



INFOPAGE

To: All Local Governments **From:** Kirsty Martin,
Executive Manager Member Services

Date: 13 February 2026

Subject: Sector Consultation – Electoral Reform Discussion Paper

Operational Area:	Governance
Key Issues:	<p>Local Governments are requested to provide Council-endorsed feedback to inform WALGA's advocacy on Local Government electoral reforms expected to be proposed by the State Government, specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • full spill elections every 4 years, and • compulsory voting at Local Government elections
Action Required:	Response to WALGA by 4:00pm Friday 27 March 2026

WALGA is undertaking sector engagement regarding Local Government electoral reforms expected to be proposed by the State Government.

In June 2025, Hon Hannah Beazley MLA, Minister for Local Government, expressed 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 at WALGA's 2025 Local Government Convention, which also raised the possibility of compulsory voting. These comments have prompted renewed interest and discussion across the sector.

WALGA has contacted both the Department of Local Government, Industry Regulations and Safety (LGIRS) and the Minister's office seeking details of any consultation on these matters, but no further information has been provided.

By proactively progressing this consultation, WALGA is seeking to obtain sector feedback that will ensure WALGA's positions reflect the sector's current views and enable timely, well-informed and effective engagement with the anticipated State Government reform proposals.

Attached to this Infopage is a brief Discussion Paper. The Discussion Paper outlines some example considerations that Local Governments may choose to address when preparing their feedback. It is not intended to present an exhaustive or prescriptive list.

Local Governments are requested to provide Council endorsed responses to the Discussion Paper by 27 March 2026. This feedback will inform an item to be presented to State Council.

For more information, please contact Kirsty Martin on 9213 2051 or Felicity Morris on 9213 2093. Please send responses to governance@walga.asn.au



WALGA

1.2.2. Election costs

In 2024, WALGA conducted a review of five Local Government biennial election cycles up to and including the 2023 Local Government elections. The review demonstrated significant cost increases and concerns about the lack of transparency in costings provided by the Western Australian Electoral Commission (WAEC).

In September 2024, State Council adopted Advocacy Position [2.5.18 Local Government Elections Analysis 2015-2023](#) calling for an independent audit of the WAEC's cost allocation methods and the introduction of Service Level Agreements to ensure transparency of costing methodology.

Cost implications are a relevant consideration in assessing the appropriateness of any proposed electoral reform. However, the current lack of transparency in costing methodology makes it impossible to confidently forecast cost impacts.

This discussion paper seeks to identify the factors associated with each reform proposal that may affect election costs. This is further complicated by the interaction of possible reform options and external economic factors.

WALGA has requested that the Department of Local Government, Regulation and Industry Safety (LGIRS) and the Western Australian Electoral Commission, undertake modelling to identify the cost implications of any proposed reforms.

A comparison of available electoral costs data, State by State, is included as Table 4 in Appendix 2.

WALGA has contacted other Local Government associations to ask if they have experienced changes in costs associated with compulsory four-year, all-in/all-out, local government elections. As this has been the approach in most jurisdictions for some time, responses were largely unable to address changes in cost.

2. Election Frequency

Current situation

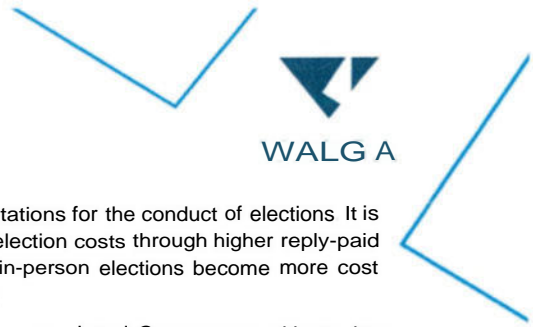
Western Australia holds biennial elections, with half of the offices on Council elected every two years for four-year terms. All other Australian jurisdictions hold full spill elections every four years (four-year terms).

Considerations

Considerations include:

- Voter participation and fatigue
- Continuity, knowledge retention and mentorship for new Council Members
- Stable whole-of-Council mandate and collective accountability
- Capacity for candidate recruitment
- Administrative requirements
- Extraordinary vacancies and backfilling
- Timing and transitional arrangements

Re-election rates



The WAEC uses expected participation rates to inform quotations for the conduct of elections. It is likely that an increased participation rate would increase election costs through higher reply-paid charges and increased staffing for the count. However, in-person elections become more cost effective than postal elections at higher participation rates.

WALGA cannot definitively determine an overall cost impact to Local Government without the requisite cost-modelling from the WAEC. WALGA has requested that the WAEC provide this modelling to LGIRS. The cost impact of compulsory voting may also be different for each Local Government depending on their current participation rates and methods for holding elections, and whether these would change significantly.

