

Consumer Advisory Council

Survey of Consumer Representatives on Government Boards and Committees

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1 Introduction

In June 2004, the Consumer Advisory Council of Western Australia surveyed government boards and committees about their use of consumer representatives. The purpose of the survey was to provide the Council with information about the extent to which consumer representatives are used as a strategy to include consumers in government decision making and the way in which consumer representatives are selected and resourced.

The government board and committee data base from the Department of Premier and Cabinet was used to identify bodies to be surveyed and a one page questionnaire was developed and sent out (Appendix 1). The results of the survey are presented in this paper.

2 Executive Summary

Approximately 40% of the boards and committees that responded to the survey presently have some form of consumer representation, although a consistent understanding of what constitutes a consumer representative is problematic. For those boards without consumer representatives, the lack of provision for consumer representatives in the establishing legislation was given as a common reason.

The majority of boards and committees have three or less consumer representatives and, most commonly, one. This represents 40% or less of total membership, with the most frequent ratio being 10%-20% of membership.

Of those boards and committees providing details about selection criteria, 56.7% said that the selection criteria used was based upon membership of a particular group of people whilst 43.3% looked for criteria related to experience, knowledge and capacity in addition to 'consumer group' membership.

The most common form of appointment (77.3%) is through an expression of interest process and initial assessment at a board or department level with recommendations being made to the Minister, who makes the final appointment.

Just over half of all committees (56.5%) with consumer representatives pay the representative a sitting fee and half said that members receive induction and training upon initial appointment.

The most common difficulties facing boards and committees in attracting and keeping consumer representatives were in finding suitable representatives from a small selection pool; time constraints and other commitments; 'burnout' and providing representatives with the knowledge and resources they need to effectively participate.

3 Respondents

The Council sent out questionnaires to 433 boards and committees. Whilst the overall number of government boards and committees is higher than this (approximately 520), the database did not have contact information of all.

Of the 433 questionnaires distributed, 35 were returned to sender, 2 provided a verbal response that the survey was not relevant to their functions and 175 written responses were received. The respondents include statutory and non-statutory government committees and authorities. Their functions vary from advisory to regulatory tasks. The questionnaire did not ask committees to define their functions and statutory status.

The Council did not provide a specific definition of a consumer representative in surveying the committees, but sought feedback based 'self definition' on the part of the boards and committees. The lack of a prescribed definition was problematic for some respondents, as evidenced in questions of clarification sought during the survey period and responses to the questionnaire. Some bodies were not always sure of whether or not the relevant committee had a consumer representative or not and others sought clarification on the difference between consumer representatives, stakeholder representatives and community representatives. Other committees have clearly undertaken a process of defining their operational concept of 'consumer' and developing defined criteria.

The local conservation district committees should be noted here. The committees are made up of local land users who come together to provide advice and strategy on local issues. Whilst being similar in purpose and structure, their responses, based upon self definition of consumer representation, vary. Seven responded that land users are consumers, so yes, they have consumer representatives whilst four self defined themselves as not having consumer representatives.

In one case, two responses were received from the same committee, each giving different information. In another, a committee defined representatives from the Department of Consumer and Employment Protection as consumer representatives, although the Department itself does not propose to act as a consumer representative. These results indicate that the process of self-defining consumer representatives is likely to have influenced responses received.

A full list of respondents is provided in Appendix 2.

4 Use of Consumer Representatives

One hundred and six respondents said that they did not have specific consumer representatives as part of their membership (60.6%). Some of these committees responded by saying that the concept of consumer representation is not applicable to their functions, which may be provide government internal processes e.g. contracts, allowances. Others said that their membership is defined by legislation, which does not include allowance for consumer representation. Some committees, such as the Port Authorities, do not have consumer representatives directly as members, but have set up consumer/community advisory committees which do.

Sixty nine respondents (39.4%) indicated that they did have some form of consumer or community representative as part of their membership. The total number of consumer representatives across the 69 committees was 316.

Table 1 summaries the aggregated results and shows that, on average, each committee had a total membership of 12 and an average consumer representation of 42% of those members. However, a few boards and committees have high consumer representative/ total member ratios (e.g. 100%), which result in a higher consumer representation average across the sample.

