

# **Colin's Costly Canal and Labor's Window of Opportunity: The 2005 Western Australian Election\***

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The February 2005 Western Australian election will be remembered for several surprises during the campaign phase, but none more than the dramatic and unexpected announcement by Opposition Leader Colin Barnett early in the campaign that a Coalition government would deal with the chronic water shortage in the Perth metropolitan area with a firm commitment to build a canal thousands of kilometres in length from the State's far north to Perth. Traditional wisdom had suggested that the Gallop Government, as a first term government characterised by ministerial stability and devoid of major scandal, would be returned to office. On the other hand, a redistribution of electorates had denied Labor some of the formidable advantages of incumbency. This, coupled with the party's failure despite two court cases to achieve its cherished goal of one-vote-one-value, consistently poor polling throughout its four year term and its dismal performance in the October 2004 federal election, gave rise to predictions (supported by several polls) that the Coalition would win government when the electors cast their vote on 26 February.<sup>1</sup> Instead, after a longer than usual five week campaign the Government was returned for a second four year term with its majority intact even as its two referendum questions on extended shopping hours were decisively defeated. Then, in the weeks that followed the re-elected government used its window of opportunity before the changeover of Upper House members to make a decisive if still incomplete move towards one-vote-one-value in the State's electoral system. Given this critical outcome one might well contend that Colin

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<sup>1</sup> 1,259,262 voters were enrolled for the 26.2.2005 poll.

Barnett's essentially unilateral commitment<sup>2</sup> to build the canal had sunk the Coalition's election campaign and paved the way for the electoral legislation his colleagues had fought so hard to prevent.

## *Canal*

The canal proposal, recalling the goldfields' pipeline and other projects of the 1890s designed by engineer C.Y. O'Connor during John Forrest's premiership, was announced by Opposition Leader, Colin Barnett, during the Leaders' television debate on 2 February 2005. Most judges at the time claimed that Barnett had won the debate against Premier Gallop with his vision on the canal (and other matters). The canal concept was based on plans prepared by a private defence and technology firm (known as Tenix) which mapped a 3700 km. proposed path at a \$2 billion dollar cost and in the initial polling some 19 per cent of respondents indicated they were prepared to shift their vote on the issue.<sup>3</sup> However, even at the time opinions were divided as to whether Barnett had enhanced or reduced the prospects of the Coalition winning the election. The Opposition leader was conscious that Labor, despite conducting a Water Symposium in 2003 and later announcing water saving measures and plans to build a desalinisation plant, had faced criticism and poor polls for its water management performance.<sup>4</sup> In November 2004, with Barnett indicating that a Coalition government would 'think outside the square' on the State's water shortage<sup>5</sup> Premier Gallop established an Independent Review panel to be chaired by Professor Reg Appleyard to report by September 2005 on the feasibility of transporting water from the Kimberley region and other options. In so doing Gallop may well have provided the impetus for the Opposition Leader to up the ante and in the process reject the need for any preliminary feasibility study.

For much of the campaign the media was awash with debate about the canal costings and State debt ratings and a score of engineering, environmental, native title and health issues. The time frame was also a concern as Barnett, while proposing to abandon the government's proposed desalination plant, did not provide any comprehensive interim plan to address water needs during the canal's construction phase.<sup>6</sup> On the wider question of whether the Opposition needed such a full scale policy initiative it should be noted that in a poll released only days before the Leader's debate the usually reliable *Newspoll* indicated that support for the Gallop Government, had risen strongly in the October to December period and

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<sup>2</sup> Critics also suggested subsequently that very few members of the Liberal Party, not to mention their National Party colleagues, knew about the canal proposal, save a group labelled in the media as 'team blue'. Amanda Banks and Nigel Wilson, 'Exiled Lib. backs gun to lead', *The Australian*, 1.3.2005, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> *West Australian*, 10.2.2005, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> *West Australian*, 8.11.2004, p. 9

<sup>5</sup> *West Australian*, 4.11.2004, p. 4

<sup>6</sup> See *West Australian*, 10.2.2005, p. 7, 'The 25 key canal questions'.

