

Hon James Hayward; Hon Matthew Swinbourn; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Wilson Tucker; Hon Neil Thomson;
Hon Pierre Yang; Hon Sophia Moermond; Hon Brian Walker; Hon Dr Steve Thomas; Hon Dr Sally Talbot

ELECTORAL REFORM

Motion

HON JAMES HAYWARD (South West) [10.10 am] — without notice: I move —

That the Legislative Council —

- (1) requests that the report from the Ministerial Expert Committee on Electoral Reform is made public upon its receipt by the state government;
- (2) notes the points raised during non-government business on 13 May 2021 and that, at the time, no regional member who is a member of the Labor Party contributed to that debate; and
- (3) calls on all regional members of the Council during this debate to express their views on the ongoing electoral reform process and update the house on their level of engagement with their constituents on this issue.

This is a hot topic for regional Western Australia. The current make-up of this house comprises 18 members from the metropolitan area and 18 members from regional WA. I want to start by quoting an exchange between a journalist and the Premier that happened just a few days before the election. The journalist asked —

If Labor is returned next Saturday will you pursue electoral reform in the Upper House?

The Premier said —

It's not on our agenda, I've answered this question many times, it's not on our agenda, we care deeply about country WA and the issues of jobs, health, education, important infrastructure other sorts of things that we will implement.

The journalist said —

There's a difference between something not being on the agenda and committing not to doing something as Labor did with the gold royalty increase. So will you commit, are you committing?

The Premier replied —

Well I'll be clear, I'll be clear again, it's not on our agenda enhanced regional representation will continue and this is just another smoke screen by the Liberals and Nationals. What the Liberals have shown today with their comments is if they don't care about regional WA. If they don't think the Premier of the state shouldn't go to regional WA they don't care about the regions.

The journalist asked —

Do you think that Electoral Reform in the Upper House is something that parties ought to take to an election before ever trying to implement it?

The Premier replied —

No like I said before it's not on our agenda.

The journalist said —

So can I take from that the Labor Party isn't going to be doing it?

The Premier replied —

It's not on our agenda we support and enhance regional representation.

That is what the Premier told the people of Western Australia moments before the election. He said that constantly in the run-up to the state election. After the state election, WA today ran a story under the headline “‘I’m not Nostradamus’: McGowan defends change of direction on electoral reform”. We know that the very first piece of business that this government put before the house after coming into power, the day after the first sitting, was to form a committee to look into electoral reform. The Premier said, “I’m not Nostradamus; I didn’t know; I couldn’t look into my crystal ball and imagine that this terrible outcome was going to happen where an honourable member was voted in, through a preference arrangement, with very few primary votes. There you go; I’m not Nostradamus; I didn’t know.” Interestingly, it appears that the Liberals and Nationals are Nostradamus because they knew! I knew—in fact, I put some television ads on in regional WA saying that the Labor Party’s intention was to reduce the number of regional members in this house down to perhaps just nine.

Hon Dan Caddy interjected.

Hon JAMES HAYWARD: Thank you for your interjection; I appreciate it. I have still got my L-plates on, team!

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We knew that it was on the agenda. How is it that the Premier could not see that? After the Premier constantly told the regional electorate that this was off the agenda, how come it is the top priority of this new McGowan government?

Yesterday, I received an email from a constituent who is very concerned about these changes. I have not yet met this constituent. He wrote in very strong terms. I know that other regional members in my space also have a copy of this email. I will not read it out because he makes some accusations about the Premier's conduct that I do not wish to repeat right now in this place. But the reality is that people in regional WA feel deceived by this government. People feel that they were perhaps lied to in terms of how this debate has rolled out.

The Premier and his government have hand-picked a number of individuals. Those people are all, no doubt, excellent in their field. I certainly do not in any way, by my remarks, disparage the quality of the individuals who have been chosen. The people who have been chosen have a track record, or are already on the public record, of having a particular view about the outcome. In fact, I understand that some of them have already published papers with some suggested outcomes. These people have already made up their minds. Why is this such a big rush? Clearly, because it was always on the agenda. We know that after 2017, Premier McGowan said that he was disappointed about the fact that he had control of the lower house but he did not have control of the upper house. He thought that was unfair. It has always been on the agenda.

After sharing my Facebook posts—as we do when we are campaigning, inviting constituents to engage—a number of people asked me, “What are you on about, James? This is nonsense. The Premier has already told us it's not on the agenda; it's not going to happen.” I engage with those people online and have had discussions with them about the fact that it has always been the Labor Party's agenda to reduce regional representation, to move to an idea called one vote, one value, which, in the Labor Party's view it would seem, is only about counting numbers of people, not equating fairness or equity.

One of the big challenges for regional people—I note the regional members we have in Parliament today—is that things are different out in the bush. I think we have talked in here a number of times about some of the challenges and inequities that people in regional WA face. People who do not live in those spaces or who do not have to navigate their lives in regional WA will find it difficult to really get an understanding of the difficulties and challenges faced by those people living in the bush in Western Australia. Clearly, we have a massive state. It is nearly a third of the country. It is many thousands of kilometres long. We could squeeze Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales in, no problem at all. It is a very, very large space. Yet Western Australia, unlike other states in Australia, has a massive population concentration in this little bubble called Perth, and the population outside of Perth is reasonably sparse, as we know. Particularly in many of those areas, that remote living creates other challenges.

We had our first meeting as members-elect here in this room, and Hon Shelley Payne talked about some difficulties she was having getting her electorate office set up in Esperance. The response from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet was, “Look, we just don't have anyone in Esperance. It's a long way away. It will probably take us a couple of weeks at least to be able to organise somebody to get out there.” That is just an example of some of the difficulties faced by people in regional spaces, because the services that are freely available in Perth are not available in regional areas. With health, for example, if there is a major incident in regional Western Australia, in almost every instance, those people are emergency evacuated back to Perth. There are big barriers for those people.