Tasmania implemented compulsory voting in Local Government elections in 2022. Local Government Association Tasmania (LGAT) advised that this resulted in reasonably significant cost increases. The Tasmanian Electoral Commission reported a \$9.32 per elector cost for the first compulsory Local Government elections in 2022, a 35% increase from \$6.92 in 2018. An analysis of the factors contributing to this increase is not available and it may be challenging to draw direct comparisons between Tasmania and WA.

It is likely that the cost impact of compulsory voting would be moderated if elections also transition to a 4 yearly cycle.



Appendix 1- WALGA Elections Advocacy Positions

2.5.15 Participation in Local Government Elections

Position Statement

The Local Government sector supports voluntary participation in Local Government elections

Noting that State Council at its 6 December 2024 State Council meeting resolved that the WALGA Secretariat further investigate implications of compulsory and voluntary participation in Local Government elections and report back to State Council.

Background

Voluntary participation in Local Government elections is a long-established position of the Local Government sector, and was confirmed as a result of sector feedback received during the Local Government reform process.

State Council Resolution

- December 2024 - 090.5/2024
- February 2022 - 312.1/2022
- December 2020 - 142.6/2020
- March 2019 - 06.3/2019
- December 2017 - 121.6/2017
- October 2008 - 427.5/2008

Supporting Documents

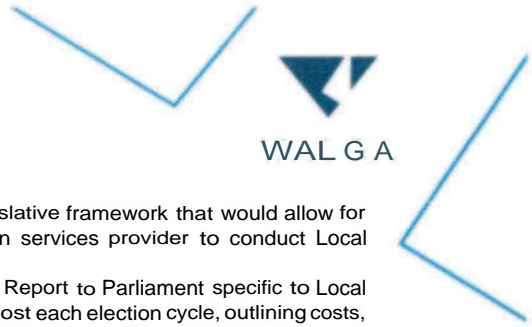
Advocacy Positions for a New Local Government Act
 WALGA submission Local Government Reform Proposal (February 2022)

2.5.16 Elections

Position Statement

The Local Government sector supports

- 1 Councillors serve four-year terms with elections every two years and half of the Council positions spilled at each election
- 2 First-Past-The-Post (PPTP) voting system for Local Government elections If Optional Preferential Voting (OPV) remains as the primary method of voting, the sector supports the removal of the 'proportional' part of the voting method for general elections
- 3 First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) voting system for internal Council elections



- 3 For a review of the legislative framework that would allow for more than one election services provider to conduct Local Government elections
- 4 For a mandated WAEC Report to Parliament specific to Local Government elections post each election cycle, outlining costs, results, voter turnout and matters for improvement both in the conduct of elections and the legislation, if relevant

Background

A comprehensive review and analysis of five election cycles up to and including the 2023 Local Government election against the backdrop of legislative reforms to the Local Government electoral process in Western Australia was carried out by WALGA

With a focus on postal elections conducted exclusively by the Western Australian Electoral Commission (WAEC), the analysis has found evidence of the rising cost and reduced service level of conducting Local Government elections in Western Australia

Elected Member feedback, costs vs service comparisons and engagement by the sector with WALGA's governance services over the 2023 Local Government election period, are the basis for the position outlined above.

State Council Resolution September 2024 - 065.4/2024



Table 3: Percentage of all elected candidates who were returning Council Members (at State level)

States with full spills only Official state level percentage reported by electoral commissions for elections they conducted

State	Most recent election year % of returning Council Members	Previous election year % of returning Council Members
Queensland	2024 43.2%	2021 46.0%
New South Wales	2021 56.8%	2016/17 (amalgamations) 60.6%
Victoria	2024 43.0%	2020 51.9%
South Australia	2022 50.0%	2018 55.3%
Tasmania	2022 46.0%	2018 48.0%

Table 4: Election participation rates

State	Election Year	Election Year	Election Year
WA	2023 31.2%	2021 30.2%	2019 29.1%
NSW	2024 84.54%	2021 (2020 postponed) 83.56%	2016/2017 (amalgamations) 2017: 79.58% 2016: 79.27%
NT	2025 <i>Official report not yet available</i>	2021 61.3%	2017 58.5%
QLD	2024 82.31%	2020 (COVID impacted) 77.71%	2016 83.04%
SA	2022 32.9%	2018 31.6%	2014 31.99%
TAS	2022 (First election with compulsory voting) 84.79%	2018 58.72%	2014 54.58%
VIC	2024 81.46%	2020 81.47%	2016 72.15%