

LOCAL GOVERNMENT — PREFERENTIAL VOTING

Statement by Minister for Local Government

MS H.M. BEAZLEY (Victoria Park — Minister for Local Government) [9.22 am]: I rise to update the house on the success of preferential voting at the 2023 local government elections.

Under the old first-past-the-post system, too often a majority of votes were cast for candidates who were not elected and there was no opportunity for preferences to flow, with those votes simply spent. Voters also did not have the chance to vote for more candidates than the number of vacancies to be filled.

For some time, every other state has used a form of preferential voting for state and local elections, and preferential voting was in place in Western Australia for many decades before the 1995 act. Through the Cook government's reforms, the recent ordinary elections were conducted under an optional preferential voting system. Optional preferential voting means ratepayers have the power to vote for as many or as few candidates as they wish, using numbered preferences.

The success of the reforms is clear, as illustrated by several examples provided to me. At the previous council election at the Shire of Broome, under the old first-past-the-post system, around 60 per cent of votes cast reached candidates who were elected. With our reforms in place at the recent ordinary elections, 82 per cent of votes cast contributed to the election of a candidate to council. I am advised that approximately 83 per cent of voters indicated more than one preference, and 38 per cent of voters numbered every single box for the 11 candidates in that election.

In the City of Gosnells, where a candidate was previously elected with less than five per cent of the vote, preferential voting also delivered a more representative council. In 2021, under first-past-the-post, all the candidates who were elected to council collectively had the support of only 44 per cent of voters. Under our reforms, nearly 80 per cent of votes reached a candidate who was elected at the most recent council elections. Overall, 63 per cent of voters indicated more than one preference, and 15 per cent were numbered from one to 22 for all candidates.

The benefits of preferential voting were also clear in the Town of Victoria Park, in my electorate. In 2021, under the old system, 56 per cent of votes reached a winning councillor candidate. With optional preferential voting in place, 72 per cent reached a winning candidate at this election. Approximately 70 per cent of voters numbered more than one box in the councillor election, and approximately 47 per cent of voters numbered every single box.

The results are clear: our reforms have made a real difference in bolstering democracy in council elections and elevating the voices of ratepayers. The Cook government is proud to have restored preferential voting for local governments as part of the most significant reforms to local government in more than 25 years.