In a recent debate on 13 May, Hon Matthew Swinbourn claimed that his electorate of the East Metropolitan Region included localities that faced the same issues as other regional areas, and that people in the Perth metro area do not lack an appreciation of or an understanding about what happens outside the metro area. With the greatest of respect to the honourable member, the reality is: is this not the exact problem? I am looking around at other regional members who do understand what the differences are. I have absolutely no doubt that in the honourable member's seat, there are significant challenges in housing and education and significant issues in getting people the resources they need. Again, with respect, it is the honourable member's place to come here and advocate on behalf of those people. But all those issues are also issues in regional WA. I would invite Hon Matthew Swinbourn to come to the Kimberley and have a look at the state of some of the Aboriginal communities in the north west of our state to see their living conditions. Those communities have issues with not only housing, health, education and other issues, but also the fact that there are significantly less government resources available. They have to wait to be able to get the important things that they need. The reality is that the government is not as nimble on the ground in those places. It is not able to provide the things that those people need. Although I would certainly expect Hon Matthew Swinbourn and other metropolitan members to stand up for their regions in the metropolitan area, the reality is that all of those issues are amplified in regional WA. The situation for people out there is worse, and that is the current status quo. Despite the fact that there are 18 members representing the regions in this house, it is still a battle for those regions. The reality is that any change to the make-up of this house with any reduction in regional representation will only exacerbate those problems, because, as with the example of Hon Matthew Swinbourn, it is a metropolitan member's responsibility to stand up for their electorate, and that is what they ought to do. As a regional MP, that is what I ought to do—stand up for the people whose voices could potentially be silenced by these proposed changes that are in the process of coming along.

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One thing that I suggested in my motion is that we have not heard from regional members of the Labor Party in this house, who know. I have had some discussions with some members personally. One of the great things I have to say since being in this house is that I have certainly got to meet a lot of people on the other side of the house, and I am developing and have developed a tremendous respect for the work that many of them do and the commitment they show. But—boy oh boy—those guys are wedged on this one; there is no question about it. It must be uncomfortable to be in their electorates and talking to the people out there, because they know that what is being proposed is ultimately not in the best interests of their constituents. I accept that there are some people within the party who might have the view, “I’m a purist; I believe in the numbers and I always have.” But the cold, hard reality is that when we distil it down to this test and ask ourselves whether this is in the best interests of our communities and constituencies, deep down they know the answer. The answer is no, it is not in their interests. How could it be?

I understand, honourable members, that probably members of the Labor Party do not get a lot of choice on how they vote on these things, but surely it comes down their own sense of morality and right and wrong, and their own sense of standing up for their constituencies about this particular issue.

There has been a bit of media around and honourable members have been asked about this. I know that Hon Kyle McGinn was asked by the *Kalgoorlie Miner* on 5 May about his views and, to his credit, he said, “I want to hear from my constituency. I want to listen to what those people are saying.” I would certainly love to hear what they are saying. What are they telling Hon Kyle McGinn? What are the people in Kalgoorlie saying? Do the people in Kalgoorlie really think that they would be better off with fewer regional members of Parliament than they have today? There is not a chance that could be correct.

I was on ABC radio with Hon Jackie Jarvis before the election and this issue came up. To her credit, Hon Jackie Jarvis told ABC radio that she would not support a reduction in regional representation. She also rolled out the line that it was not on the agenda. I do not know whether she will get that choice; I certainly hope she does. The people of Margaret River need her to make the right decision there. The people of the south west need her to make the right decision, as do the people of Esperance, Kalgoorlie, Karratha, Halls Creek and Wyndham. Those people need their regional members of Parliament to stand up for them and to ensure that there is not a reduction in their voice in the Parliament of Western Australia.

I understand that honourable members of the Labor Party, on the other side of the house, are not allowed to speak openly and freely in this format or to express their vote and cross the floor to join opposition members in their fight for regional Western Australia, but I understand that they are able to speak in caucus. Boy oh boy, I hope the regional members of Parliament in this house who are members of the Labor Party scream the house down. One of the great challenges that we as members of the Nationals WA have always contested is that we sit in a caucus room that has only regional members. We have always told the electorate that the challenge for members of the Labor Party in this place would be to go into a party room full of metropolitan members. They would need to be able to make their case and argue, but, inevitably, they would be outnumbered.

We know that in the lower house as it stands, with 43 members from the metropolitan area and 16 members from the regions, the votes for forming government are largely found in the metropolitan area. So those regional members of Parliament who are on the other side of the house need to scream the house down for the people of regional Western Australia. We cannot allow regional people to end up worse off under this proposed scheme. I challenge each and every one of the regional members of this house to speak up and to make their position clear to their electorate and this Parliament.

HON MATTHEW SWINBOURN (East Metropolitan — Parliamentary Secretary) [10.31 am]: I stand today representing the Minister for Electoral Affairs in my role as parliamentary secretary. I thank Hon James Hayward for bringing this important topic back to the floor of the Legislative Council. It is really important that we get an opportunity to continue to speak about electoral equality. I always welcome the opportunity to talk about how unrepresentative this Legislative Council is and has been since 1890 when a representative government was finally granted to the people of Western Australia. The Legislative Council has existed with the malapportionment, the property franchise and the disenfranchisement of women and all those other sorts of things; therefore, the opportunity to talk about how we can reform this house to become more democratic is always welcome, so I thank the member for bringing this motion to the house.

I take this opportunity to recap what has happened to date, because the member kept talking about a proposal. There is currently no proposal. Nothing has yet been proposed. Therefore, I invite the member in his reply, if he gets one, to let the house know that he is aware that there is no proposal at the moment. However, there is a process underway, and that process, at the moment, is that the Ministerial Expert Committee on Electoral Reform was appointed on 28 April 2021. The committee is chaired by the former Governor of Western Australia, Hon Malcolm McCusker, QC. As far as I am aware, Mr McCusker has not expressed any public comments about electoral reform—he may have done, but I am not aware of them. To suggest that he has a preconceived view on the outcome is suggesting

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that that eminently important and qualified person has come forward and is not able to bring an independent and free mind to this issue. This is a very serious allegation to make against Mr McCusker.

