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Proportional Representation in the Legislative Council

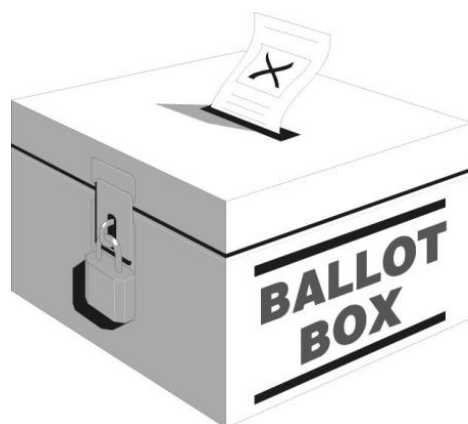
Proportional Representation (PR) is the name given to the voting system that is currently in use in the Legislative Council. This system was introduced in 1987 in time for the 1989 state election. PR is different to the preferential voting system that is used to elect members to the Legislative Assembly.

The Proportional Representation system was designed to more accurately reflect the intentions of the voters. Generally speaking, the number of votes cast for a political party will be mirrored in the number of seats won. This differs from the preferential system used in the Legislative Assembly, which works to create an artificial majority so that one party or coalition can form a government.

Importantly, the operation of PR requires multi-member electorates in order for the distribution of seats to be allocated to the competing parties. For instance, in a six-member electorate if one political party received 50 per cent of the vote it could expect to win 50 per cent of the seats, that being three seats. However, if another party received one third of the votes (33 per cent) it could expect to win one third of the seats (i.e. two seats).

To be elected to the Legislative Council, a candidate must achieve a quota which is based on the number of formal votes and the number of candidates to be elected. The quota required is calculated using the following formula:

$$\frac{\text{Number of formal votes per region}}{\text{Number of MLCs to be elected} + 1} + 1 = \text{Quota}$$



For example, the quota for the six-seat East Metropolitan Region for the 2008 state election was:

$$\frac{276,591 \text{ (formal votes)}}{7 (6+1)} + 1 = 39,514$$

Candidates who receive a quota, or more, of first preference votes are immediately elected. The surplus votes of candidates who receive more than the quota are transferred to second choice candidates. Because it is not possible to determine which votes actually elected the candidate and which are surplus, all the elected candidates' ballot papers are redistributed at a reduced rate.

The transfer value of the elected candidate's ballot papers is worked out by dividing the number of surplus votes by the total number of the elected candidate's ballot papers:

$$\frac{\text{Candidate's number of surplus votes}}{\text{Total number of votes the candidate received}} = \text{Transfer value}$$

If at any stage there are no candidates with a surplus of votes and not all Council seats have been filled, the candidate with the fewest votes is excluded from the count. The excluded candidate's ballot papers are distributed to the remaining candidates at the same vote value as they were received. In some counts this will mean ballot papers are transferred at the value of 1 while others will have various transfer values. The process of distributing surplus votes from elected candidates and excluding the candidate with the fewest votes is continued until all vacancies are filled.

From 1989, as for the Senate, the transfer of votes formula was known as the Inclusive Gregory Method. In 2006 this was changed to the Weighted Inclusive Gregory Method¹.

¹ For a model count, see the Western Australian Electoral Commission website <http://www.waec.wa.gov.au>.

East Metropolitan Region 2008 (Roll 327,550)

Party	Total Valid Votes	Ticket Vote %	% Vote	Quotas	Seats Won
Labor	113,686	97.48	41.10	2.88	2
Liberal	104,385	97.85	37.74	2.64	3
Greens	32,228	90.81	11.65	0.82	1
Family First	8,839	85.55	3.20	0.22	-
CDP	8,094	92.41	2.93	0.20	-
Nationals	2,690	86.65	0.97	0.07	-
One Nation	2,051	89.13	0.74	0.05	-
DSP	1,665	84.62	0.60	0.04	-
CEC	417	83.69	0.15	0.01	-
Other	2,536		0.92	0.06	-
			(100.00)		
Formal	276,591	95.89	96.74		
Informal	9,311	(overall ticket vote)	3.26		
Total	285,902		87.28		
Quota	39,514		(turnout)		

Source: www.waec.wa.gov.au

The count for the East Metropolitan Region for 2008 is tabled above. It shows the correspondence between the percentage of the political party vote and the proportion of seats won by each party.

The table shows the percentage of voters who used the so-called 'Ticket Vote' as 95.89 per cent. The Ticket Vote takes place when an elector places the numeral 1 beside the political party of their choice.

The preferences for such voters follows a written statement of preferences lodged with the Electoral Commission. The remaining 4.11 per cent of voters cast their preferences between all competing candidates.

As a consequence of legislation passed in 2005, the numbers of members of the Legislative Council representing each region changed.

From 1989-2009, the six electoral regions of the Legislative Council, which returned 34 members, were:

South West Region	7 Members
North Metropolitan Region	7 Members
South Metropolitan Region	5 Members
East Metropolitan Region	5 Members
Agricultural Region	5 Members
Mining and Pastoral Region	5 Members

However, in 2005 the constitutional provisions were changed in the Legislative Council to provide for six members to represent each region. As from 22 May 2009, there are now 36 members of the Legislative Council. The four-year fixed term and proportional representation voting were retained.

South West Region	6 Members
North Metropolitan Region	6 Members
South Metropolitan Region	6 Members
East Metropolitan Region	6 Members
Agricultural Region	6 Members
Mining and Pastoral Region	6 Members