Chart 1 shows the overall number of consumer representatives on the boards and committees. The most common frequency is one consumer representative (22%) with 57% of committees having three or less consumer representatives.

Chart 2 shows the number of consumer representatives as a percentage of total committee membership. The most frequent proportion of consumer representatives to overall membership is 10-20%.

Table 1: Number of Consumer Representatives

	Consumer representatives	Members in total	Percentage of consumer reps in total membership
Average	5	11.73	42%
Minimum	1	3	3.1%
Maximum	36	74	100%

Chart 1: Number of Consumer Representatives

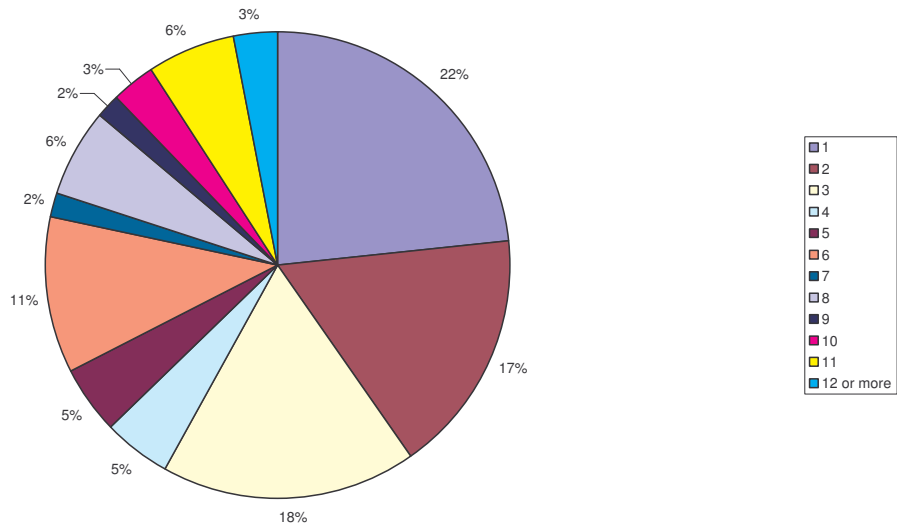
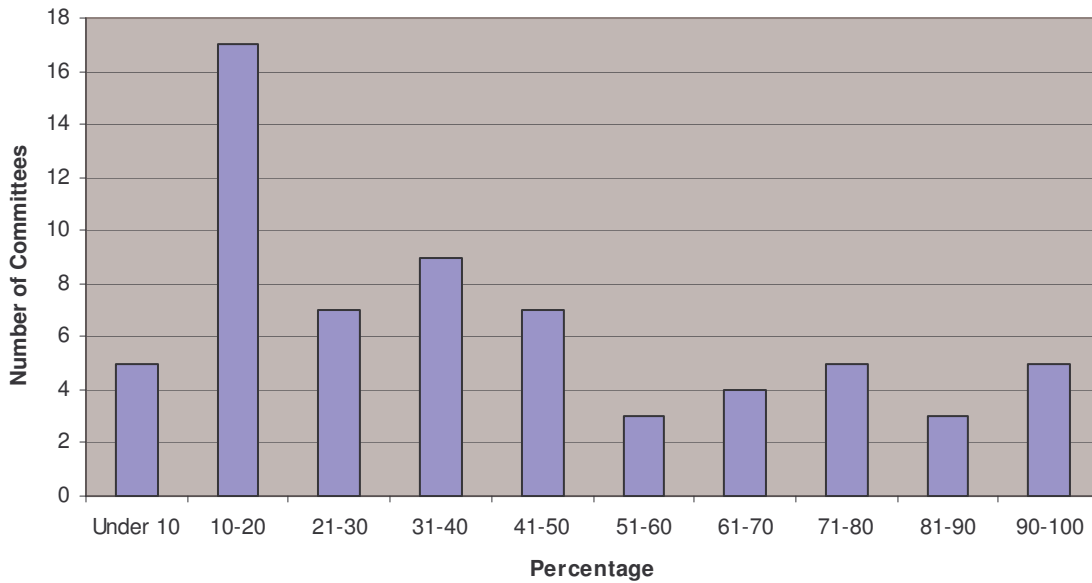