Professor John Phillimore, who is a member of staff at Curtin University, is a very well qualified academic. Professor Sarah Murray, who is also —

Hon Neil Thomson interjected.

Hon MATTHEW SWINBOURN: President, I am not taking interjections.

The PRESIDENT: Noted, honourable member. I request that other members ensure that interjections are limited.

Hon MATTHEW SWINBOURN: Professor Sarah Murray from the University of Western Australia is a constitutional law expert and, again, is another person who is eminently qualified. Associate Professor Martin Drum is someone whom many of us are very familiar with for his understanding of, and work within, the Western Australian electoral system. These are all highly qualified and esteemed persons who should not be impugned for the work that they are currently undertaking.

The committee released a discussion paper on 14 May 2021, and it advertised and called for public submissions on 1, 14, 28 and 29 May. We are lucky that we have received 184 submissions from interested members of the public and organisations. The submissions that have currently been processed are published on the committee's webpage, other than those submissions that were asked to be kept private. The committee is now preparing its report for the government.

The member did not speak to the first point of his motion, which requests that the report from the Ministerial Expert Committee on Electoral Reform be made public upon its receipt by the state government. It will not be made public upon its receipt by the government because that is not the normal course for how these things are done. But an undertaking has been given by —

Hon Tjorn Sibma: Gold-standard transparency!

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon MATTHEW SWINBOURN: Thank you, President. I did not interject on the previous members and it would be appreciated if they could extend me the same courtesy.

Legislative Council question without notice 361 was asked on Tuesday, 22 June and the answer said that the report would be tabled in Parliament after it had been considered by the government, which is a very ordinary course of affairs. There is nothing unusual or exceptional about that. It is the normal and standard approach. For example, the *Independent review of the vocational education and training sector* in WA by Emeritus Professor Margaret Seares was completed and presented to former Minister for Education Hon Peter Collier on 30 April 2014, but was not tabled in both houses until 19 November 2014, when it was tabled at the same time as the government response. There is nothing unusual about that and nothing unusual about tabling the report after the government has had an opportunity to consider it. Therefore, that point is of no particular note, in my view.

The member made a couple of other points. He spoke about the comments that the Premier made about this not being on the agenda. It is worth noting that what the Premier said was that he did not make an election commitment. It was not on the agenda, and I think that realistically that is the most appropriate answer, because given that since 1890 there is never been a Labor majority in the Legislative Council, how could it possibly be on our agenda? How could it possibly be on our agenda when all the political orthodoxy says that it is not something that the Labor Party will ever be able to achieve, yet we achieved it? We are very grateful for achieving a majority in this house for the first time. We have the ability to deliver a program that will be progressive and transformative for the people of Western Australia. It is a program that has often been frustrated by members opposite for no good reason, most of the time, other than pure belligerence.

I think that the people of Western Australia understood that. They gave the Labor Party a majority in this house, and it was their choice to do that. It was not just a majority of people who voted; sixty per cent of Western Australians voted for the Labor Party in the Legislative Council. How many people voted for the Nationals WA in the Legislative Council? I think about 2.6 or 2.8 per cent of Western Australians supported National Party members. They really are a voice for Western Australians! The Premier has been very clear that electoral reform was not on our agenda, but, now, clearly, it is on our agenda, so there is no great mystery or surprise about that. The process is underway and we will see how that process plays out.

The member said that he could have fixed the issue that, essentially, resulted in the election of a Daylight Saving Party member with 98 votes. However, the member's party was in power for eight and a half years. The Senate voting system was fixed to remove group ticket voting in 2016. As I recall, the member's party was still in power then, but it did nothing to fix that same problem! The opposition members' parties did nothing to fix that apparent problem. Those members supposedly all knew what the problem was and how likely it was that we would get an outcome in which someone is elected on 98 first-preference votes, but they did nothing about it. I was in Parliament

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in the last term and I do not recall the member's party putting forward any bills dealing with that issue. The member did nothing about a problem that he said was apparent and needed fixing and was simple to do. He is high and mighty about his position and says that we all knew about it, but the former government did not do anything about it. In any event, it is now being considered by this committee. Again, the member did not say anything about that. He talked only about what he thinks might happen with the Nationals WA vote. One thing worth raising is that the member comes in here and talks about having a voice for regional people and about how bad it is out there. Hon James Hayward is a member for the South West Region. I suggest that he get a better understanding of the problem with malapportionment in Western Australia, because his constituents in the south west are beginning to be disenfranchised, and they have been more and more disenfranchised because of this system. One voter in the South West Region is worth 2.35 in the Agricultural Region and 3.48 in the Mining and Pastoral Region. When his constituents write to him, I hope that he tells them how their vote is worth less than others in Western Australia. I hope he also tells them that a voter in Bindoon, 55 minutes from Perth, is worth 2.35 votes compared with a voter in Katanning or Denmark, which is five hours away. Tell them about that. Tell them that is the system the member is defending. That system is getting progressively worse for people in the South West Region. The National Party casts the issue into the bucket of metro versus the regions because it is the easiest way to do it without thinking about how other things cut across that dichotomy that National Party members create and do not tell their own constituents is causing their vote to be further diminished, but, apparently, that is okay, because it does not suit the National Party's ideology or interests.

One of the most galling things I have learnt over time coming into this chamber is the way in which the National Party conflates its interests with the interests of regional people. The National Party always thinks they are the same thing, but regional people do not think that. Fewer than six per cent of people in Hon James Hayward's electorate voted for the National Party. What about the other 94 per cent? They do not see their interests connected to the National Party's interests. For the National Party, it is all about the National Party's interests. Even in the National Party's heartland of the Agricultural Region, the National Party received less than 27 per cent of the vote. The other 73 per cent of voters in the Agricultural Region do not even support the party that says it is the party for regional Western Australians. Hon James Hayward needs to have a good, long hard look at his party and what he stands for and why he is not getting the level of support out there that he claims he supposedly gets when he comes in here.

