

Hon Martin Aldridge MLC

Member for the Agricultural Region

REF: 190618TA

Professor John Phillimore
Executive Director
John Curtin Institute of Public Policy
Curtin University
GPO Box U1987
PERTH WA 6845

Dear Professor Phillimore,

ELECTORAL REFORM IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

I refer to your correspondence of 20 February 2019 and apologise for the delay in my response. As you're aware, The Nationals WA oppose any measure that seeks to diminish regional representation in our State Parliament. It will come as little surprise that The Nationals WA reject your assertion that an equal weighting system for each region in the Legislative Council of Western Australia "fails the democratic fairness test".

It tends to be the case when the debate of one vote one value rears its head, that there are cries of protest from predominantly city-based academics and politicians. These cries are centred on the notion of equality. Yet at the same time there is a clear inequality in dearer fuel prices for country motorists, a lack of public transport and exorbitant regional airfares. Regional people are likely to achieve a lesser education standard and die earlier than their city counterparts.

The impact of proposed electoral reform in the Upper House – such as that presented at a New Zealand conference by the President of the Legislative Council last year – is to dilute country representation.

One vote one value was achieved in the Legislative Assembly with the passage of the *Constitution and Electoral Amendment Bill 2005*. The Bill recognised the need to compensate what are considered to be large districts by a weighting mechanism known as the Large District Allowance. Your proposal provides no detail on whether you believe our electoral system ought to recognise and respond to the challenges of representing regional and remote Western Australia.



Postal Address
PO Box 255
Bindoon WA 6502

Parliamentary Electorate Office
21 Binda Place, Bindoon WA 6502
Ph: (08) 9576 0141
Fax: (08) 9576 0488
Freecall: 1800 336 905

Connect

www.martinaldridge.com.au

www.martinaldridge.com.au

[@MartyAldridgeMP](https://www.facebook.com/HonMartinAldridgeMP)

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THE NATIONALS for Regional WA

Western Australia is unique. My electorate of the Agricultural Region has a land mass comparable to Italy with nearly all of it populated. Yet my slice of country Western Australia is relatively tiny when compared to my upper house colleagues in the Mining and Pastoral Region. Spanning more than two million square kilometres, the total geographic area is more than 2656 times that of the South Metropolitan Region and includes Carnarvon, Kalgoorlie, Eucla and Wyndham.

In April 2005, then Professor Greg Craven, Executive Director of The John Curtin Institute of Public Policy and Professor of Government and Constitutional Law made a fair comment on the *One Vote One Value Bill*:

"I would respectfully argue that, once the Lower House of the Parliament is constituted on a more or less strict One Vote One Value basis, the case for constituting the Upper House differentially as a Chamber where regional interests receive moderately enhanced representation, is strong. This follows from the necessity to ensure that the diversity of interests contained within the State are adequately reflected in Parliament."

In the same vein, Dr Harry Phillips, Parliamentary Fellow, Adjunct Professor, Edith Cowan University and Curtin University of Technology said in April 2005:

"In Western Australia the interpretations of the Canadian Courts have tended to be used as support for the 'one vote one value' argument. However, the Canadian Courts, have given thrust to a broader concept of 'effective representation'. The latter provides scope for deviation (sometimes substantial) from voter parity. If one sought to do so I think there would be scope to argue that in many settings, other factors (such as geography), have to be considered for effective representation to prevail."

It is my view that those living in regional and remote Western Australia have an expectation and a democratic right to be able to reasonably access their Members of Parliament. The proposal advanced by you is incongruent with that expectation and right and would significantly diminish and disadvantage those people from being adequately represented in the State Parliament.

As individuals with expertise in democratic practice, I invite you and your cosignatories to spend some time with my colleagues in their regional constituencies. I think having walked a few days in our shoes will give you a deeper appreciation for the challenge of representing regional and remote Western Australia in a meaningful way. To that end, my Parliamentary National Party colleagues and I invite you to join any or all of us during our electorate travels.

Thank you for considering our views and I look forward to your response. Please don't hesitate to contact my office should you wish to arrange a visit to the electorate with one of our Members of Parliament.

Yours sincerely



HON MARTIN ALDRIDGE MLC
Member for Agricultural Region
Spokesperson for Electoral Affairs