

16 March 2022

Mr. Richard Wilson  
President – WA Liberal Party  
Via email: richard.wilson@waliberal.org.au

### PERTH PRESELECTION REFORM WORKSHOP

Dear Richard,

Thank you for both facilitating the Perth reform workshop and for your letter summarising the feedback.

It is indeed refreshing to see such a robust consultation process being undertaken in the lead up to the July State Conference. It has been made abundantly clear to me by members of the Division, communities of interest within the Perth electorate, and the Perth business community that not only is there a desire for change, but an expectation of change.

The Perth Division is unique in that it takes in the Capital City and the Central Business District. The West Australian Parliament sits in the Division, as do the Corporate headquarters of many of WA's largest private enterprises. This is important to note as regular feedback has lamented the lack of candidates with a business background, whether that be as a senior decisionmaker or as a business owner. Furthermore, many potential candidates from the private sector choose to self-select out of the pre-selection process as they have been deterred by the self-destructive practices of "branch-stacking" and "branch-bombing". The impression this gives individuals who may be eminently qualified in their own field, and desire to serve the community, is that they have zero prospect of success in what is perceived to be a "fixed race". This speaks to not only the rules of the party codified in our constitution but the "unwritten rules" of how we operate and how we treat each other. In short, the culture of the organisation - are we seeking to be a broad-based grass roots political party, or are we content to be an insular cabal of political apparatchiks with the inability to relate to the members of the community we seek to represent?

I note your observation that no one in attendance at the Perth reform workshop was of the view we should maintain the status-quo arrangement. I am incredibly proud to lead a Division that took three reformist motions to the 2021 State Conference. They focused on increased enfranchisement of members, more transparency with pre-selection delegates, and the obvious change to move our membership fees into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I anticipate the Division will continue to show thought leadership and discuss further constitutional amendments in the lead up to the State Conference.

I will offer my responses to your observations below and additionally include a few other pieces of feedback made to me since.

### Larger

Workshop attendees agreed that pre-selection committees should be larger in the number of participants. The dotmocracy exercise showed a strong preference for pre-selection committees being five times larger than their current configuration. This in practical terms would mean the adoption of a plebiscite style enfranchisement of members.

The size of the State or Federal pre-selection committees would be almost the entirety of most of the Branches if the feedback from the Perth reform workshop was adopted. The only practical way to achieve this would be the 100% enfranchisement of members.

### Local

The workshop supported in the strongest terms the importance of a “locality rule” to uphold the integrity of the pre-selection process.

There is of course a divergence of views on exactly how far this should extend. The vote at the Perth reform workshop showed a continuum spanning 75-100%. This matter has been discussed at prior Divisional Council meetings with a range of views. In the spirit of transparency there are some within the Division who feel the inclusion of a 100% locality rule would negatively impact members who are in a CBD Branch. This is on the basis they may work in the electorate but not live within it. This also reflects the fact that the Perth CBD has a smaller ratio of residential to commercial zoning than other Capital City Divisions. Having a plebiscite pre-selection with a “locality rule” then no longer penalises the entire branch from participating. They will no longer be held hostage to the 50% + 1 rule due to the unique zoning constraints of the Capital City.

There was a strong feeling aired at prior Divisional Council meetings and feedback received since that the “locality rule” should be on the basis of your place of residence, not based on where you work or other links to the electorate. The concern stemmed from the difficulty of administering such a system and that a “grandfathering clause” would be detrimental to the democratic principles of a broad-based local pre-selection committee. The easiest way to administer this would be based on where you are on the electoral roll. There is some appetite to allow individuals who aren’t on the electoral roll (i.e. are not yet Australian Citizens, or between the ages of 16-18) to participate on the proviso that they reside locally, are able to show proof of this (council rates or a residential tenancy agreement) and that the burden of proof be on the pre-selector so as not to waste the time of staff at headquarters ensuring compliance.

### **Simpler**

Participants overwhelmingly agreed that the current rules were too difficult for a person without legal training to interpret; and that simplicity for candidates, pre-selectors and headquarters staff should be pursued.

