

DISCUSSION PAPER

REVIEW OF COUNCILLOR REPRESENTATION 2022

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Acknowledgement of Country

The Shire of Irwin acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land and their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to all members of the Aboriginal communities and their cultures; and to Elders both past and present.

BACKGROUND:

In July 2022 the Department Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries (DLGSC) announced the final package of proposed local government reforms. Included in the reform package was the requirement for local governments to consider the size of Council representation.

The reform, which will come into effect in early 2023, will influence the number of Councillors that the Shire of Irwin is required to have. For Councils of our population size (under 5,000), the number of Councillors must be reduced from the current eight (8) to a minimum of five (5) and a maximum of seven (7), this includes the Shire President.

The Shire of Irwin has been identified as needing to make changes to councillor representation to align with the new reforms.

In accordance with Schedule 2.2 of the *Local Government Act 1995* (the Act), local governments can undertake a review of its Council size through a Review of System of Representation.

This Discussion Paper aims to consult with the community to find a system of representation that best suits the characteristics of our Shire and its people. The options examined within this Discussion Paper meet the requirements of the reform and will be used to form a decision for consideration by the Local Government Advisory Board and the Minister for Housing; Lands; Homelessness; Local Government.

THE REVIEW PROCESS

The review process has several steps:

1. Council resolves to undertake the review
2. Public submission period opens
3. Information provided to the community for discussion
4. Public submission period closes
5. Council considers all submissions and relevant factors and makes a decision
6. Council submits a report to the Local Government Advisory Board for its consideration.

If a change is proposed, the Local Government Advisory Board submits a recommendation to the Minister for Local Government.

Any changes approved by the Minister of Local Government will be in place for the next Ordinary Election where possible.

CURRENT SITUATION

The Shire of Irwin (the Shire) has resolved to undertake a review of its councillor representation to comply with the requirements of the Local Government Act 1995.

The purpose of the review is to assess the number of positions of councillor appropriate for the current situation at the Shire, within the limits of representation as set by the Local Government Reform Proposals.

The Minister for Local Government has announced a package of reforms to the Local Government Act 1995. As part of the reforms to strengthen democracy and increase community engagement, new requirements will be introduced to provide for:

- The introduction of optional preferential voting
- Councillor numbers based on population
- The removal of wards for band 3 and 4 local governments (*The Shire of Irwin does not have a ward system*).

The Shire of Irwin has been identified as needing to make changes to councillor representation to align with the new reforms.

Legislation to give effect to the changes is expected to be introduced into Parliament in early 2023.

Further information on the reforms is available at:

<https://www.dlgsc.wa.gov.au/localgovernment/strengtheninglocalgovernment/localgovernmentactreform>

THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF REDUCING THE NUMBER OF ELECTED MEMBERS

There are many arguments for and against increasing or decreasing Council representation, and the public consultation process aims to assist local governments in determining the best size of Council to meet the needs of the District.

The **advantages** of a reduction in the number of elected members may include the following:

- The decision-making process may be more effective and efficient if the number of Councillors is reduced. It is more timely to ascertain the views of a fewer number of people and decision making may be easier. There is also more scope for team spirit and cooperation amongst a smaller number of people.
- Consultation with the community can be achieved through a variety of means in addition to individuals and groups contacting their local elected member.
- The cost of maintaining elected members is likely to be reduced however a lesser number of elected members may result in increased commitment from those elected reflecting in greater interest and participation in Council's affairs.
- Fewer elected members are more readily identifiable within the community.
- Fewer positions on Council may lead to greater interest in elections with contested elections and those elected receiving a greater level of support from the community.
- There is a State-wide trend for reductions in the number of elected members and some local governments have found that having fewer elected members has worked well.

The **disadvantages** of a reduction in the number of elected members may include the following:

- A smaller number of elected members may result in an increased workload and may lessen effectiveness. A demanding role may discourage others from nominating for Council.
- There is the potential for dominance in the Council by an interest group.
- A reduction in the number of elected members may limit the diversity of interests around the Council table.

