

From: [REDACTED]
To: [DLGSC Act Review](#)
Subject: RE: Consultation
Date: Thursday, 28 March 2019 12:43:41 PM
Attachments: [~WRD000.jpg](#)
[image001.png](#)
[image002.png](#)
[20181207 - Research Proposal.pdf](#)

Hello,

I would like to submit some feedback/input regarding the reform of the Local Government Act.

I've heard there is some intent through the review/reform to reign in the power of Local Government Authorities (LGAs) wherever possible on the basis that they are incompetent and corrupt. The thinking is that the state is a better steward of local affairs and LGAs require stricter governance. This is understandable, however it will undermine initiatives by the state and Commonwealth governments to decentralise economic development in WA.

To put it simply, centralised economic development is a symptom of centralised political power. Attached is my PhD research proposal from the University of Western Australia. This exciting bit of research is a bit young to fully inform your review, but the literature review is a worthwhile read. I will summarise briefly here.

In the economic geography the term *urban primacy* is used to refer to a territory where urbanisation/economic development is concentrated in one metropolitan region. Australian states exhibit some of the most extreme examples of urban primacy in the world. This reality has long figured into Australian political debate with several failed attempts by state and Commonwealth governments to decentralise population and economic activity. Thanks to recent scientific studies, this historic mystery may be a few steps closer to being solved.

Decentralised urban systems (which are relatively rare) are characterised by strong local and state governments with considerable political, administrative and fiscal autonomy/power. Usually urban primacy is a national phenomenon with countries like Thailand, France, Argentina, Mexico and Kenya being classic cases. Because of Australia's federal structure, which has granted the states considerable power, urban primacy is not a national feature of Australia. This is why economic geographers often miss the fact that Australia's enormous states exhibit extreme urban primacy. But why?

Latest research would suggest Australian states exhibit urban primacy because local governments are relatively weak. For example, they are legally creatures of the state, working at the pleasure of the state. The state may abolish a local government council. An LGA cannot independently develop and fund major works of infrastructure without the state's permission and support. Their level of dependency is colonial in flavour because centralised power is colonial in origin. In many respects the WA economy still exhibits colonial economic motion.

This Australian context can be compared/contrasted with the United States. While they are extremely different countries today, they have strikingly similar original circumstances (remoteness, low population, in the US west an inhospitable climate). Despite these similarities the two nations have divergent urban geographies. The United States is perhaps the best example of a decentralised urban system in the world. Both nationally and within its large states,

urban primacy ceases to be an issue (e.g. Florida, California, Texas). In the United States the equivalent tier of government to an LGA (towns and cities) have significant power and are incorporated, independent entities. Their elected representatives cannot be fired at the pleasure of the state. They may raise funds independent of tax revenue (e.g. municipal bonds). They may implement urban planning schemes independent of the state; while it is in their interest to work together, the power dynamic is very different. This enabled formerly remote, unpopulated, inhospitable regions to be transformed by major works of infrastructure which in turn magnetised and generated population (see: California and Texas). The common WA excuses for there being few cities in the state, such as low population, climate and remoteness, were equally applicable to California and Texas. The difference was that these formerly remote US regions had greater control over their destinies regardless of how their prospects were perceived by distant political capitals. The origins of this difference are accidental. Following the American Revolution, Americans replaced colonial governance with local governance. The US federal government was created to be weak. Former colonial capital cities were dethroned of their charters and remote capital cities were established (e.g. the capitals of California, Texas and Florida are Sacramento, Austin and Tallahassee respectively). Power was stripped down and local governments empowered. This had almost nothing to do with good economic development and everything to do with Americans coming from a well earned place of distrusting authority – their colonial experience had been rather traumatic. This was hardly Australia's experience, where it by and large was founded and federated from a place of trust in central authority. Quite accidentally, these varying origins correspond with long-term outcomes relative to urbanisation and economic development.

The above said, WA is not that far behind the 8 ball. Many scholars suggest urban primacy is a critical initial condition of economic development. That is, concentrating resources of all kinds in one city incubates a young economy, enabling it to gain a foothold. However, at a certain stage of maturity decentralisation becomes optimal. Specifically, at populations >2 million urban primacy becomes more of a bottleneck than a supporter of economic development. WA only recently crossed that threshold.

If there was one kernel of knowledge to distil from the above it is that the paradigm that the state must be the orchestrator and planner of decentralisation is in itself flawed. The literature suggests this is a bottleneck approach. Better to empower local governments. Analogous to parent and child, decentralised urban systems have delegated power downward, enabling local regions to make their own successes and mistakes. This here is how your review can be integral to impacting economic development in our state.

As shared, the literature review of my proposal lays out current thinking on the topic well. Hopefully food for thought as you proceed. I'm happy to answer any follow up questions, etc.

Thank You,

George Wilkinson | [REDACTED]

From: DLGSC Act Review <actreview@dlgsc.wa.gov.au>

Sent: Thursday, 21 March 2019 3:32 PM

To: Wilkinson, George [REDACTED]

Subject: RE: Consultation

Good afternoon George

Yes. Submissions are welcome via email at actreview@dlgsc.wa.gov.au

We have also prepared surveys available from the Department's website at dlgsc.wa.gov.au/lgareview.

Kind regards

Kenneth Parker

Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

From: Wilkinson, George [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, 21 March 2019 2:52 PM
To: DLGSC Act Review <actreview@dlgsc.wa.gov.au>
Subject: RE: Consultation

Hi Kenneth,

Can I make a public submission via reply to this email?

Thank You,

George Wilkinson | [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

From: DLGSC Act Review <actreview@dlgsc.wa.gov.au>
Sent: Tuesday, 5 March 2019 4:01 PM
To: Wilkinson, George [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: Consultation

Dear Mr Wilkinson

Thank you for your email. I am sorry that you were not aware of the recent session at the University of Western Australia.

The session was organised after the Department wrote to Western Australian universities, including UWA advising them of the opportunity to inform the review. UWA was the only university to respond and request a session. The participants were organised by UWA.

In the five months since the release of the papers, the Department has held more than 100 workshops including more than 20 community forums across WA. The details of these workshops are available [here](#).

The Department also hosts an inter-agency working group on the review. The Department of the Premier and Cabinet is represented by Nicole McCartney.

The Department has completed its schedule of community workshops.

We would be very interested in your research topic and would welcome you to make a submission to the review.

The public submission period closes on 31 March 2019.

Kind regards

Kenneth Parker

Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

From: Wilkinson, George [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, 5 March 2019 3:45 PM
To: DLGSC Act Review <actreview@dlgsc.wa.gov.au>
Subject: Consultation

To Whom it May Concern,

I was disappointed to learn today that I missed, by just a few days, a consultation at UWA regarding the Local Government Act Review, particularly given I am a PhD student whose research directly relates to local government reform. From my vantage this was not well advertised or announced, I cannot find a record of it in any of my emails.

Anyway, it appears you're nearing the end of your consultation phase, but I wonder if I might attend one of the remaining Metropolitan Perth sessions?

Happy to share my research topic beforehand if there is interest.

Thank You,

George Wilkinson [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]



www.dpc.wa.gov.au



Acknowledgement of Country The Government of Western Australia acknowledges the traditional custodians throughout Western Australia and their continuing connection to the land, waters and community. We pay our respects to all members of the Aboriginal communities and their cultures; and to Elders both past and present.

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