I will finish my comments about the motion. This is the member's first motion in non-government business and I appreciate that the member is new, but can I suggest that he speak to other members before putting in a motion comments about members on this side of the chamber not contributing during non-government business. Normally, non-government business is the time for non-government parties; it is not the time for government members. There will always be a government response to non-government business. That is very normal and we will give a government response, but government members do not often seek the call during non-government business because that is the time for non-government members to speak. If our government members stood up—all 21 of them—and sought the call during non-government business, I can imagine that a few members who have been around for quite some time, or at least a bit longer than Hon James Hayward, would complain about that and say that we wanted to dominate the debate and that we were not letting opposition members' voices be heard when debating non-government motions. It is the same with private members' business. That is private time for the government backbenchers. Typically, other members can seek the call, but usually preference is given to a majority of government backbench members so that they have an opportunity to speak. The member is using this time to cast judgement on government members by saying they are not interested in this issue, when they are respecting what members opposite refer to as the hallowed conventions of the house, which is that we respect non-government business as the time for non-government members to speak. If the member wants us to dominate his non-government time, we can do that—that is possible—but we are not going to do that, even though we could. Reflect on that, member.

I also make the point that during the debate back in May, Hon Alannah MacTiernan made a contribution, and I admit that at the time she made it she was still a member of the North Metropolitan Region. She is now a member for the South West Region, and was elected as a member for the South West Region. She made a contribution in that regard as an elected member of the South West Region. We have the rump period, as I like to call it, during which we have to come back as the previous Parliament before we can start the new Parliament, notwithstanding that the people of Western Australia had expressed their views about what the make-up of this place should be. We come in for that rump period, which is when Hon Alannah MacTiernan made her contribution. She also made a contribution as the Minister for Regional Development. She was not giving the government response; she was responding on her own behalf.

As I said, the member is new. He is obviously trying to stir the pot and make a name for himself. Congratulations and well done. Perhaps next time he will put forward a motion on which he is happy for his own members to get up and make a contribution rather than inviting every other member on this side of the house to make a contribution.

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With that, I cannot commend the motion of the house because I do not support it. I hope for the member's sake that he reflects a bit more on the quality of the motions that he puts forward.

HON TJORN SIBMA (North Metropolitan) [10.45 am]: I begin by observing that I think this motion has awoken a sleeping giant and filled him with a terrible resolve. I say that as a compliment to the honourable parliamentary secretary. If that was meant to be a speech to mark him out for future cabinet material, it has just been delivered. I have noted in recent times that the honourable member has been called upon by his government to defend the indefensible, and he has done another sterling job. Unfortunately, I cannot concur with any of the significant points that he made in rebuttal.

Obviously, I speak in support of the motion put before us today. I wish to address in particular the first limb of this motion. I want attempt to make my contribution in an abbreviated time because I note that a number of regional members on this side of the house wish to speak to it, and I want to provide them with an appropriate opportunity. The parliamentary secretary was correct that 184 submissions on this very matter were received by the expert committee. In fact, I have a file of about 100 of them in front of me. I will quote from a number of them to give members an indication of the sentiment in regional Western Australia about the way this issue has been presented, because I think the process that has been initiated by the government is deeply flawed and problematic. Members will discover from some of the sentiments—there is a diversity of views—that some of them are quite strong. I think that of itself speaks to the fact that the committee should make available its recommendation to government at the first available opportunity.

I will quote from a contribution from the Shire of Wagin, which goes to the nub of the issue. It states —

Whilst Council concurs that the principle of one vote—one value is a noble one, it is of the view that due to the relative sparsity of population in regional Western Australia, the level of disadvantage experienced by those living in the regions and the significant contribution that the regions make to the Gross Domestic Product (particularly in mining and agriculture) there is a strong argument for resisting changes to the current level of Parliamentary representation in the Legislative Council.

It goes on to say —

After the election, reassurance was given by the Government that it would govern fairly and honestly for all people. Given its significant majority and control of both houses of Parliament there is unprecedented opportunity for the Government, if it wished, to capitalise on its position and to reduce regional Parliamentary representation in the Legislative Council. If this opportunity was taken it would result in grave disappointment throughout regional areas that the Government was primarily focussed on power than on recognising the challenges and disadvantages that those living in the bush contend with on a continuing basis.

Hon Dan Caddy: Who signed off on that letter, just out of interest?

Hon TJORN SIBMA: It is publicly available. It is from the Shire of Wagin.

Hon Dan Caddy: The president of the shire was a Liberal candidate. I am just putting it out there.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: He is a voice for his community who was duly elected, as indeed is the member.

There is also a contribution from the shire president of the Shire of Esperance. I will read a portion of that submission —

For an isolated Shire, such as Esperance having regional representation on the Legislative Council is more than necessary to ensure our region is catered for and considered throughout State Government decisions.

Without this regional representation, critical issues such as health and education outcomes, serious injuries and deaths on our roads, cost of transportation and access to reliable telecommunications will not be addressed or get the consideration they desperately need.

Furthermore, a submission from the Shire of Lake Grace reads —

The Shire of Lake Grace is concerned that changes to the weighted representation of the upper house ... in the Agricultural Region of Western Australia will impact on our ability to have an adequate voice for our citizens.

We feel that as the Agricultural Region currently serviced by six (6) members, it is necessary to adequately represent the region which extends from Kalbarri in the mid-West to Israelite Bay in the South East, encompassing most of the traditional grain and livestock primary production area of the state.

The submission from the Shire of Bruce Rock is summarised in the last sentence of its letter, which states —

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The Shire of Bruce Rock strongly opposes the reduction of regional, rural and remote political representation, including any loss of members in the Legislative Council.

