people. What might appear fair can actually deliver disadvantages for some communities.

So, we need to understand the effects any changes made will have on electors and whether those changes are fair and equitable.

When you consider the influence of regional electors, you need to consider the situation in the Lower House and the respective roles of each house.

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It's fair to say that the concept of one vote one value is in practice, achieved in the Lower House. Electorates in most regional seats are relatively similar in size to metropolitan seats, with the exception of some very large seats in the Mining & Pastoral and Agricultural Regions.

There is an acceptance that the arrangements in those seats are appropriate, given those seats are not subject to this review.

Government is formed in the Lower House where most legislation originates from.

The regional to metro split is 43 metro seats compared to just 16 regional seats. It's clear that in the Lower House Regional MP's have very little influence over the passage of legislation.

Metropolitan members have the overwhelming majority of the say in that house.

The upper house has a different role and is to ensure checks and balances are in place and that the proposed legislation is fair and equitable.

The current 50% regional seats and 50% metropolitan seats does provide on the face value, better representation for regional people, but in the context of both houses regional people do not overwhelm the parliament.

There are significant barriers to regional people and those exists despite the current system.

Issues such as distance and access to their local Member of Parliament.

Whilst electronic communication has assisted in some ways, the reality is that there are many people who want the opportunity to be able to meet face-to-face with their Member of Parliament and explain the challenges they are trying to work through.

If we look at the situation in Perth's Upper House regions. Accessing their local member's office is relatively easy, with 6 offices with in 30 kilometres of constituents.

Compare that with the Mining and Pastoral Region where a local members office could be 2,000 kilometres away.

This is a significant barrier, and it exists under the current arrangements. Any demise of regional representation will further exacerbate the challenges.

Regional MP's in the Upper House bring content experts with local knowledge to a critical element in the process of amending and passing legislation.

This is particularly important for the state, given the large amount of metropolitan influence in the Lower House.

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The state has a history of trying to provide better outcomes to those who are disadvantaged.

One area example of that is in the State's effort to assist indigenous people to have access to better housing, education and health outcomes.

The state, rightly so, has identified that there is a significant need to help this group in the community. The state provides significant investment to promote better outcomes to try and address the disadvantaged. The hope is to try and give indigenous people every opportunity to gain the same outcomes as non-indigenous people.

Regional people also pull their weight in relation to the states economic activities.

With 40% of the states Gross Regional Product being created by 25% of the state's population.

Other factors that make up some of the disparity between the City and regional electorates are the lack of government services. Health, transport, education, social and housing programs, are all more difficult to access or are simply not available in the bush.

Group voting ticket should no longer be used in Western Australia. A move to the Federal Senate style where the voter, votes for six above the line or twelve below the line would be a much better system.

If the vote has not landed with a candidate who is still in play, then the vote exhausts. This would prevent preference harvesting yet maintain good preference flow for voters and the parties putting up their candidates.

In accordance with question (d) of the submission request, I believe some recommendations could improve the overall voting system in Western Australia.

My recommendations are:

1. Reaffirm the current region-based electorate system.
2. Reaffirm the current number of regional seats in both House's of Parliament.
3. Adopt a Federal Senate-like voting system for the Upper House.
4. Introduce laws to ensure it is mandatory for Upper House members to have their office in the region they represent.

In conclusion, the fairest system is the current system. Provided that the voting system is reformed in a way which will ensure members are elected by the people, not preference deals. Nobody knows the regions like regional people, and the disparity between services in the regions and metro area are a clear demonstration that the regions are clearly underrepresented in Parliament. The adoption of a whole-state-electorate would further increase the disparity between regional communities and Perth.