

Template Agenda Item:

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS – REVIEW OF WALGA ADVOCACY POSITIONS

Background

The *Local Government Amendment Act 2023* introduced a range of electoral reforms that came into effect prior to the 2023 Local Government ordinary elections:

- the introduction of Optional Preferential Voting (OPV);
- extending the election period to account for delays in postal services;
- changes to the publication of information about candidates;
- backfilling provisions for extraordinary vacancies after the 2023 election;
- public election of the Mayor or President for larger Local Governments;
- abolishing wards for smaller Local Governments; and
- aligning the size of councils with the size of populations of each Local Government (change to representation)

Following requests from several Zone’s, WALGA undertook a comprehensive review and analysis of 5 ordinary election cycles up to and including the 2023 Local Government election against the backdrop of these legislative reforms. The review and report focused on postal elections conducted exclusively by the Western Australian Electoral Commission (WAEC), with the analysis finding evidence of the rising cost and a reduction in service of conducting Local Government elections in Western Australia.

Comment

The Elections Analysis Review and Report was presented to State Council 4 September 2024, with State Council supporting a review of WALGA’s Local Government Elections Advocacy Positions.

WALGA is requesting Councils consider the current and alternative Elections Advocacy Positions and provide a response back to WALGA for the December 2024 State Council meeting.

WALGA State Council current advocacy positions:

The following is a summary of WALGA’s current Advocacy Positions in relation to Local Government Elections:

2.5.15 ELECTIONS

Position Statement

The Local Government sector supports:

1. Four year terms with a two year spill
2. Greater participation in Local Government elections
3. The option to hold elections through:
 - Online voting
 - Postal voting, and
 - In-person voting
4. Voting at Local Government elections to be voluntary
5. The first past the post method of counting votes

The Local Government sector opposes the introduction of preferential voting, however if ‘first past the post’ voting is not retained then optional preferential voting is preferred.

Background

The first past the post (FPTP) method is simple, allows an expression of the electorate’s wishes and does not encourage tickets and alliances to be formed to allocate preferences.

State Council Resolution

February 2022 – 312.1/2022

December 2020 – 142.6/2020

March 2019 – 06.3/2019

December 2017 – 121.6/2017

October 2008 – 427.5/2008

Supporting Documents [Advocacy Positions for a New Local Government Act](#)
[WALGA submission: Local Government Reform Proposal \(February 2022\)](#)

2.5.16 METHOD OF ELECTION OF MAYOR

Position Statement Local Governments should determine whether their Mayor or President will be elected by the Council or elected by the community.

State Council Resolution February 2022 – 312.1/2022
 March 2019 – 06.3/2019
 December 2017 – 121.6/2017

2.5.18 CONDUCT OF POSTAL ELECTIONS

Position Statement The *Local Government Act 1995* should be amended to allow the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) and any other third party provider including Local Governments to conduct postal elections.

Background Currently, the WAEC has a legislatively enshrined monopoly on the conduct of postal elections that has not been tested by the market.

State Council Resolution May 2023 – 452.2/2023
 March 2019 – 06.3/2019
 December 2017 – 121.6/2017
 March 2012 – 24.2/2012

WALGA has requested the following advocacy positions be considered by Councils:

1. PARTICIPATION

(a) The sector continues to support voluntary voting at Local Government elections.

OR

(b) The sector supports compulsory voting at Local Governments elections.

2. TERMS OF OFFICE

(a) The sector continues to support four-year terms with a two year spill;

OR

(b) The sector supports four-year terms on an all in/all out basis.

3. VOTING METHODS

(a) The sector supports First Past the Post (FPTP) as the preferred voting method for general elections. If Optional Preferential Voting (OPV) remains as the primary method of voting, the sector supports the removal of the 'proportional' part of the voting method for general elections

OR

(b) The sector supports Optional Preferential Voting (OPV) as the preferred voting method for general elections.

4. INTERNAL ELECTIONS

(a) The sector supports First Past the Post (FPTP) as the preferred voting method for all internal elections.

OR

(b) The sector supports Optional Preferential Voting (OPV) as the preferred voting method for all internal elections.

5. VOTING ACCESSIBILITY

The sector supports the option to hold general elections through:

(a) Electronic voting; and/or

(b) Postal voting; and/or

(c) In-Person voting.

6. METHOD OF ELECTION OF MAYOR

The sector supports:

(a) As per the current legislation with no change – Class 1 and 2 local governments directly elect the Mayor or President (election by electors method), with regulations preventing a change in this method.



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- (b) Return to previous legislated provisions – all classes of local governments can decide, by absolute majority, the method for electing their Mayor or President.
- (c) Apply current provisions to all Bands of Local Governments – apply the election by electors method to all classes of local governments.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Shire/Town/City of XX recommends that WALGA adopt the following Local Government Election Advocacy Positions:

- 1. PARTICIPATION – Council support advocacy position XX**
- 2. TERMS OF OFFICE - Council support advocacy position XX**
- 3. VOTING METHODS - Council support advocacy position XX**
- 4. INTERNAL ELECTIONS - Council support advocacy position XX**
- 5. VOTING ACCESSIBILITY - Council support advocacy position XX**
- 6. METHOLD OF ELECTION OF MAYOR - Council support advocacy position XX**