

ELECTORAL AND CONSTITUTION AMENDMENT BILL 2011

Introduction and First Reading

Bill introduced, on motion by **Hon Norman Moore (Minister for Electoral Affairs)**, and read a first time.

Second Reading

HON NORMAN MOORE (Mining and Pastoral — Minister for Electoral Affairs) [7.40 pm]: I move —

That the bill be now read a second time.

The Electoral and Constitution Amendment Bill 2011 seeks to amend the Electoral Act 1907 and the Constitution Acts Amendment Act 1899 to enable a fixed election date for general elections in Western Australia. During the previous state general election campaign in 2008, the Liberal Party made a clear commitment that if elected to government it would introduce a fixed period of time for the next state general election. Today we are delivering on that promise by legislating for a fixed date every four years. The most populous states of Australia, New South Wales and Victoria, have fixed election dates. South Australia, the Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory also have fixed terms.

Fixed-term elections will provide certainty for electors; facilitate better electoral enrolment of citizens who are disadvantaged by the calling of snap elections; provide the business community with certainty; provide certainty in planning for electoral administrators, and therefore cost efficiency; offer more effective planning in the parliamentary and policy process; and remove the partisan political advantage of governments in manipulating election dates.

If passed, this bill will define a state general election to be held on the second Saturday in March every four years, beginning in 2013, as a periodic election; fix the date for Legislative Council general elections for the second Saturday in March every four years; and provide for a conjoint general election to occur when the Legislative Assembly is dissolved or expires after 1 November in the year prior to a Legislative Council election. Thus, a Legislative Assembly election will also have to be held on the second Saturday in March. Due to constitutional complexities, any attempt to fix a date for a Legislative Assembly election would require an absolute majority of both houses of Parliament and a statewide referendum.

This bill will also stipulate that the writs for the general election shall be issued on the second Wednesday in February in the election year; that nominations for the general election close on the second Friday after the issue of the writs; that the writs must be returned by 21 May in the election year, which will ensure that the election process is complete before the new members of the Legislative Council take up their positions on 22 May; and, provide alternative days for the general election if it clashes with a commonwealth election, Easter or there are exceptional circumstances as to why the election cannot be held on the second Saturday in March.

In conclusion, if this bill is passed, the Western Australian community will know exactly when the next state general election will be held. Further, this bill will offer certainty for the business community and for those who have to administer an election. In short, if this bill is passed, the next state general election will be held on Saturday, 9 March 2013. I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.