That is not all the submissions; it is a select number of submissions. Indeed, there are submissions that are deeply committed to the government's proposition. I think that demonstrates, however, that there is a depth of feeling on the issue because this process has been initiated by surprise, in contravention of election commitments given by the Premier and will not be undertaken by the Western Australian Electoral Commission but by a handpicked selection of eminent people. I impugn nobody on the committee, but they are not necessarily uninvested in a particular outcome and have made their views quite clearly known. I say that because the earliest indication of what model will be recommended to the government is likely to inform—if it has not done so already—the government's draft bill, which I anticipate will be read in reasonably swiftly after the winter recess. The parliamentary secretary said that there is no preconceived notion of what the outcome might be, there is no model and the government is effectively open-minded. One might reflect on whether that is indeed the case!

For members of the chamber present who were not residing in Western Australia 20 years ago or interested in this matter, there were models conceived by a previous Labor administration. I do not know whether I need to seek leave to table this document now or incorporate it later.

The PRESIDENT: You can do either, but for the benefit of members, you might want to table it now.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: I seek leave to table the document "Indicative models for Legislative Council region boundaries for Western Australia" volume 2 of 2, version 1.1, May 2001.

[Leave granted. See paper [348](#).]

Hon TJORN SIBMA: I draw members' attention, once they avail themselves of this document, to what is possibly an indication of outcomes. There are a number of models, but I draw members' attention to the two-region model and the three-region model. The two-region model is, effectively, a north region and a south region, with the boundary being the Swan River and the then Shire of Dundas local government authority boundary across to the state boundary. That is one option that might inform the government's model in the bill that will be presented to the house in August or September. There is a three-region model, with a metropolitan area, a north region and a south region, with the boundary again contiguous with the Swan River. Effectively, that is the option. Or, not included in this matter because it would be almost farcical, there is a whole-of-state electorate model. I actually think that is what is being seriously contemplated and will be proposed by this ministerial expert panel. That is problematic not only for regional representation, but also because it will potentially lower the threshold of the quota required to be elected to Parliament in the first place. If there is anything that might frustrate the plans of a future Labor government, it is a plurality of political representation in this chamber, because it would necessarily involve the quota dropping from around 14.28 per cent to something closer to five per cent.

Hon Dr Sally Talbot interjected.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: I thank the member very much for the clarification.

Who knows what kind of party would be voted into this chamber on that basis?

HON WILSON TUCKER (Mining and Pastoral) [10.55 am]: I rise to make a contribution to the debate on this motion. I thank Hon James Hayward for raising such an important topic. I am sure that there will be a lot more debate on electoral reform in the coming weeks and months as the Ministerial Expert Committee on Electoral Reform hands down its findings, and I look forward to engaging in that debate. I think it is fair to say, as a micro-party representative and regional member, that I have a fair amount of skin in the game.

There are two issues in this debate. The first is group voting tickets and preferences. I am a product of 98 votes and have been blasted publicly by the Premier and used as an excuse to rush through this electoral reform mandate, despite the Premier saying time and again before the election that the Labor Party was not going to touch this issue and that it was not on its agenda. My election to this place could be considered by some as undemocratic; however, I am open to having a constructive and consultative discussion about the group voting ticket system and how we might improve our electoral system. I do not think electoral reform should be deliberated on and debated behind closed doors; there should be a consultative process. Reform should not be rushed through without engagement with the community, especially regional members and constituents. I would like to see a referendum on the issue. A referendum would allow the public to decide for themselves and it would not close the door to input from micro-parties and regional constituents.

The other issue is regional representation and the one vote, one value system. I do not think anyone in this chamber would deny that changing this model will result in less representation for rural areas by concentrating the focus on cities. Regional areas are already struggling with gaining equality in health and education services. I do not believe anyone in this chamber thinks that regional areas are in a more fortunate position than cities. It is not fair to mix

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up these two issues. The Premier has taken umbrage with micro-parties being elected, but this should not be mixed up with the one vote, one value system.

In summary, I think we should do this properly. Group voting tickets should be looked at, but we should not conflate the two issues. Let us do this properly. Let us look at reform and make sure that regional areas are not in a worse position than metropolitan areas. Thank you.

HON NEIL THOMSON (Mining and Pastoral) [10.58 am]: I rise to say a few words on this motion. I think it is an appalling betrayal of regional people for a party to publicly make one thing very clear to the people of Western Australia prior to an election and then the very first thing it does after the election is exactly opposite. I do not know whether members on the other side of the chamber are watching the news and seeing reports on people's opinion of politicians. There is a very good survey currently being run by the ABC that I think is called "Australia Talks". There are some very interesting points made about the truthfulness or otherwise of politicians. I want to point out some of these things. Ninety-eight per cent of Australian people believe that politicians should resign if they accept a bribe. I think that is fair enough. I am surprised it was not 100 per cent. Ninety-five per cent think that politicians should resign if they mislead Parliament. If it is uncorrected and done on purpose, maybe that is fair enough. Ninety-four per cent of the Australian public believe that a politician should resign if they lie. I am not going to stand in judgement of whether or not what the Premier said prior to the election was a lie, but I believe the people of Western Australia will make that judgement. They will make that judgement themselves when they read what the honourable member here quoted from the Premier in the interaction he had with Mr Mercer. I do not have to go back over that again, because to me that was very clear. The people of the regions will find that very clear. I think it is a disgrace that, at very best, the Premier misled on purpose the people of Western Australia prior to the election, when they could have made an informed decision. By all means those opposite could then have said yes, they have a mandate on this issue. It was raised repeatedly with the Premier, but he chose not to tell the full story. I go back to this "Australia Talks" survey. Ninety-four per cent of the Australian people said that a politician should resign if they lie. I call on the conscience of the Premier and for him to think about what he has done here. He has the opportunity to listen to the Australian people—94 per cent—and he can if he chooses to. If he feels he has lied to the Western Australian people about this issue, he can choose to resign. That is my invitation to Hon Mark McGowan in the other place at this point, because that is what 94 per cent of Australians thought in that survey of over 60 000 people in Australia about the truthfulness or otherwise of politicians.