drawn level with the Coalition in two-party preferred terms.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, the Coalition was still rated above Labor in terms of which could best handle water and power, described as the seventh ranked election issue — the other top ranking issues in order were health, education, law and order, the WA economy, family issues, environment, taxation, public transport, roads, and industrial relations.<sup>8</sup> In this context the Barnett announcement while potentially stalling Labor's campaign recovery was also arguably in accord with the Coalition's campaign slogan of 'Decisions, not Delays'. Unfortunately, it also had the effect of making Barnett himself the focus of the campaign<sup>9</sup> and the Opposition leader began to be labelled as fiscally irresponsible, a factor which would contribute to his remaining discernibly behind Gallop in polling for the preferred Premier stakes.<sup>10</sup>

### *Federal factors*

Another negative for Barnett was that federal influence in the State poll was both limited and far from helpful for the Coalition. Thus, within days of the canal announcement, Peter Costello, as Federal Treasurer, failed to give unqualified support to the canal project either during media interviews or during his subsequent campaign visit to Western Australia. Similarly, Prime Minister John Howard, after visiting Western Australia before Christmas following his federal electoral triumph, did not arrive in campaign mode until the final week and then spent much of his time defending his government's decision to send additional troops to Iraq. During the same visit Howard did contend that credit for Western Australia's strong economic performance resided with his federal government and he also accepted a letter from Barnett promising that if elected Premier he would sign up for the national water initiative giving the State a share of the \$2 billion national water fund.<sup>11</sup> For his part Gallop sought to warn electors not to be captured by the 'Howard Halo' but on balance most journalists concluded that Howard had offered the struggling Coalition little real encouragement.<sup>12</sup> Indeed references by Howard's cabinet colleague Kevin Andrews to the federal government's determination to 'take over' industrial relations were in the same tone and direction of earlier pronouncements about university and technical education. Not surprisingly, this led to speculation that the Federal Coalition was lukewarm about electorally assisting State Coalition partners which might well seek to resist the centralist drive of the Howard Government.

On the Labor side of the fence several Labor State Premiers, made public statements contributing to the decision of Federal Opposition Leader, Mark

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<sup>7</sup> *The Australian*, 18-19.12.2005, p. 6

<sup>8</sup> *The Australian*, 2.2.2005, p. 4

<sup>9</sup> *West Australian*, 8.2.2005, p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> *The Australian*, 3.2.2005, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Kate Gauntlett, 'Gallop not to thank for WA economy: PM', *West Australian*, 18.2.2005, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Taylor and Ruth Williams, 'PM jets out without using his clout', *West Australian*, 25.2.2005, p. 11.

Latham, to step down from his leadership post.<sup>13</sup> To that point in time Gallop had refused to give Latham any public role during the 'phony campaign' repeatedly stating he did not need his hand to be held by the Federal leader. Indeed, it would seem that he deliberately delayed calling the election until it was apparent that Kim Beazley had emerged as the leadership choice of federal Labor but thereafter had no hesitation in employing the federal leader, a political ally and 'mate', in the State campaign. Certainly, even though Labor's vote remained static in the federal polls,<sup>14</sup> the departure of Latham had allowed Gallop to call the State poll with a reasonable degree of confidence that he could focus the election on State affairs.

### ***Apology (taxation and health)***

In a major speech to media representatives a few days before the election date was announced the Premier somewhat surprisingly included what was described as 'an extraordinary apology' for the taxation increases which had been included in Labor's first three budgets.<sup>15</sup> Gallop it will be recalled during the 2001 television debate with Richard Court had promised electors there would be no taxation increases. In this vein he had also to deal with the oft repeated charges that his government had failed in its promise to 'fix the health system'. The apology strategy may have caught commentators by surprise and evoked only a cool response from some lobby groups but it seems to have had the effect of neutralising taxation and health as campaign issues and the Coalition arguably failed to maximise its apparent advantage with these issues.