Chart 2: Consumer representatives as percentage of total membership



5 Selection Criteria

Of the 69 boards and committees that said they presently have a consumer representative, 30 (43.5%) provided a selection criterion by which representatives are chosen. Table 2 provides an overview of the survey results for the selection of consumer representatives. The detail of selection criteria varied widely from committee to committee. In 17 (56.7%) cases where criteria were provided, a consumer representative is defined simply by membership to a particular group of people e.g. member of local community, student, member of a superannuation fund, local land user, people with a disability, consumer of service.

Thirteen committees (43.3% of responses where criteria were provided) require consumer representatives to meet additional criteria to membership alone. These are loosely built around skills, experience, capacity to represent and knowledge. For example:

- *demonstrates availability and interest.*
- *demonstrates knowledge and interest in consumer affairs*
- *demonstrated experience in dealing with consumer issues*
- *demonstrated ability to liaise and coordinate consumer input.*
- *ability to put forward consumer views in an industry forum.*
- *knowledge of industry.*
- *possess interest, experience and knowledge relevant to regional communities.*
- *formal qualifications and experience.*
- *able to contribute to the process.*

Table 2: Selection Criteria

	Respondents with consumer representatives	Respondents with consumer reps. and selection criteria is provided	Membership based selection criteria.	Selection criteria membership plus other e.g skills, experience, capacity and knowledge
Number of boards and committees	69	30	17	13
As percentage of all boards and committees with a consumer representatives.	100%	43.5%	24.6%	18.8%
As percentage of all boards and committees that responded to the question.	n/a	100%	56.7%	43.3%
As a percentage of all boards and committees that responded.	39.4%	17.1%	9.7%	7.4%

6 Selection Process

Question 4 of the questionnaire asked committees to provide information on the selection process for consumer representatives. Forty-four committees with consumer representatives responded. In the majority of cases (77.3% of respondents to the question) selection is made by the Minister, with advice being received from the relevant government authority and/or government board and committee. Nominations for selection are usually sought through advertisement, asking stakeholders or the through the use of 'interested person databases'.

In three cases (6.8%), a specific organisation is asked to provide a consumer representative (e.g. Health Consumers' Council and Western Australian Council of Social Services). An election is the selection process cited for use in six cases (13.6% of responses received). The committees most likely to use election procedures were superannuation boards, university senates and local district conservation committees. In one instance, selection is made by the Board.

Twenty-three committees (34%) responded that they aimed to target diversity in their selection process to ensure representation across a range of categories such as gender, Aboriginal representation, locality based representation, age, ethnic groups and people with disabilities.

7 Supporting Consumer Representatives

Of the 69 boards and committees that said they presently have a consumer representative, 39 committees (56.5%) pay representatives a sitting fee for their services. This relates to 189 consumer representatives (59.8%).

Just over half of the committees (50.7%), responded that they provided consumer representatives with induction and orientation either through written materials, induction sessions and/or meetings with the chairperson. Three of these groups are presently using the pilot training program being run by Challenger TAFE for public sector boards and committees. Eight committees said that consumer representatives received additional training to induction in areas such as directors liability, corporate governance, project management and legal responsibilities.

8 Difficulties

When asked to describe the difficulties boards and committees had in selecting and maintaining consumer representatives, the following issues were identified:

- narrow range of organisations to choose from.
- onerous time requirements.
- technical and complex issues.
- no small user groups exists.
- few new members of the local community apply.
- appointment process through Minister/dept takes too long and people loose interest.

- remuneration for certain tasks should be increased.
- time commitment.
- organisations ability to participate is limited by funding.
- small communities – lack of volunteers, burnout.
- distance time frequency of meetings fuel travel reimbursement.
- limited consumer resources and organisational funding.
- time obligations; highly specialised role; suitable people in short supply.
- lack of time for volunteers.
- difficulties in retaining young people and facilitating their full representation.
- lack of direction or purpose.
- balancing own commitments with board commitments.