I sat in the Broome Chamber of Commerce, where I had an interview, like we do before an election. I sat with Divina D'Anna, the member for Kimberley. She was asked a question on this issue and she made it very clear in front of all those people that she supported regional representation and that she was going to "fight like a Chihuahua". We have it on record and we can always present it here. She said she was going to fight like a Chihuahua.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: Fight like a Chihuahua?

Hon NEIL THOMSON: Yes. I think she said "nipping at the heels" to fight for this issue. I call on Hon Kyle McGinn sitting on the opposite side, who is a very robust and decent person, to stand up for regional Western Australia. When the inevitable vote comes to gut regional Western Australia of representation, I call on Hon Kyle McGinn to join us on this side of the house to vote against that bill. I call on Hon Peter Foster to do the same—represent his region. I feel very sorry for Hon Rosie Sahanna, who is fourth on the ticket and who will not have a position in the new Parliament when it is finally gutted on behalf of this review. We know what this review is going to do, because we know the members on Ministerial Expert Committee on Electoral Reform. Mr John Phillimore is on the panel. He has already published his findings on what he thinks about regional representation and equality. "Equality" is a very important word in this debate—equality as opposed to equity. I thought the Labor Party was the great party of equity—clearly not. It takes members on this side to stand up for equity for people in the regions. Labor members should be ashamed of themselves, because Mr John Phillimore has already put out a paper. Hon Tjorn Sibma presented a previous review, but more recently on the Curtin University website, which members can google and check out, John Phillimore and Graham Hawkes put out a paper with five options. Option A is for the number of metropolitan seats to go to nine—nine representatives. What happens to the regional seats? There will be three each. Option B is for the number of metro seats to go to five members. What happens to the regional seats? Seats in the Mining and Pastoral Region and the Agricultural Region will go down to three, and then another seat will be added. Option C is for the number of metropolitan seats to go up to seven members, and for the South West Region to be enlarged and include some of the metropolitan area—that is going to be great! It will include some of the metropolitan area, so it will be really representative! The Agricultural Region will have five seats and the Mining and Pastoral Region will have three seats. In my region there will be three seats. I have heard people say that there are vested interests. The Liberal Party gains on all these options, because the analysis has been done. But I am not standing up here for some smart process to get some extra numbers in the Liberal Party. I am standing up for the people who voted for me, and I expect Hon Kyle McGinn to do the same. The next option involves the whole state. Can members imagine what that option would look like—the whole state? That is Perth-centric thinking, and that is the sad part

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of speaking here today. I am very sorry for Hon Matthew Swinbourn. I have not got to know him very well yet, but I have heard he is an honourable person. He had to defend the indefensible. I could see by his body language how tough it was for him. This is Perth-centric thinking, which is going to result in bad outcomes for the state, I promise, because Western Australia's regions drive this economy. We need more people living in the regions. We need better representation.

During the election campaign I drove to Warburton. I drove to as many remote communities as I was allowed to visit. I was not even allowed to talk to my constituents until four days after the writs were called. I thought that was an absolute disgrace, by the way, and I would like to know more about why people who were representing their regions could not go and talk to their constituents. This is the sort of thing that ran on—absolutely! Members opposite can look at me; I can prove remote communities were shut down. We could not go and talk to the people who voted for us. Meanwhile, government ministers were flying around on the jet visiting these communities. That is one-sided. It does not stand up to any degree of democracy. I stand by that point. It was an absolute disgrace. We now see the same stitch-up here to knock out regional representation.

Several members interjected.

Hon NEIL THOMSON: I am furious, because the government has lied to the people of Western Australia. It makes me furious. I will stand —

Point of Order

Hon PIERRE YANG: I understand that the honourable member is very enthusiastic, but accusing the government of lying is absolutely unparliamentary.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Members, I draw your attention to standing order 44, “Offensive Words”, which states —

A Member shall not use offensive words in debate, including offensive words against either House of Parliament, any Member of either House, the Sovereign, the Governor or a judicial officer.

I listened to the context in which the member used those words. I do not believe they were directed at an individual; they were used in a general sense, so there is no point of order.

Debate Resumed

Hon NEIL THOMSON: Thank you, Mr Deputy President. I note the time; I have 14 seconds left. I have made my point, so I will leave it at that.

HON SOPHIA MOERMOND (South West) [11.10 am]: I thank Hon James Hayward for bringing forward this motion today. If media reports around the potential for electoral change are to be believed, the motion is both timely and topical. We can see the philosophical merits of one vote, one value but we are also painfully aware of the practicalities that can be encountered in rural electorates. It is a simple truth that rural members have a very different task in front of them when they represent great swathes of the state. The tyranny of distance is very real for us. I, for one, will spend much of the recess travelling from one end of the South West Region to the other, stopping at all points in between just to touch base with only a fraction of my constituents.

It might not be appropriate to ask when a minister last visited, let us say, Donnybrook; it is perfectly valid to ask how many times ministers passed through Donnybrook for whatever reason during a year or a Parliament. I suspect that the number is quite low compared with visits to electorates such as Stirling, Armadale or even Rockingham.

I look forward to hearing what others have to say on this subject but, for my part, I am not by any means convinced that we could or should rush to treat the regions in the same way we treat the metropolitan area. Even though I have philosophical sympathies towards one vote, one value, members can rest assured that I have some very practical sympathies for Hon James Hayward and his motivation in moving this motion today. If any system is deemed unfair, it deserves to be scrutinised and improved to provide fair and equal representation for all people in WA.

