

Western Australian Electoral Equality Bill

September 2021

On 15 September 2021, Western Australian (WA) Premier Mark McGowan, and Attorney General and Minister for Electoral Affairs John Quigley, announced the introduction of an Electoral Equality Bill. The Bill, if passed, will make the WA upper house a whole State electorate, abolishing group voting tickets.

The Bill follows the tabling of a final report commissioned by an independent Ministerial Expert Committee on Electorate Reform. This committee was led by WA's 31st Governor, Malcolm McCusker, and other constitutional law experts.

Background

The WA Parliament consists of two chambers, with the upper house called the Legislative Council. Within the Legislative Council, there are six regions which each contain six Legislative Councillors. Three of these regions are metropolitan regions, and the other three are non-metropolitan regions. Enrolments currently sit at around 71,500 voters per metropolitan region, and 22,900 voters per non-metropolitan region. The split in upper house regions, and the population disparities within these, result in unequal weighting in favour of non-metropolitan voters.

In addition, Legislative Council elections run on the Group Voting Ticket system, where a ticket of preferences is lodged by each party contesting a Legislative Council region. If a voter placed a '1' in a particular party square 'above the line' on the ballot paper, then the vote would be assigned to that Party's preferences. The alternative option would require the voter to number and rank all individual candidates 'below the line'. This voting system has previously led to undisclosed preference arrangements, elevating minor party candidates by passing on votes.

Reforms

The newly introduced Constitutional and Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Equality) Bill 2021 will implement the [report](#)'s key recommendation to abolish the three metropolitan and three non-metropolitan regions. These will instead be replaced by a single electorate comprising the entire State.

This recommendation will see the WA upper house elected on the same basis as upper houses in New South Wales, South Australia, and mirrors the Federal Senate by treating the State of WA as a single electorate.

Under the whole State electorate, regional representation is enhanced with 37 Legislative Councilors representing the State as a whole. Parties and candidates will be able to locate their electorate offices wherever they choose across WA.

In addition, WA will join other States and the Commonwealth in abolishing Group Voting Tickets, and instead will introduce optional preferential voting. Electors will be given the choice of selecting one or more parties, or as many candidates as they choose.

Further Information

To access the committee's final report, see [here](#).



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