9 Conclusions

- 9.1 The use of consumer representatives as a strategy for including consumers is limited in its application across government boards and committees. In part, this is because many such committees are set up under legislation and the role of a consumer representative is not including in the founding Act. The increased use of consumer representatives may require a review of legislation, in some instances.
- 9.2 Many government boards and committees are uncertain about what a consumer representative is and confusion seems to exist between consumer representatives and stakeholder representatives (which may include industry representatives). In one case, representatives from the Department of Consumer and Employment Protection were defined as consumer representatives.
- 9.3 Where consumer representatives are used, the selection criteria are variable. Under half of the responding committees seek qualities related to skills, experience and knowledge, whilst over half consider a consumer representative is determined by membership alone. This may cause problems in the effective participation and representativeness of consumer representatives.
- 9.4 With an average membership of 12 people, 22% of the committees had only one consumer representative, 17% had two and 18% had three. In the majority of cases, consumer representatives are a minority delegation. This may affect their ability to participate, especially as many do not represent consumer organisations as such; possibly coming from a under-resourced position compared to members who do come from organisations. Half of the respondents with consumer representatives offer induction and training. Initial and ongoing support for consumer representatives is an issue that may require further investigation. Only eight committees provided information about training for members beyond induction processes.
- 9.5 Lack of time, complexity of issues and limited consumer 'pools' to draw from were critical issues in recruiting and maintaining consumer representatives. Forty per cent of representatives identified are asked to participate on a voluntary basis.

Appendix 1 Questionnaire

Survey of Consumer Representatives on Government Boards and Committees

The Consumer Advisory Council is undertaking a survey of consumer representatives on government boards and committees. Your assistance in providing the following information is most appreciated.

1. Does your Board or Committee have specific positions for consumer representatives, as part of its membership?

Yes No

- 2a. If so, how many? _____

- 2b. What is the total number of members? _____

3. Are consumer representatives paid a sitting fee?

Yes No

4. What are the selection *criteria* for consumer representatives?

5. What is the selection *process* for consumer representatives?

6. Do you attempt to target particular groups to ensure diversity (e.g. women, Indigenous Australians, people with disabilities etc)? If so, how?

7. What difficulties, if any, does your Board or Committee have in attracting and keeping consumer representatives?

Appendix 2 Respondents

The following boards and committees provided a response to the survey.

Aboriginal Cultural Material Committee
Aboriginal Housing Infrastructure Council
Aboriginal Lands Trust
Access and Equity Standing Committee
Agriculture Protection Board
Albany Cemetery Board
Albany Port Authority
Anaesthetic Mortality Committee
Animal Resources Authority
Anzac Day Trust
Appeal Costs Board
Architects Board of WA
Armadale Redevelopment Authority
Art Gallery of WA
Arts WA Peer Assessment Panel
Arts WA Peer Assessment Panel - arts development
Arts WA Peer Assessment Panel - young people
Arts WA Peer Indigenous Art
Aviation Ministerial Council
Board of Valuers
Botanic Gardens & Parks Authority
Bridgetown Land Conservation District Committee
Broome Port Authority
Builders' Registration Board of WA
Building & Construction Advisory Council
Building and Construction Industry Training Board
Building Disputes Tribunal
Building Regulations Advisory Committee
Bunbury Cemetery Board
Bunbury Port Authority
Bunbury Water Board
Busselton Water Board
Centre for Excellence - State Funding Advisory Committee
Charitable Collections Advisory Committee
Chicken Meat Industry Committee
Children and Young People in Care Advisory Committee
Chiropractors Board of WA
Chowerup Cemetery Board
Coal Industry Super Board
Commission for Occupational Health and Safety
Community Advisory Council (DAO)
Community Affordable & Sustainable Housing Standing Committee
Community Program for Opioid Pharmacotherapies: Advisory Committee
Community Program for Opioid Pharmacotherapies: Professional Review Group
Community Safety and Crime Prevention Council

