

SUBMISSION TO THE
MINISTERIAL EXPERT COMMITTEE ON ELECTORAL REFORM

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This submission, dealing with the Terms of Reference as to how electoral equity might be achieved for all citizens in electoral council elections for the Legislative Council in Western Australia has been prepared by me as an elector in the Agricultural Region.

Firstly, we must look at the dictionary definition of the word “equity” which means the quality of being fair, justice, impartial, fair play.

There are those who define equity as one vote one value, which varies from the definition of that found in, the majority, of dictionaries.

In developing the argument for maintaining our regional electoral system, which was developed around our current Federal Senate System. Electors living in the sparsely populated, but wealthy in minerals and grazing country, feel electorally disadvantaged compared to the electors in our highly populated metropolitan and regional centres. Many successful industries situated in the sparsely populated areas are only made possible by the Fly in-Fly Out well paid employees living and voting in the metropolitan and large regional areas. The huge capital requirements of many of these industries and the shareholders and directorships are controlled by people living in the metropolitan areas and are the main beneficiaries. Most of the people living in the area do not share in the wealth.

It is important to look at roles of the Legislative Council. Firstly, the Legislative Council does not form Government. It is the Legislative Assembly that does form Government. The Legislative Council monitors, reviews Government Legislation administration and expenditure.

It gathers information and publicises issues and presents petitions on behalf of the public to the Government.

It also maintains close connection between the Legislative Council members and its electors.

West Australians and the West Australian Government have always supported the Federal Senate electoral system, that is not based on one vote one value. It should also be noted that the Western Australian Labor Party and the Western Australia National Party supported the current Regional Electoral System in Western Australia. When the Legislative Council was changed from the previous Provincial System to electing Upper House Members.

In the terms of equity much of the Governments and States wealth has been earned in the sparsely populated areas and spent in building good infrastructure in the metropolitan areas

such as road, rail and medical services. All too often electors living in the northern and inland areas feel they are not benefiting sufficiently from the nation's expenditure. This occurs under the current electoral system but would be far worse if equity was to be implemented as one vote one value. The connection between the Legislative Council and its electors would deteriorate.

The Committee should study and consider the High Court decision MCGINTY V WESTERN AUSTRALIA as has been raised in other submissions and how the Court approached one vote one value. I firmly believe that the 6 metropolitan and 6 regional Upper House seats need to be maintained to keep the fairness and equity in our electoral system.

DISTRUBUTION OF PREFERENCES FOR THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

It is important that elected members have considerable support and represent the views and aspirations of their electorate. The Electoral System needs to be easily understood and applied by the electors. To bring this about electors need the opportunity to either vote for the Party above the line or if they wish to support individuals only being required to vote for the first say 5 candidates, below the line.

The installation of the Upper House members should be in line with that of the Lower House when elections have been called and finalised. The current system, I believe, has an anomaly when the Upper House continues on after the election of new members. Both houses of Parliament need to be in line with start and finish of their terms.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute.

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Colin Nicholl