



RSL
Victoria

Current Voting System for State Executive

The current system for electing members of the State Executive is explained in detail in the current rules, albeit, that there is no single point of reference and ultimately, the process needs to comply with different parts and then different sections, within the rules. Voting entitlement is detailed in the rules and is determined by the number of Life and Service Members of the Sub Branch, being anywhere from one to eight votes on a sliding scale.

The present system is best described as “Representative Democracy”, also known as “Indirect democracy”. It is a type of democracy where elected persons represent a group of people, in contrast to direct democracy. Nearly all modern Western-style democracies function as some type of representative democracy; for example, the United Kingdom and Australia (a unitary parliamentary with constitutional monarchy or representative in the case of Australia), India (a federal parliamentary republic), France (a semi-presidential republic) and the United States (a federal presidential republic).

It is a common misconception that we elect our “leaders” and that we have a direct say in parliamentary business. The Prime Minister (as well as key members of the Government) are not directly elected by voters but are elected by the representatives that voters elect to represent them. In the same way, normal parliamentary business is not influenced directly by express voter instruction but is undertaken by the representatives that voters elect, except in the very rare occasions, where there is a change to the constitution. The Prime Minister of Australia, (as well as the Chairpeople of most Boards), is not directly elected by voters but they are chosen from within and by the Parliamentary Representatives (or from the elected Directors as applicable). Additionally, by way of example, only the Mayors of the capital cities are directly elected by voters because of their unique ceremonial type duties.

The current structure of the Victorian Branch of the RSL is quite different to both Queensland and NSW. In Victoria, while there is autonomy within Sub-Branches, the State Branch also still exercises quite significant oversight over the functioning of each Sub Branch, including Licensed and Gaming Sub Branches (“10A”). Additionally, while members are “Members of the League”, many consider themselves primarily “Members of the XYZ Sub Branch”.

Strengths

Members of the Victorian Branch have greater say in the election of its leadership “team” than we have in Local, State and Federal Government. Similarly, it is problematic to directly compare the Victorian Branch and its election model to that of ASX Companies, Unions or member organisations like the RACV, where is no real subordinate structure or groupings. In those examples, each member is simply a member of the overall organisation rather than the member of a semi-autonomous subordinate office.

While the present system is not perfect, it's also not completely dysfunctional nor completely undemocratic.

Providing the rules are adhered to, each member has a right and say in the election of members of the State Executive. The rules provide that larger (by membership) Sub-Branches have a greater say in elections. The sliding scale attempts to counter malapportionment, where smaller Sub-Branches would otherwise have a disproportionate say in the election and larger ones, too great a say. If all Sub-Branches were of equal size (like divisional boundaries) there would be no need for this sliding scale.

The current system encourages participation and affiliation to a Sub-Branch rather than to the State Branch.

The sliding scale attempts to correct or moderate the imbalance of larger city based Sub-Branches compared to smaller country Sub-Branches, where the facilities are better and the available pool of possible Service Members is larger. The sliding scale also attempts to correct or moderate the city/rural divide.

The current system is relatively easy to conduct and the cost to administer is negligible.

The present system caters for (or counters) voter apathy by allowing the active and engaged members of a Sub-Branch to determine the votes, providing always that the rules are adhered to and it's not just the Sub-Branch Committee who vote isolation, without reference to their members, for example. Conversely, while ultimately democratic in that elections should be decided by those who care and turn out, elections can't be overly influenced or swayed by one group or active cohort.

It's the easiest model to scrutinise and providing the rules are adhered to, the least likely to be manipulated or corrupted.

It's the easiest to implement as there are no (or limited) changes to the Rules required for its ongoing utilisation.

Weaknesses

Voting isn't compulsory and the current system doesn't encourage engagement. The current system is not direct democracy.

There is an anecdotal belief, of some, that a change in the voting system would have resulted in a change of leadership, the selection of better candidates and/or it will encourage more members to join.

I am confident that examination of the ERAG Survey will conclude that there is quite poor understanding of the rules, adherence to the rules and low voter turnout. This brings into serious doubt the validity of recent elections, although this is somewhat true for any model and not just the current system.

The sliding scale does not account for nor reward active members but moreover it rewards financial members.

The sliding scale disproportionately advantages (gerrymanders) smaller Sub-Branches and lessens the impact of larger Sub-Branches that may or may not have active and engaged members.

The sliding scale for elections is different to the scale used for constitutional or normal conference voting, where that scale is from one to a maximum of four votes.

Opportunities

Adherence to the rules, regardless of the model, would give greater confidence in the result. It should be possible to develop and implement a checklist and/or compliance certificate to ensure scrutiny, accuracy and confidence.

There is the possibility to retain the system of representative democracy and the primacy of Sub Branches by changing the “sliding scale” for example:

- To reflect actual voters at the Sub Branch “election OGM” (although it is very difficult to get, say, 1500 people at a meeting);
- Removing “the scale” entirely and having one vote per Sub Branch (1SB1V);
- Alignment of the election and normal conference voting being a maximum of four votes;
- Allocate voting entitlement directly according to membership (at a given point in time). For example, Nathalia would receive about 17 votes, Wangaratta about 300 votes, etc;
- A hybrid system of direct and Sub Branch voting, or
- any combination of the above.

Threats

Voter apathy regardless of the model chosen.

Consistent with what occurred as an output of Justice Bergin's inquiry into RSL NSW, that “Government” want us to change our system and change will be “forced upon us”.

There is possibly a large number of dissatisfied members who want direct democracy (1M1V) rather than representative democracy regardless of how much effort ERAG makes and regardless of how members end up voting at Conference.

That ERAG doesn't provide sufficient information nor time for Sub Branches to make an informed decision at Conference.

That voting at Conference is not timed nor undertaken systematically and correctly.