The Liberal leader did seem to have stolen a march on Labor when he negotiated a deal with Mark Olsen, the controversial Australian Nurses Federation (ANF) Secretary promising that if elected to government the Coalition would offer a 14 per cent pay rise over three years, plus \$50 million for improved conditions. Health Minister Jim McGinty who had been negotiating with the ANF for several months was anxious to avert a threatened nurses' strike but refused to increase the government's offer during the so called 'caretaker period'. Eventually, after a meeting between Premier Gallop and Olsen, strike action was deferred as the government undertook to honour its existing offer if it was returned to the treasury benches.

The ANF had also been engaged in seeking registration as a political party, giving an indication that registration was an emerging strategy in political campaigning for interest groups. Fourteen parties, compared with 6 at the 2001 election, had satisfied the criteria (which included the documentation of 500 members), when the election was called. Particular interest surrounded the likely impact of the Christian Democratic Party (WA) and the newly formed Family First Party and

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<sup>13</sup> Samantha Maiden and Brad Norington, 'Premiers gang decide fate', *The Australian*, 19.1.2005.

<sup>14</sup> *The Australian*, 8.2.2005.p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Steve Pennels and Monica Videnieks, 'Gallop sorry on taxes as poll looms', *West Australian*, 15.1.2005, p. 24.

Public Hospital Support Group Party. Though the ANF had not completed its registration exercise when the election was announced it did sponsor 'independent' candidates in 12 marginal seats.

In dealing with the health issue the government made several new commitments as well as recycling some earlier proposals in this domain. Major announcements included plans for a new 1000 bed south-of-the-river hospital at Murdoch, to be named after former Australian of the Year, Fiona Stanley and for Joondalup hospital to treble in size along with additional funding promised to reduce waiting lists in elective surgery and the state's public dental service. The Coalition promised some extra 730 hospital beds under a plan to expand community care centres and the retention of Royal Perth Hospital as a major trauma hospital, where Labor was planning a merger of Royal Perth and Sir Charles Gairdner hospitals on two sites. Other Coalition promises referred to upgrades at Joondalup and Swan Districts and the construction of a new Princess Margaret Hospital for Children.

### ***Other key policy pledges and apparent 'non issues'***

One policy avenue where the Coalition did hope to make headway was on the question of maintaining a reliable power supply in the wake of mass blackouts and power shortages in February of 2004. As a former energy minister Barnett was committed to building a second 300 megawatt unit at the Collie power station and completing the upgrading of Cockburn-Kwinana power station. When a series of blackouts arising from power-pole fires affected metropolitan homes and country areas down to Albany two weeks before the election the Coalition ridiculed the government's claim that the network was 'summer-proof' but in retrospect it did not appear that the Coalition had gained the potential electoral advantage on the issue.

Both major parties made 'tough' pronouncements on law and order, respectively accusing each other of being soft on crime.<sup>16</sup> Labor claimed to have introduced more effective sentencing provisions for burglary and other offences. New 'anti-hoon laws' to take dangerous drivers off the streets were highlighted whereby cars could be impounded for those driving recklessly having their licences suspended or even cancelled and it was foreshadowed that young drivers were to face six months on L-plates with a doubling of supervised driving hours.

The Coalition chose to announce its 'law and order' package at the Liberal Party campaign launch on 13 February. Proposed reforms included the abolition of several Boards including the state's Parole Board and the establishment of a Custody Review Tribunal that would accept submissions from victims or their lawyers. Mandatory prison terms were to be increased for serious crimes together with minimum jail terms of three years for serious and violent crimes against

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<sup>16</sup> Sean Cowan and Robert Taylor, 'Barnett's hard line on crime', *West Australian*, 14.2.2005, p. 8.

children, people with disabilities and those aged over 65 years. While the Coalition leader may have won some support for his move to ease backyard pool fence laws votes,<sup>17</sup> it may have 'lost on points' when Colin Barnett proposed that police have the capacity to use water cannons as a crowd control measure.<sup>18</sup> In this regard Greens MLC Giz Watson, claimed the police did not want the water cannon as under their rules of deployment it can't be used to harm its target.<sup>19</sup>

One obvious point of policy departure between the Coalition and the Greens was over drug policy and gay and lesbian reform. Barnett was reported as saying that he intended to reintroduce discriminatory gay and lesbian laws but Greens Giz Watson claimed this announcement broke his prior commitment to consult with the gay and lesbian community.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, suggestions that the Liberal Party would alter the age of consent from 16 to 18 years also tended to be sidelined, partly because National Party leader, Max Trenorden, indicated that the Nationals were reticent about the repeal of such laws and the issue generally did not seem to gain much traction during the campaign.