HON DR BRIAN WALKER (East Metropolitan) [11.12 am]: I have listened with some concern for some months to what is going on. I have to say that I do not know what is going on because I have not been informed properly and therefore I cannot take an opinion either way. If that is true for me, it is probably also true for the people of Western Australia. If we are looking at democracy, we ought to be involving every voice in this debate.

I have lived and worked in the regions. I have travelled to the Kimberley and the Pilbara and worked in both those areas, and visited Halls Creek, Fitzroy Crossing, Derby, Broome, Newman and the wheatbelt, where I resided for quite some considerable time. I am quite familiar with the issues surrounding the regions and how they are represented or, indeed, not represented as the case may be. The feeling in the regions where I lived is that the people are remote from Perth; they are not listened to. I cite as an example a psychiatric facility erected in Broome for the quite major Indigenous mental health problems. A very beautiful centre was built perfectly. It was constructed elegantly, but it was designed based on statistics referring to Perth metropolitan psychiatric needs. It was completely inappropriate

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for the needs of the Kimberley. It was designed by well-meaning people in Perth but it was not fit for purpose. Were we in the Kimberley best served? How do we know how to serve the people in the Kimberley if we do not have representatives there who can cast an eye over what is happening? Blind people are leading those who have vision but who have no voice. This is not tenable.

We have a system that has brought surprising results. I think we can deal with that. I think we need to speak about it. We need to look at it with an open mind—clearly, unbiased, unprejudiced. A few days ago I said some words about the fundamental principles by which we need to abide. Every member in this place is passionate; if they are not, they should not be here. Every member here is committed to serving the people who elected them and also to being good members of the party that supported them and gave them help. We recognise this. No imputation of any kind should be made against any sitting member or party. We all have our views and our biases, but because we have our biases, we also need to have an open mind to the other point of view. This entrenched vision needs to be stopped. This is one reason the study by the ABC showed how much people despise politicians, myself included, for what goes on in the public eye. We need to stand up and make changes. When we talk about electoral reform, we also need to consider reforming how we behave, because, quite plainly, our behaviour does not match the needs of the Australian people. This will be a word I give to myself as well as to my honoured and respected colleagues. It can also be said that our need to consider reform is genuine. We have a genuine need. I would like very much to look at how things are going on, but I also ask that this not be held behind closed doors initially but is put out to everyone to have a voice.

It is very clear that a different approach to how we manage legislation is needed. We have a house that is unmentionable, for very good reason, and we have this house of review. It has a different purpose. Although individual members of the other place might represent smaller populations, in here we need to look at legislation with a clear eye and a different perspective to look at what is right. That is not a party-political perspective but the perspective of a clear, open-minded, unbiased eye that perceives what is needed and what is not needed. We need to deal with honesty and integrity. We need to look at our basic policies—our own approach to what is right. We need to set the standard for this nation, if you like. Casting blame and forcing things through by sheer force of might, as is possible, do not serve the people of Western Australia. I ask that we bear this in mind in our deliberations over the coming weeks and months.

HON DR STEVE THOMAS (South West — Leader of the Opposition) [11.17 am]: I do not intend to make a long contribution, but I will just reinforce some of the obvious points that have been made by speakers today. I thank Hon James Hayward for his contribution and for his excellent motion on electoral reform. The government had no interest in electoral reform prior to the election.

Once again, we had an excellent contribution by Hon Dr Brian Walker. I enjoy his contributions. He referred to the other place, the place that shall not be named, as “unmentionable”. I thought we might have a little competition at some point to come up with a description. “Unfathomable” might rate. I have a few others, but I probably cannot say too many because the standing orders obviously tell us that we need to be respectful of the place that shall not be named.

Hon Sue Ellery: Wouldn’t you be reflecting on yourself as well?

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I think that some of the things that come from that house to this place to be repaired could probably be described in various forms; “unfathomable” might be one of them. In relation to some of the legislation, we could potentially say “incomplete”. “Indescribable” is a word that I have occasionally used for some legislation that finally arrived in the house of review in need of repair—we have given it the appropriate scrutiny and fixed it as best we can. I have added one more word to my lexicon for the place that shall not be named! I have already got a few on that list. Thank you, honourable member; I thought that was great.

This is, of course, the description of trust being broken. How many times does the Premier have to be asked prior to the election whether this is about to happen? I suspect that the Premier did not realise or did not think that he was going to have a win of the size that eventuated, but I am pretty certain that he thought he was going to win comfortably and win control of both houses of Parliament. I am pretty confident that is what he thought. He obviously does not confide in me. I did not get a phone call from the Premier saying, “Steve, I think we’re doing pretty well. I think we’re on top here and we’ll have both houses.” I am pretty confident, given the various polls that were out there, that the Premier had a fair idea that this result was going to look, perhaps not quite as lopsided as it did, but lopsided enough. I know a number of opposition members asked this question prior to the election. A number of opposition members spoke to journalists and said, “We think, given the potential outcome of this, the Premier needs to be asked quite specifically what his intent is.” He was asked quite specifically. I do give credit to a very good journalist, Dan Mercer, who was originally at *The West Australian* but is now in the joyous ABC offices in the south west, which obviously, if we are talking about where this legislation might go, is the best region in the state! It was put to the Premier in no uncertain terms.

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This is a matter of confidence and trust. This is a matter about whether we can trust the words of the Premier of Western Australia in what he says. It is an important question because, despite the political differences and the argy-bargy across the floor, the people of Western Australia want to be able to trust the words of their representatives, particularly the Premier, who is their highest representative at a state level. It was proven without doubt in the lead-up to the election, and afterwards, that that trust is not in good faith. How can a person repeatedly say, “It is not on our agenda” to do this thing? The polling was publicly available, and across the board it did not change significantly. Multiple polls sent a very similar message. The end result of the election was remarkably close to the polling that was released. I do not think the Premier had the slightest doubt about the outcome of the election. In my view, he must have known that the result was going to give him the capacity for significant electoral reform because he could control both houses. Why could he not come up with an honest answer when it was put to him by a journalist? Why could the Premier not give an honest answer to the people of Western Australia?

