



WEST AUSTRALIAN RATEPAYERS AND RESIDENTS
ASSOCIATION INCORPORATED

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IARN: A1027260D

9th September 2022

Attn: STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS
Legislative Council Committee Office
18-32 Parliament Place | West Perth

By Email: env@parliament.wa.gov.au

Petition No. 055 – Local government reform process

The West Australian Ratepayers & Residents Association (WARRA) Incorporated provides the following submission to the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs.

The response to this petition by the State's largest local government stakeholder group, the Residents, Businesses and Ratepayers (the community), those who will be directly impacted by any reform of Local Government, is demonstrative of a lack of confidence in the State Government supporting this petition. It is also troubling to note the support of this petition was also influenced by a fear of retribution by parties within local government. Consequently, a major section of the community has been unwilling to communicate their concern with the reform process and its content owing to the requirement of providing their individual details (notwithstanding the privacy provisions communicated by the Legislative Council).

It is significant to note that the local government sector recognises and expresses concern over a low participation rate from the community when it comes to voting, nevertheless, local governments did little to ensure maximum community participation in determining the most important and significant changes to local government in decades. In fact there is community concern that minimising community participation was an objective at the local government level, despite claims to the contrary.

There is concern that the local government sector is the victim of influence by the self-interest of special interest groups representing the bureaucratic stakeholders. Influence that is supported by the State Government's elected and administrative representatives. Essentially, those familiar with dealing with local government are concerned there is an unwelcome power struggle between bureaucrats and elected representatives that is detrimental to those who local government is there to serve.

A review of the first submissions in the reform process highlights the vast inequity in responses influenced by both WALGA and LGPro. The individual submissions by organisations subject to the influence of these two organisations outweighs the individual submissions provided by community interests.

WARRA declined to be part of the 'consultation' as it was not fit for purpose, choosing instead to support the Local Government Reform Facebook Group (LGR) submission in the form of a State-wide community consultation survey. The LGR Community Survey submission is representative of a greater number of community organisations and individuals than the individual submissions provided through the department's initial engagement process.

Additionally, more Elected Members took part in the LGR survey than in the department's own engagement process, choosing to be anonymised for fear of the continuing and apparent increased weaponisation of parts of the Act. To date, there is no evidence that the State has addressed the wide number of concerns and suggestions provided therein. <https://www.warra.asn.au/public/LGRG-Submission-DSL.G.pdf>

The fact that the State has already commenced implementing Reforms in accordance with its original intent and irrespective of community stakeholder feedback is offered as evidence to the legitimacy of community concerns.

Community concerns were further legitimatised by the fact that the LGR State-wide Community driven survey (provided to the State through the initial consultation process) clearly indicated people were concerned:

- that these local government reforms did not adequately provide clear information on the form and implications of the reforms,
- the State and Local Governments did not provide adequate opportunity for a comprehensive process to inform and engage those who local government services are provided to benefit

The effect being Millions of affected people have not been provided with:

- clear information as to the implications and impacts of the reforms
- the opportunity to contribute to the decision-making process for the reforms

If the State Government is to honestly develop and implement truly improved local government reforms, it must support not only the expectation of Ratepayers, but their right to be properly and satisfactorily informed and consulted before any such reforms are implemented.

It is inappropriate for the State to allow both WALGA and LGPro to dominate the advisory component of the process, as these two organisations hold a symbiotic relationship with a focus on the Administration of and Administrators of Local Government leading to decisions favouring bureaucratic rather than community interests.

Such a situation lends credence to the concerns that the local government reforms have all the hallmarks of serving to excerpt control over the Peoples' Elected Representatives whilst loosening the parameters for the administrative function of local government and providing less accountability for those employed to deliver the wishes of the duly elected Council's and the Communities they represent.

WARRA reiterate our request for the Legislative Council to recommend that the Government ensures the current process to amend the Local Government Act 1995 is discarded and a new process is carried out as described and requested in Petition No. 055.

"At the end of the day - no one wants WA to lag behind the rest of the country when it comes to fairness. Our great State shouldn't just be strong and successful - we should always be fair." Mark McGowan 16/8/2022

Your sincerely
Daniel Hanley
Principal Petitioner for
West Australian Ratepayers & Residents Association Incorporated