Constitutional Centre Advisory Board
Construction Industry LSL Board
Council of Official Visitors
Country Housing Authority
Dampier Port Authority
Degrey Catchment Land Conservation District Committee
Dental Board of WA
Dental Charges Committee
Dental Prosthetics Advisory Committee
Disability Services Commission Board
Disbanded Committee
Electrical Licensing Board
Electricity Reform Consumer Forum
Ellenbrook Joint Venture Board
Environmental Protection Authority Board
Equal Opportunity Tribunal
Finance Brokers Supervisory Board
Fire and Emergency Services Authority
Fire and Emergency Services Superannuation Board
Flouridation of Public Water Supplies Advisory Committee
Fremantle Ports Board of Directors
Fremantle Prison Trust Committee
Gas Retail Deregulation Project
Gascoyne Development Commission
Geraldton Port Authority
Gold Corporation
Goldfields Esperance Development Commission
Government Employees Housing Authority
Great Southern Development Commission - Board
Great Southern TAFE Governing Council
Hazardous Materials Coordinating Committee
Homeswest Operational Standing Committee
Housing Advisory Committee
Jerramungup Land Cons. District Committee
Kalgoorlie-Boulder Cemetery Board
Keystart Board of Directors
Kimberley Development Commission
Kwinana Industries Coordinating Committee
Land Surveyors Licensing Board
Land Valuers Licensing Board
Landstart Board
Legal Contribution Trust
Legal Cost Committee
Legal Practitioners Complaints Committee
Legal Practitioners Disciplinary Tribunal
Leschenault Catchment Council
Library Board of WA
Link Executive
Local Government Advisory Board
Manjimup Land Conservation District Council
Maternal Mortality Committee

Medical Board of WA
Metropolitan Cemeteries Board
Mid West Development Commission - Board
Minerals and Energy Research Institute of WA
Mines Occupational Safety and Health Advisory Board
Mines Survey Board
Motor Vehicle Dealers Licensing Board
Motor Vehicle Theft Steering Committee
Municipal Building Surveyors Qualification Committee
Murdoch University Senate
Nurses Board of WA
Occupational Therapist Registration Board of WA
Optometrists Registration Board
Painters Registration Board
Peel Development Commission
Perinatal and Infant mortality committee
Perth Market Authority
Pesticides advisory committee
Pharmaceutical Council of WA
Physiotherapists Registration Board of WA
Pilbara TAFE Governing Council
Plumbers Licensing Board
Podiatrist Registration Board
Pork Producers Committee
Port Hedland Port Authority
Potato Growing Industry Trust Fund
Premiers Science Council
Premium Rates Committee
Psychologists Board of WA
Public Housing Review Panel
Public Service Appeals Board
QEII Medical Centre Trust
Quairading LCDC
Racing Penalties Appeal Tribunal
Radiological Council
Railways Classification Board
Ravensthorpe Land Conservation District Committee
Real Estate and Business Agents Supervisory Boards
Recreation Camps and Reserve Board
Recreational Fishing Advisory Committee
Regional Development Council
Regional Electricity Supply Committee
Renewable Energy Access Working Group
Reproductive Technology Council
Retirement Villages Disputes
Rock Lobster Industry Advisory Committee
Rottnest Island Authority
SAAP State Advisory Committee
Screen West Inc.
SEDO Grants Committee
Serpentine-Jarrahdale Land Conservation District Committee

Settlement Agents Supervisory Board
Shire of Chapman Valley
Shire of Kent
Salaries and Allowances Tribunal
Small Business Development Corp
Small Claims Tribunal
State Housing Board of Commissioners
State Records Advisory Committee
State Supply Commission Board
Technology and Industry Advisory Council
The Swan Bells Foundation
Trayning Land Conservation District Committee
Underground Power Steering Committee
UWA Senate
WA Boxing Commission
WA Coastal Shipper Commission
WA Local Govt Grants Commission
WA Meat Industry Authority
WA Museum Board
WA Sports Centre Trust
WA Tourism Commission boards and committees
WA Treasury Corp
Waddy Forest Land Conservation District Committee
West Coast TAFE Governing Council
Western Australian Institute of Sports
Western Power Corporation Board
Whicher Water Resource Management Committee
Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation Commission
Zoological Parks Authority