

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**To:** [DLGSC Act Review](#)  
**Subject:** Local government reform submission  
**Date:** Tuesday, 2 April 2019 11:24:15 AM

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Good afternoon Mr Parker,

I write in reply to an email sent to the University of Western Australia's School of Social Sciences seeking feedback on the McGowan Government's local government reform program. I am a PhD candidate studying local democracy at the University of Western Australia. I apologise greatly for the lateness of my email, and hope that it may still be considered among the submissions.

As a short overview of my background, as well as being in my third year of the PhD programme, I have degrees in Urban Planning as well as Public Policy & Management, and I have ten years of experience working in local and state government.

I will limit my comments to the Elections discussion paper, which I thought was very well put together and canvassed the issues nicely.

I am keen that reforms are considered that will help to broaden the range of people willing to nominate and campaign for councillor positions. Unfortunately, reforms in other states – namely amalgamation and limiting the number of councillor positions – has seen constituencies (and the number of constituents per councillor) expand enormously. This has undoubtedly increased the cost (in time, money and skill) of nominating and serving on council. Local government plays an incredibly important role as a 'training ground' for democracy; it allows more people to get involved, learn the ropes of politics, to have a stake in their community, and to build their local profile. If only a small percentage of the population is able to serve, this may not only compromise the representativeness of local democracy, but may also have flow-on consequences for higher tiers.

Considering this, reforms I support are:

-Instituting a maximum representative to elector ratios. This should mean substantial increases to the number of councillors in larger municipalities (or de-amalgamation). We should not shy away from the idea of increasing councillor numbers. The current average representative to elector ratio in metropolitan Australia and Western Australia is well above that of comparable countries internationally. The common perception that we are an over-governed nation is, at least at the local level, unfounded.

-Breaking councils into wards and minimum ward size. At least in the urban area, I see no issue with instituting minimum ward sizes, below which councils must be undivided (i.e. no wards). By the same token, maximum electorate sizes should also be considered, such that new wards are created and councils that are currently undivided are divided into wards. As the discussion paper notes, larger councils without wards have many candidates contesting the single election, raising competition and campaigning costs. A whole of council constituency also raises campaigning costs (money and time). It is noted that while such at-large elections may attract many candidates in the single election, they do not see an overall increase in candidates compared to divided councils. Indeed, analysis I have carried out shows that, as a percentage of the population, the number of candidates is highest in the smallest municipalities and falls as

municipality size increases.

A reform I am hesitant about:

-I am wary of instituting compulsory voting in the current context of large municipalities/constituencies. At the moment, 'ordinary citizens', wanting to have a go at serving their communities, still have a slim chance of being elected in larger municipalities simply due to the low voter turnout rates. Even in Stirling, it is possible to be elected with around 2,000 votes. However, if compulsory voting were introduced, candidates would need a significantly higher number of votes. Without ample wealth or political backing, it would be almost impossible for an 'ordinary citizen' to have a chance at serving her community.

Thank you for considering my feedback and suggestions. I wish you well in progressing the reforms.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua McDonnell  
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University of Western Australia

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