

Durack Division

Liberal Party of Western Australia

Mr Richard Wilson
President
Liberal Party of Western Australia
Via email: [REDACTED]

Position on Reform

Dear Richard,

Thank you for your letter in relation to the position of Durack Division on Party reform. I know that the issue is complex and that your consultation has been broad. On behalf of Durack Division, I thank you for the time that you have put into this pursuit, especially the time you have taken to liaise with Durack and other country Divisions.

In this letter I will endeavour to outline the response from Durack Division in relation to your four outstanding questions, as well as thoughts on broad principles of reform. I have consulted with Durack Division and will endeavour to relay to you the consensus view that I believe is held by the Division. I encourage you to undertake as much regional consultation as possible.

1. Larger: Most - but not all - preselections across Durack are well attended. The key concern of the Division in relation to larger preselections is that enfranchisement of more members comes with a method to allow at-home participation. I will touch more on this later. Constitutionality of Branches is often the excluding factor for local members - a plebiscite option would remove this issue. The Division supports larger preselections as long as increased options for participation are offered.
2. Local: There is a very strong view that preselections in Durack should be more heavily weighted to local residents. Among members of Durack Division, this component of reform is the most passionately felt. As your letter outlines, many members who resided in the Division for significant periods of time and now live in Perth consider themselves to be local - this must be taken into account as the Division strongly wishes to retain these members' input. This would not be an issue exclusive to Durack.

A system where non-local residents who are members of local branches can be elected as delegates would be a good hybrid, with a grandfathering system considered a distant second as an alternative. Reforms to better enfranchise more local members are very strongly supported by the Division, given a certain period of membership (one or two years are the most common suggestions).

3. **Better Vetting:** There is strong support for increased vetting. Avoiding embarrassment of the Party through media attacks and resignations can only be beneficial. Putting this power into the hands of an elected body however, risks factionalising the process. This would defeat the point of reform. The Division supports stronger vetting, done by party officials, not party members.
4. **Simple:** The Division would benefit from simplifying preselections. Administrative and timing cut-offs has caused a number of members and a number of branches to be counted out of preselections and other meetings, even when efforts were made to comply. For example, one member renewed their membership one day too late to participate as a delegate in a preselection despite being elected as a delegate and despite being a party member for a long period of time. If this process cannot be simplified, a flag when delegates are submitted to OMMS would improve this, as well as education of the membership of the requirements of branches and delegates to ensure participation. The Division strongly supports simplifying the rules around preselections.

Aside from these principles that you have raised, there are other, more specific issues facing country Divisions that are posed by reform. They are at least as - if not more - important than the final structure of our reform journey.

The first of these is remote participation in preselections. It is not feasible, practical, or fair to expect all members of the Durack Division to gather in one physical location to participate in a preselection. If this location were Perth, members living outside driving distance would be vastly disadvantaged; if the location were in Durack then a massive 'home-ground advantage' would be had by any local candidate. This creates more barriers than it removes.

Without the option for remote participation in some way - whether it be electronic or some other form, I believe the delegate system presents a more equitable system for preselections in Durack. Reform enabling remote participation must be passed either before or as part of plebiscite reform. This would ensure that plebiscite reform is not passed in isolation, and country Divisions can support reform knowing that far-flung remote branches will not be disadvantaged. Another option would be enabling a regional Division to choose between plebiscite preselections (whatever their final design) and delegate preselections, on a case-by-case basis. I urge you to consider these issues and options when drafting reform. Electronic participation is the most important issue for members of Durack Division through this reform process. The unreliability of regional telecommunications also presents an issue that must be looked at.

Secondly, the issue of proxies at preselections should be considered. Currently, members of country Branches have the capacity to hold a second vote via proxy. While there has been no firm opinion put to me on how this should continue under a plebiscite model, the question has been raised as to whether a local Branch member elected as a delegate is 'pickled' or entitled to two votes, and whether elected delegates (or local members) can proxy their vote to another member - as they can currently. There is strong support for the existing double proxy rule. Any reform process should be very clear around proxy rules, both in general and in relation to country Divisions.

Thirdly, the recently proposed cap on State Council delegates at 20 (rather than 20%) means that Durack and other regional Divisions will have a greatly reduced capacity to participate in metropolitan preselections. Although this cap would also mean less metropolitan participation on regional preselections, the exposure to regional issues that the metropolitan preselectors would gain from attending these preselections would be of benefit to them. I believe that a greater number of State Councillors - and therefore a greater number of regional State Councillors - being present at preselections would be beneficial to the process.

Finally, I believe there needs to be consideration given to the definition within the reform process of 'local' - especially in regional settings. A number of Durack Division members, while living in the Division, are not strictly members of their nearest branch as it is not active. They are instead members of their closest *active* Branch. Some examples are Liberals who live in Northampton, who are members of the Geraldton Branch (50km away), and Liberals in various Pilbara towns such as Tom Price who are members of the Karratha or Port Hedland branches. It seems unfair to begrudge these Liberals their membership of 'non-local' branches if they would otherwise be the only member of their home branch. Given the membership audit by BDO found that around one third of Liberals do not live in their local branch, perhaps consideration could be given to defining 'local' (for preselection purposes) as residing in the *Electorate* or *Division* in which you are enrolled, rather than Branch - at least for regional Divisions.

I thank you again for your efforts over the past 12 months and look forward to working with you to strengthen our Party. Please do not hesitate to reach out for clarification on any issues that I have raised.

Yours sincerely,

Dean Wicken

President - Durack Division

14 June 2022

CC: C&D Committee

CC: State Director

CC: Deputy State Director