When did we recently have a very rushed committee review that gave rise to an outcome to which the government was disposed? Gee, that was not that long ago, was it, members? There is now a developing trend here, honourable members—it is a very old-fashioned part of government. Obviously, we know these things; we have known these things for a long time. To suggest that we have a committee that will review these things is a little like: never form a committee and ask for a report that you do not already have the answer partly written to! That is how government works. When we get to reports, the old saying is, “If you don’t know what you’re doing or if you don’t know what the answer to the problem is, form a committee. If you don’t know what the question is, form two committees: one to find the answer and one to work on the solution”! But also you certainly do not want to form a committee where you might get a recommendation that you do not like very much. In relation to the electoral reform committee, is it not the case that much of what is being debated is predetermined? I do not think sensible, right-thinking people in Western Australia have any doubt that what the government intends to do is slash regional representation, because it has the opportunity to do so, and it is going through the facade of a public review in order to justify its position. When we get to the end of that process, we will have to discover what the people of regional Western Australia think about that. Many members have said that it will then be up to the people in regional areas of Western Australia to respond, and I think that is absolutely the case.

Like many other members, I look forward to regional members, particularly those regional members who are new, in seats that the Labor Party have not traditionally held, working hard to justify the Labor Party position over the next three and three-quarter years. That will be an incredibly fun thing! I am sure the government is very good at discipline. I am sure that Labor Party members will have to stick to the good party line: it is good for the state of Western Australia to strip regional people of representation! They did it in the lower house. I remember that very clearly because my seat was one that disappeared. They are about to do it in the upper house. I am hoping that at long last the people of regional Western Australia will remember who looks after their interests and who has done their absolute best to decimate their representation. The impact of that on the 2025 election should be a very interesting outcome, and I hope it is.

HON DR SALLY TALBOT (South West) [11.25 am]: I want to make something clear right at the beginning of my remarks on this motion: I will never seek the call during non-government business while I am sitting on this side of the chamber. That is not what this 80 minutes of parliamentary time is about. That should have been made very clear to every member of this chamber who is not a member of the government during the training that they received. Compared with the time when I was sworn into this place in 2005, I know that there is a very comprehensive training program. I assume that members of the opposition know that this is their time to fill, but I have sought the call now to save Hon James Hayward being humiliated the very first time that he gets to his feet to move a substantive motion in this place. There are some things, obviously, that either the people who provided his training, or his own party, have not informed him about. There are a few basic rules. One, as I say, is that non-government business is supposed to be for members of non-government parties; that is not me, but I do not want Hon James Hayward to run out of speakers, which is exactly what has happened to him. I am going to say to Hon James Hayward, through you, Deputy President, that rule number two is: make sure you are not set up when you are asked to put your name to a motion. That is clearly what has happened here. There is 80 minutes of non-government business.

I know there are very few members sitting on the other side of the chamber; I know that they are few and far between. They can be counted on the fingers of —

Hon Pierre Yang interjected.

Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT: I just about need two hands, but only just!—thank you, Hon Pierre Yang.

Eighty minutes divided by the number of people on the opposition side of the chamber means they will run out of speakers unless they can put up something that people actually want to speak on, which that side clearly does not want to do.

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The third lesson that I would like to suggest to Hon James Hayward, with respect, is that if he is going to move a motion like this, he does his homework, which he clearly has not. He is clearly labouring under a serious misapprehension, both about the way that this place works and about the way the processes of government work.

I thank the Leader of the Opposition, Hon Dr Steve Thomas, for giving this place an insight into the way the Liberal Party regards inquiries that are set up. Hon Dr Steve Thomas has just told us that as far as he is concerned, an inquiry is not set up unless the answer is known. What does that tell us about the way the Liberal Party positions itself for government?

Hon Dan Caddy interjected.

Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT: It does not even know the question, let alone the answer, when it sets something up. He has just told us that he would never do it while he is in a leadership position.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members! Hon Dr Sally Talbot has very limited time left. I am actually now starting to struggle to hear the honourable member.

Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT: The Leader of the Opposition has just told us that while he is a member of the leadership team of the Liberal Party, it will never hold an independent, open-ended inquiry into anything! He is going to want to know the answer as well as the question! I am not actually sure that he knows either, and I do not think he has got any record to run on that.

I would just suggest to Hon James Hayward to be careful about the advice he gets from his own side.

I thank the members of the Legalise Cannabis WA Party for the thoughtful contributions they have made today, as they are rapidly establishing a reputation for doing in this place. It is nice to have people come into this place with an open mind and to hear them give voice to that open mind.

There are a couple of things that Hon James Hayward did get right. In my spirit of cooperation and collegiality, I would like to pay him the compliment of saying that he did get something right. He did get right the fact that electoral reform was not on the government's agenda before we were re-elected. That is absolutely correct. It is absolutely correct—I will say it again in case members did not hear—that electoral reform was not on the government's agenda prior to the election. The member is right and we will keep saying that because it is the truth. The reason it was not on the agenda is that we did not know what the outcome of the election was going to be.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT: Unlike members of parties on the other side of the political spectrum, who clearly did know what the outcome of the election was going to be. Oh yes, that is right—they went out and conceded! They went out five or six weeks before polling day and said, “We’re giving up now. We’re taking our bat and ball and going home, because the Labor Party has already won the election.” Are members opposite saying that at that point, we should have said, “Okay; there is no opposition. What shall we do?” No—we carried on fighting right until the last minute. Until six o’clock on Saturday, 13 March, we were fighting for every last vote at the ballot box. That is what those guys did not do. They packed up their bat and ball and went home. They hung up their clogs. What did they do? They were probably all at the afterparty by lunchtime on the Saturday. Did they wait until Saturday, 13 March?

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order!

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members! Hon Dr Sally Talbot, with 10 seconds.

Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT: Thank you, Deputy President. I just give Hon James Hayward that final advice.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.