

RECOMMENDATION

That WALGA organises (commencing in 2026) a biennial conference or get-together in the alternate year to the WALGA Urban Forest Conference, focused on taking stock of progress and opportunities for further action as per the WALGA Climate Change advocacy position.

8.2 WALGA'S ADVOCACY POSITION ON THE FREQUENCY OF ELECTIONS

By City of Gosnells

BACKGROUND

Last year, WALGA sought feedback on its electoral advocacy positions. One question related to whether the sector supported the current electoral system (a half spill every two years) or the alternative (all in/all out elections).

Following consideration of responses, WALGA resolved to support “elections every two years and half of the Councillor positions spilled at each election”.

Since then, the City has received a quote from the Western Australian Electoral Commission to conduct the 2025 ordinary elections. This quote estimates the cost to be \$431,889. This is a very significant amount of money which is being diverted from supporting the local community.

Further, while this cost estimate represents a 5.76% increase on the cost of the last election in 2023, it is noted that the 2023 election included a Mayoral election which cost around \$80,000. Consequently, the real cost of conducting the ordinary election for Councillors in 2025 is rising by about 30%. This type of cost increase is unsustainable.

If costs of a similar magnitude are being incurred by other metropolitan local governments, it is estimated that the 2025 elections will cost metropolitan local governments around \$7.5 million.

COMMENT

One way to reduce election costs is to move to all in/all out elections. Under such a system, elections would be held every four years instead of every two. This option would also reduce elector fatigue by reducing the frequency at which people are asked to vote.

While elections for half of the Councillors every second year may have been supported in the past to ensure continuation of some Council members following an election, it is hard to conceive a situation where all sitting Councillors would be defeated at an election. However, if this were to occur, it would reflect a community desire which should be supported.

Finally, the State Government holds elections every four years and the Commonwealth Government holds elections every three years. These government spheres operate effectively without elections every two years.

SECRETARIAT COMMENT

Advocacy Position 2.5.16 was adopted by State Council at the meeting held on 6 December 2024, and provides as follows:

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 (FPTP) 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.*
4. *Councils holding elections by means of in-person, postal and/or electronic voting.*
5. *Current legislative provisions of Mayor/President of Class 1 and Class 2 Local Governments being directly WALGA Advocacy Positions Page 41 elected by the community and Class 3 and Class 4 Local Governments determining whether its Mayor or President is elected by the Council or by the community.*

This position was adopted following sector-wide consultation. Of the 92 Local Governments that responded to WALGA's survey, 98% supported four-year terms with half spill elections every two years. This shows a very high level of sector support for the current system.

At the 6 December 2024 meeting, State Council also resolved that “the Secretariat further investigate implications of compulsory and voluntary participation in Local Government elections and report back to State Council.”

WALGA has commenced scoping this investigation. Recently, an update was provided to WALGA's Governance Policy Team, identifying the following key issues to be considered in this investigation:

- Participation and engagement
- Election methods and costs
- Election frequency

It was noted that consideration of compulsory participation is likely to require consideration of 4 yearly all-in-all out elections. The relationship between participation, frequency and cost will be explored as part of this research. In particular, the Governance Policy Team requested the inclusion of cost modelling of both 2 yearly half spills and 4 yearly full spills, as well as insights and experiences from other jurisdictions that have full spills.

WALGA aims to provide a report on this investigation later this year.

RECOMMENDATION

That WALGA amends advocacy position 2.5.16 on elections and supports all in/all out elections.