



31 January 2022

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## O'CONNOR PRESELECTION REFORM WORKSHOP

Dear Michael,

I extend my sincere thank you to the O'Connor Division for hosting me for a workshop with your members on 20 January.

As you know, State Executive has agreed to a rigorous grassroots consultation process for preselection reform. This letter is to confirm discussions at the workshop you hosted. I would appreciate if you could write back to me with your understanding of the conversations which took place across each of the four principles.

I do not believe there has been a time in our recent history where the appetite for reform has been so widespread. In all the workshops I have facilitated, the question is not whether we should have reform, but rather what it should look like.

My understanding of the views expressed during the workshop is summarised below. Given the session was conducted online, we did not complete the voting exercise I have facilitated with other Divisions.

For that reason, I have included below an outline of the feedback I have been receiving from the majority of workshop attendees. I believe much of this aligns with the views expressed by your members. In addition, it was useful to hear feedback on challenges unique to regional Divisions like yours, I have covered those below as well.

### Larger

In each workshop, attendees have agreed the number of preselectors currently entitled to attend preselections is too few, and that preselection committees should comprise a greater number of delegates. You will recall the fact pack showed the average number of entitled delegates for preselections for Legislative Assembly "key seats" was just 35.

Attendees have consistently articulated a clear view that selection committees should be around at least two and a half, up to ten times larger. Based on the key seat average used in the exercise, this would mean between 90 to 350 people participating in a preselection. This is in keeping with preselection models used in other states.

The desire for having such large numbers of delegates participating means the only viable model is a plebiscite model – allowing all grassroots members to participate in a preselection.

For example, O'Connor Division has 13 active branches. To continue the delegate system and reach the desired number of preselectors, each branch would need to elect between 7-26 delegates, which is unworkable given an average branch typically comprises ~10 members. Instead, the whole membership of the Division should be enfranchised.

For the O'Connor Division, I also make two further observations.

- A plebiscite model would enfranchise all of your members, not just those in active branches. There are 52 branches in the O'Connor Division, 13 of which are not suspended. Under the current model, only those which are not in suspension can send delegates to a preselection. A plebiscite model, like that being trialed at the moment, has no regard for the status of the branch, rather it just looks at the members within a Division.
- There needs to be more work done to enable participation under a plebiscite model in an area as geographically large as the O'Connor Division. The Party must look at ways we can engage members in the process, in a way that doesn't skew the result towards how many people in a major regional center who turn up to vote. For example, virtual preselections or postal ballots could be used in regional seats.

In addition, I asked you how the O'Connor Division have meetings at the moment. You said that a weekend of events is usually built around an AGM. The same concept could apply to a regional plebiscite with careful planning.

## **Local**

All workshop attendees so far have agreed that the current proportion of local delegates attending key seat pre-selections was too low. You will recall the fact pack showed only ~58% of delegates in most key seat preselections were locals who lived and worked in the electorate.

The vast majority of attendees agree preselections should comprise at least 75% local delegates, and as high as 100% as is the case in Tasmania. There is generally a relatively even distribution in each workshop between these two options.

Further, there has been considerable discussion over the definition of what should constitute a "local delegate". Attendees often strongly make the case that the definition of local should only enfranchise those delegates who are on the electoral roll at a residential address within the electorate where the pre-selection is being conducted.

This view has received strong support on the basis that adopting a looser definition of "local" could result in the signing-up of members who live outside the electorate, with those "outside" members having a disproportionate influence over preselections.

This has implications for those members of the Division who are not on the electoral roll within the boundaries of O'Connor Division, namely those who live in:

- The electorate, but by virtue of lacking Australian citizenship, are not on the electoral roll
- Another area, but choose to be members of O'Connor Division because they:
  - Wish to contribute where they are a member because of historical links to that community or their support for the candidate or MP
  - Joined O'Connor Division or one of its branches because those constituent bodies are particularly active, whereas the bodies where they live are less active

- Have strong friendships with other members of O'Connor Division, and want to associate with them

I appreciate the views put by your members that highlighted this as a significant issue which must be addressed for regional Divisions.

I would be grateful if you could discuss these issues further with you members, and clarify with me their views on how local should be defined, and if there is a way we should be enfranchising those with historical links to regional Divisions.

### **Simpler**

All workshop attendees favor a simpler preselection system that was easy to administer.

There are three ways to achieve this through a plebiscite model.

- Constituting selection committees comprising only local delegates, with no additional delegates from outside the electorate or the centre (e.g. no State Council delegates), who must be on the electoral roll.
- A mixture of local and central delegates - closer to the current practice of having a mix of local delegates and then layering on central delegates from State Council.
- The same system as that directly above, but adding in additional eligibility criteria such as having to be a member of the Party or branch for a period of time, and that local delegates must be on the electoral roll.

I am not of the opinion so far, that either model would impact the willingness of attendees to support reform, as long as the criteria outlined in the "larger" and "local" sections were met.

### **Better Vetting**

Each workshop has made it clear that the current arrangements around candidate vetting are inadequate. Attendees accept that the WA Liberal Party must to codify its vetting processes, and were willing to look to other States for guidance on how to achieve this.

There are three schools of thought on how vetting could be improved:

- The largest group of workshop participants believed that a vetting committee should exist, and should provide advice to State Executive which could then stop an application from progressing.
- Another group slightly smaller group believe a vetting committee should provide advice directly to the relevant selection committee where the candidate has nominated.
- A third, but smaller, group believed the committee itself should be able to stop an application.

Despite these disparate schools of thought, I do not sense a particular model is preferred. It was useful to have several former candidates on the call, to provide their views and experiences of the vetting process.

### **Other matters**

In addition to the above, the below views have been consistently raised in other workshops. I offer no opinion on these points, but ask that you consider them in the response from your Division given they continue to be a topic of discussion.

- That being an office bearer in a Division or local branch is a measure of contribution and that person should be enfranchised with a vote, even if not otherwise eligible. The counterargument has been made that this could skew executive positions to those who are not local.
- That there could be a grandfather or sunset clause on eligibility to vote in local preselections for those who are not local, but once were. For example, the Victorian Liberal Party's constitution makes allowances for those who were a member of a local branch on 12 October 2008 and who lived in the area at some point from 1 July 2007. This could, however, undermine the simpler to administer principle, and create two classes of membership.

### **Next steps**

I am conducting workshops in each Division, after which they will receive a letter just like this, allowing a further opportunity to put their views. Taking those into account, we will then identify and models which deliver against the four principles.

It is anticipated these workshops will be completed by the end of February/early March 2022. Models will be circulated, with another opportunity for consultation and feedback.

Please extend my sincere appreciation to all those who participated on the night.

Across the Party, I see not only the appetite for reform, but that we can have a respectful, sober and mature conversation about the future of selecting candidates to represent our great Party in the community, and ultimately, in Parliament.

I look forward to your response and continuing to work with you and the O'Connor Division. Please note I plan on releasing this letter publicly on the reform section of the Party's website, as well as your response.

Yours sincerely,



**Richard Wilson**  
State President