It is worth noting that needlessly complicated rules favour individuals with a near encyclopaedic knowledge of the party rules at the expense of party members who focus their involvement in community facing activities rather than internal party machinations.

The general feedback I have received indicates that random State Council delegates are superfluous in a system that has a plebiscite and “locality rule” although members seemed agreeable to leaving the ratification to State Council.

### **Better Vetting**

The Perth reform workshop agreed in principal that there should be enhanced vetting procedures for candidates. There was however a wide range of views, on what the exact format looked like.

Feedback received since has indicated a lack of appetite for a committee that can make the decision to “blackball” an application prior to the pre-selection. Members indicated they felt uncomfortable with an internal body that could “intercept applications” before the pre-selectors had a chance to judge the applicants for themselves. This was in part driven by a lack of confidence in the integrity of such a body. Concerns arose from that fact that it could be factionalised and used as some sort of “star-chamber” to punish would-be candidates.

There seemed to be more appetite for a body who gave a recommendation to the pre-selection committee but allowed participants to make up their own minds. This approach is more consistent with the appetite for a plebiscite and “locality rule”. If you believe in a broad-based participatory model then it is incongruent for a body separate to the grassroots members to unilaterally stop an application.

Otherwise my observation is similar to yours, members of the Division would be open to different models as long as there was an expanded level of participation and a residential requirement.

### Other matters

In response to the two points raised in your correspondence I offer the following observations based on direct member feedback.

There is a common misconception that Branch office bearers are entitled to other positions within the party. This often includes Branch Presidents believing that they are automatically State Conference delegates, State Conference Delegates believing that they are automatically State Council Delegates etc, etc I then understand why some believe that as a measure of gratitude that certain office bearers receive ex-officio status to certain bodies. My experience within the Perth Division has been largely but not entirely different. There are members of the Divisional Executive for example that have made it known that they support the “locality rule” even if that then means that they themselves would be disenfranchised from participating in the pre-selections within the Division they are a senior office bearer of. The feedback from those members was that the integrity of the process is more important than their personal benefit. In particular drawing on the fact that if we cannot present a strong message to the community that there has been meaningful change then we will continue to suffer electorally.

There was little to no appetite when I spoke to members of a “grandfather clause”. It directly contradicted the principles of a simpler pre-selection process and would in all likelihood dilute the principles of a “locality rule”. There were also concerns aired to me over allegations of members from out of area being signed up to the party now on the expectation that there would be a two year minimum membership rule and a “grandfather clause” included. This sort of behaviour is viewed as abhorrent, and in direct contrast to the democratic principles our party is supposed to uphold. More galling is the suggestion that party operatives are planning this as a clandestine operation to parachute loyal foot soldiers into winnable seats. It is precisely this kind of attitude that undermines any attempt to find viable tier-1 candidates from the private sector to enter into preselection processes.

On the topic of integrity of processes, there has also been feedback in relation to the forensic audit that is currently underway. The review of the March 2021 State Election and the years that proceeded it drew to attention some alleged conduct that undermines the integrity and confidence of the pre-selection process independent of whatever format of selection is used. We cannot be seen to have adequately reformed if there are individuals within the party who are actively subverting internal processes. The matter must be brought to a head and resolved so that we may move on and look to the future.

### Conclusion

Thank you once again Richard for visiting the Perth Division and facilitating the reform workshop. I had extremely positive feedback from attendees and a renewed sense of optimism in the party based on your handling of this reform process.

While the milieu at the time of the March 2021 State Election was conducive to us losing electoral support, there can be no doubt that there have been longstanding issues within the party. I am hopeful that the reform process encourages members to do what is in the best interests of the party, and not what is just in the interest of those who wish to maintain power structures that have served them personally in the past.

I and the Perth Division look forward to continuing to work with you and other reform minded individuals and party units to ensure that the WA Liberal Party is once again in government, and proudly serving the good people of Western Australia.

Kindest regards

David Martinich  
President – Perth Division  
Liberal Party of Australia (WA Division)