



**UNFINISHED
ELECTORAL
BUSINESS**

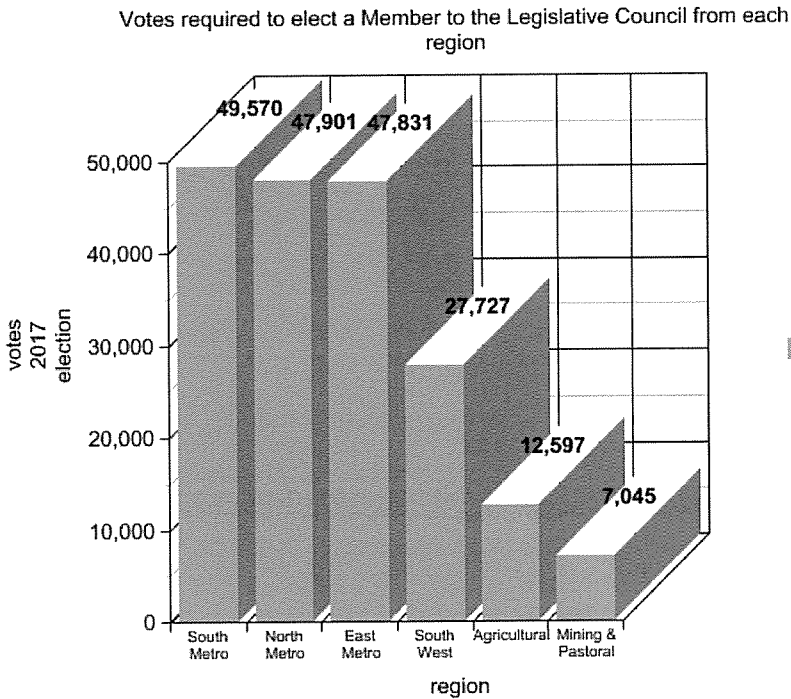
**"All animals are equal but some
animals are more equal than
others."**

George Orwell 1945

Among Australian States and Territories the WA Legislative Council is the only one with inequitable representation. The imbalance is gross. Significant improvements in the State electoral system were made in 1987 and 2005 but another step is needed to extend those reforms to the Legislative Council

Reasons for reform are clear

Since 2005 the increasing imbalance in enrolments and the accompanying political bias in the Legislative Council have been ignored by Parliament. The average imbalance between Metro and Country regional enrolments is now 3:1. In the worst case the number of votes required to elect a Member from South Metropolitan region was 7 times more than from the Mining and Pastoral region. The chart shows the disparity between votes required at the 2017 election in each of the regions.



Re-distribution due

Under electoral law a re-distribution of electoral boundaries will commence in March 2019. The law which guides re-distributions should be reformed now.

The fundamental purpose of a re-distribution is to restore equity in representation to Parliament. But the re-distribution applies only to restore balance among Legislative Assembly districts. The previous re-distribution abolished a country district and replaced it by a new metropolitan one. Transfer of one district means about 27,000 electors are subtracted from one region and added to another with no adjustment to representation in the Legislative Council which is 6 Members per region. This pushed the ratio in enrolments from 4.9:1 to 5.9:1 between South Metro region and Mining and Pastoral region. Unless there is change this will happen again. At present there are 43 metropolitan Legislative Assembly districts but enrolment in March 2018 shows there should be 44.

Lower enrolments are already permitted in large Legislative Assembly districts. This does not need repetition in the Legislative Council.

Task for Parliament

It is now the task of all Members to change the law so that each of them represents a similar number of electors. This is the unfinished business for this Parliament. Members have no rightful place in drawing their own electoral boundaries but Parliament selected the boundary between metro and country and set up vote weighting by deciding how many Members will be elected from the regions either side of the boundary. All boundaries should be drawn by the independent WA Electoral Commission.

Reform requires politicians to put aside self interest in order to uphold the democratic principle of equal representation of every citizen. It requires political courage because it will end over-representation of some electors and entrenched political effects.

Ways forward

There are a number of possibilities. Parliament could give the Electoral Distribution Commissioners the task of allocating the 59 districts among regions they create in a fair manner. Retaining six regions much like the existing ones would need nine Members in each of three metro regions and three in each of the non-metro regions.

Alternatively Parliament could add two regions based on the successful arrangement in Victoria of eight equal enrolment regions each returning five Members. Adaptations in WA for large remote districts and the existing number of Members suggests six regions with five Members each and two regions with three Members each.

With a larger metro-southwest area there could be four regions

each electing seven Members and in non-metro areas a region electing five and another electing three Members. The number of districts in each region to be as nearly as practicable in balanced proportion the number of Members.

Creation by Members of a standing committee from both Houses on electoral matters would provide the mechanism capable of resolving this and other issues vital to our democracy. Federal Parliament has such a committee, with a beneficial achievement record.

Members cannot expect belief in State Parliament when it fails a key principle of democracy

Electoral structure - WA Legislative Council			
region	Number of MsLC per region	Number of MsLA/districts	Enrolment 31/3/2018
South Metro	6	15	418,066
North Metro	6	14	398,930
East Metro	6	14	403,063
South West	6	8	230,952
Agricultural	6	* 4	102,861
Mining and Pastoral	6	* 4	68,364
Total 6	36	59	1,622,236
* In some large districts lower enrolments are permitted.			

Ticket Vote

Another reform is needed before the 2021 State election. This is the ticket vote system where one number in a box is read as ranking every candidate on the ballot paper. Proven flaws in that system caused the Federal Parliament to alter it early in 2016 but the flawed system is still law in WA. At the Federal Senate election prior to this reform the 95% of voters who chose the ticket vote option showed that the system could be manipulated among parties with miniscule support to produce results that were a perversion of democracy. Similar results occurred in the 2013 State election. For example, the election of a Liberal Democrats candidate in South Metro region from a low primary vote was brought about by a preference exchange arrangement among tiny parties and done via voting tickets. It's also nonsense to insist that the majority of voters have a meaningful preference between say, candidates 31 and 32 but current rules forced voters to rank all candidates and that was about 50 in each region.

Federal Parliament adopted a practical solution which combines the simplification of the ticket vote concept with further options available to voters. This approach would be good for the WA Legislative Council and it's helpful to keep things consistent if possible.

Actions:

Email your local paper.

**Write or call your local member - especially
Legislative Council Member
[Aid to do that on the web page.]**

Put something on social media.

**Raise the topic with your friends, workmates,
neighbours etc.**

**Ask your web search engine,
"UNEQUAL VOTES in WA" or,
log on to website
"members.iinet.net.au/~maggra/electoral.html"
for more.**

*A long term objective of any progressive group is to
build a good, functioning, fair democracy for our
society. You can be part of that deeper change.*

More ?

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Author

Graham Hawkes

maggra@iinet.net.au