- Opportunities for community participation in Council's affairs may be reduced if there are fewer elected members to contact.

Table 1 – Comparison of Western Australian Local Governments in the Tier 3 Band

The Shire of Irwin is in the Tier 3 Band. The table below provides examples of Councillor representation/ elector ratios in medium sized agriculturally based Shires.

Local Authority	Councillors	Electors	Representative Ratio
Bridgetown-Greenbushes	9	3459	1/384
Dandaragan	9	2536	1/282
Gingin	9	4309	1/479
Irwin	8	2746	1/343
Katanning	7	2494	1/456
Merredin	9	2176	1/242
Narrogin	8	3200	1/400

Source: WA Local Government Directory 2020-21

Table 2 – Proposed Representation Ratios for the Shire of Irwin

Councillors includes Shire President	Representation Ratio
5	1: 549
6	1:458
7	1: 392

Based on 2,746 electors in the Shire of Irwin Source: WA Local Government Directory 2020-21

OTHER FACTORS TO BE CONSIDERED:

Demographic Trends:

Table 3 - Shire of Irwin – Census Data 2006 to 2016

	2006	2011	2016
Total Population	3052	3,567	3569
Median Age	42	44	49
Median Age Australia	37	37	38
65 years and over	16.2%	18.9%	25.6%
15 to 64	63.2%	59.8%	57.4%
0 to 14	20.6%	21.1%	17%

Table 3 demonstrates that the population of the Shire is very stable. However, the median age is increasing as is the percentage of people aged 65 years and over. This could translate into a higher demand for the Shire to meet the needs of people in the higher age groups. The Shire is keen to grow the population and is currently focussed on improving sporting and recreational facilities and encouraging business activity to enhance employment opportunities and strengthen the local economy.

Economic Factors:

The economic drivers of the Shire is largely based on agriculture, rock lobster fishery, oil and gas, mineral sands and olive growing. The Shire is well supported with ancillary industries such as manufacturing, fabrication, vehicle, plant and machinery servicing, tourism and a general retail sector. In addition, the district is well served by builders, associated trades, medical and allied health professions.

These businesses and services have been relatively stable over a long period and are not expected to change much in the foreseeable future.

Council will consider the following options and members of the community may suggest others:

Option 1: Reduce the number of Councillors to six plus the Shire President (Total 7)

Option 2: Reduce the number of Councillors to five plus the Shire President (Total 6)

Option 3: Reduce the number of Councillors to four plus the Shire Preside (Total 5)

How to Make a Submission

Members of the community are invited to make a written submission about any aspect of representation review and can lodge it at:

- Shire of Irwin Administration Centre 11-13 Waldeck Street DONGARA WA 6525
- **Post:** PMB 21 DONGARA WA 6525
- **Email:** reception@irwin.wa.gov.au

All submissions must be received by 4pm on Friday 27 January 2023.

The Shire of Irwin welcomes your comments on any matters that may assist it to make informed and responsible decisions for the benefit of our community.

Thank you for your interest and involvement in this review.

REPRESENTATION REVIEW – WA LOCAL GOVERNMENT 2022

What is your preferred option for councillor representation as outlined in the Shire of Irwin Discussion Paper?

- Option 1** – 6 Councillors and a directly elected Shire President (**Total 7 member Council**)
- Option 2** – 5 Councillors and a directly elected Shire President (**Total 6 member Council**)
- Option 3** - 4 Councillors and a directly elected Shire President (**Total 5 member Council**)

Comments:

Submitted By:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone / Email: _____

Please submit your completed feedback (this form) to:

- **Email:** reception@irwin.wa.gov.au
- **Post:** Shire of Irwin PMB 21 DONGARA WA 6525
- **Hand Delivered to:** Shire of Irwin Administration Centre 11-13 Waldeck Street DONGARA WA 6525

Submissions must be received by 5pm Friday 10 February 2023