

## FLYING MINUTE: Sector Consultation – Compulsory and Voluntary Voting and Election Frequency

By Felicity Morris, Manager Governance and Procurement

### RECOMMENDATION

**That State Council endorse the Electoral Reform Discussion Paper for the purposes of sector consultation.**

**RESOLUTION 258.FM/2026**

**CARRIED**

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Following a report to State Council on WALGA's Elections Advocacy Position in December 2024, State Council requested that the WALGA Secretariat further investigate the implications of compulsory and voluntary voting in Local Government elections.
- WALGA's sector-wide consultation in late 2024 showed:
  - 74% support for voluntary voting overall, but majority support for compulsory voting among metropolitan and Class 1 and 2 Local Governments.
  - 98% support for four-year terms with a two-year spill (biennial elections).
- Recent Ministerial comments have indicated State Government support for reform, including consideration of compulsory voting and a four-year, all-in/all-out election cycle. These comments have prompted renewed interest and discussion across the sector.
- The introduction of compulsory voting is likely to require a transition to a four-year, all-in/all-out election cycle, and this model has been the subject of recent Ministerial commentary and interest from parts of the Local Government sector.
- WALGA has contacted both the Department of Local Government, Industry Regulations and Safety (LGIRS) and the Minister's office seeking details on the consultation process and timeframes but no further information has been provided.
- In anticipation of potential reforms, it is proposed that a discussion paper be circulated to all Local Governments, with Council-endorsed feedback to inform a proposed advocacy position for consideration by State Council.

### ATTACHMENT

- Draft Electoral Reform Discussion Paper

*For the purposes of this Flying Minute, the draft Discussion Paper has not been included as an attachment. Based on State Councillor feedback collected during the Flying Agenda process, refinements will be made to the Discussion Paper. Once finalised, the sector consultation timeframes will be adjusted to ensure that Local Governments have sufficient time to respond.*

### BACKGROUND

#### WALGA Elections Advocacy Position Review

WALGA has long-standing advocacy positions in support of voluntary voting and elections of half the Council every two years. In late 2024 WALGA conducted a review of its Elections

Advocacy Positions ([Advocacy Position 2.5.15 Elections](#)) to ensure they reflected the sector's contemporary view.

A total of 92 Local Governments participated in the sector-wide consultation. The results informed a report to the [State Council meeting in December 2024](#). The strong (98%) support for half spills every two years was reflected in the adopted advocacy position. While voluntary voting was supported by an overall majority of responses (74%), compulsory voting was supported by a majority (64%) of metropolitan respondents and a majority (61%) of Class 1 and 2 respondents.

State Council requested that the WALGA secretariat undertake further investigation of the implications of compulsory and voluntary participation in Local Government elections before reporting back to State Council.

This investigation was ongoing when the Minister for Local Government raised the prospect of further Local Government election reform.

### **2025 Ministerial statements and response**

In June 2025, Hon Hannah Beazley MLA, Minister for Local Government, stated her support for a four-year election cycle, citing concerns about voter fatigue and the rising costs of conducting biennial elections. These messages were repeated in Minister Beazley's address to WALGA's 2025 Local Government Convention, which also raised the possibility of compulsory voting.

In response to Minister's Beazley's comments, several Zones considered motions relating to four yearly, all-in/all-out elections.

These Zone resolutions were referred to the Governance Policy Team at the [State Council meeting in September 2025](#).

### **COMMENT**

The issues of compulsory voting and election frequency are complex, with significant implications for democratic participation, governance, and electoral administration. It is critical that WALGA is well-positioned to engage with the State Government, based on a clear sector position. While the Secretariat has undertaken research to provide relevant data, further consultation is recommended. The information presented in the attached Electoral Reform Discussion Paper is intended to support sector engagement.

### **State By State Comparison**

While voting in Local Government elections is compulsory in most Australian states, Western Australia and South Australia remain exceptions where participation is voluntary. In Tasmania, voting in Local Government elections was made compulsory in 2022. In South Australia, a former Minister for Local Government initiated a Local Government Participation and Elections Review in October 2023, which included the question of whether voting in Local Government elections should be made compulsory. However, no further action has been taken.

All Australian states and territories, except Western Australia, conduct Local Government elections on a four-year cycle using an "all-in, all-out" approach.

The attached Electoral Reform Discussion Paper includes an overview of key statistics for each State relating to Local Government elections.

### **Policy considerations**

The policy considerations in this area are complex, and open to competing views. The Electoral Reform Discussion Paper lists high-level considerations that have been raised in the debate on these matters but does not provide a recommended view. Local Governments are invited to identify the key considerations that inform their position.

### **Election Costs**

The sector has expressed concerns regarding rising election costs and a lack of transparent costing methodology. Election costs are a relevant factor in assessing electoral reform proposals, balanced with the value of civic engagement and representation. The Electoral Reform Discussion Paper seeks to identify the factors associated with each reform proposal that may affect election costs. However, it is not possible to confidently forecast the precise cost impact. Cost modelling would require collaboration with the WAEC to assess the complex interactions of a range of factors to reflect real-world conditions and resource requirements. WALGA has requested that the WAEC assist the LGIRS to undertake cost modelling to quantify the cost impacts of reform proposals.

### **Proposed consultation**

It is proposed to circulate the Electoral Reform Discussion Paper to all Local Governments, seeking a Council endorsed position by Friday, 27 February. The consolidated feedback would inform a report and proposed advocacy positions to be presented to State Council.

**FLYING MINUTE OUTCOME**

Poll created: 13/01/2026 at 15:00

Poll closed: 20/01/2026 at 17:00

| <b>Name</b>            | <b>Completed Date</b> |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Chris Antonio          | 20/01/2026 13:42      |
| Phillip Blight         | 19/01/2026 21:24      |
| Laurene Bonza          | 19/01/2026 18:20      |
| Donelle Buegge         | 20/01/2026 11:40      |
| Scott Crosby           | 14/01/2026 23:10      |
| Patrick Hall           | 14/01/2026 13:57      |
| Rod Henderson (Deputy) | 19/01/2026 16:19      |
| Lewis Hutton           | No response.          |
| Mark Irwin             | 14/01/2026 12:01      |
| Paul Kelly             | 19/01/2026 22:25      |
| Teresa Lynes           | 18/01/2026 23:27      |
| Paige McNeil           | 17/01/2026 10:52      |
| Chris Mitchell         | 20/01/2026 18:16      |
| Matthew Niikkula       | 20/01/2026 15:44      |
| Les Price              | 17/01/2026 8:08       |
| Helen Sadler           | 18/01/2026 11:19      |
| Robert Schmidt         | 20/01/2026 15:25      |
| Eman Seif              | 20/01/2026 14:35      |
| Audra Smith            | No response.          |
| Stephen Strange        | 19/01/2026 9:13       |
| Liz Sudlow             | 20/01/2026 13:30      |
| Mike Walmsley          | No response.          |
| Karen Wheatland        | 20/01/2026 6:13       |
| Barry Winmar           | 15/01/2026 12:01      |

**The Discussion Paper was endorsed.**

*Following State Councillor feedback, refinements will be made to the Discussion Paper. Once finalised, the sector consultation timeframes will be adjusted to ensure that Local Governments have sufficient time to respond.*