From the point of view of the Greens the election campaign was disappointing given a much diminished focus on environmental issues compared with 2001. On that occasion the issue of logging in old growth forests had seen the emergence of the Liberals for Forests grouping and this issue alone probably accounted for the Liberals almost losing their blue ribbon stronghold of Darling Range. In the government's official summation of its record in the document 'First Term Achievements 2001–2005' reference was made to the ending of logging in old growth forests and 'saving Ningaloo Reef from development' but such issues seem only to have had much potential electoral clout in seats such as North-West Coastal in the light of the government's decision to increase the area of sanctuary zones from 10 per cent to 30 per cent of the Ningaloo Marine Park.

The Greens also campaigned vigorously for 'No' votes on the two referendum questions on weeknight and weekend trading hours, which had been placed before the electors for decision on election day.<sup>21</sup> The decision to place the issue before the people was itself surprising and unexpected in the light of opposition to extended trading hours from various vested interests though the threat of having federal competition moneys withheld without such amendments were a constant part of the media debate. Even more surprising perhaps was the Premier's statement, supposedly at the instigation of his wife Bev,<sup>22</sup> that his government would support the 'yes' campaign. Initially the polls suggested both questions would be approved but the 'No' campaign gathered strength as the weeks passed.

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<sup>17</sup> Kim McDonald, 'Barnett in move to ease backyard pool fence laws votes', *West Australian*, 27.1.2005, p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> *The Australian Financial Review*, 17.2.2005, p. 62.

<sup>19</sup> Giz Watson, Media Release, 17.2.2005.

<sup>20</sup> Giz Watson, Media Release, 17.2.2005.

<sup>21</sup> Wendy Pryor, 'Greens warn major stores will grab trade', *West Australian*, 21.1.2005, p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> Steve Pennells, 'Sunday driver had nagging wife', *West Australian*, 20.1.2005. p. 17.

The official launch of the Labor campaign to the party faithful at the new Perth Exhibition and Convention Centre was delayed until the last weekend. A centre piece of the Premier's address was his party's \$ 1 billion dollar school's package, which perhaps arose from the fact that Labor had entered the campaign 6 points ahead of the Coalition on education matters<sup>23</sup> but perhaps also from a perceived necessity to divert attention from Education Minister Alan Carpenter's series of disputes with the Teachers' Union and criticism directed at teachers and principals.<sup>24</sup> The Labor plans included provision for 39 new schools and an increase in maintenance outlays. Promises for the provision of \$200 every year for each 16 and 17 year old in school and \$400 for those in training to be spent on gaining skills as well as a requirement for a compulsory 20 hours of community service for year 10 and year 11 students were strategies linked to Labor's objective that teenagers stay at school, in training or in some form of employment. In addition, as part of the government's determination to improve the academic performance of State schools, the oldest government secondary school, Perth Modern School, was be turned into a 'centre of excellence'.

For its part the Coalition matched the Government's commitments to school maintenance and pledged to abolish school fees in government schools with every government school in lieu receiving \$40 for each student in years K–7 and \$235 for each student in years 8–12. However, Coalition proposals for an increase in the opportunities for salary advancement in the top tier of classroom teaching led to State School Teachers Union fears that individual employment agreements might affect its collective bargaining power if there was a change of government.

### *Last minute twists*

With the major parties attempting to cancel each other out with their respective late launch themes of education and law and order some last minute twists in the campaign loomed as significant. In the heat of the final days Premier Gallop unveiled a plan to ban semi-trailers and road trains from parts of Leach Highway and South Street bound for the port of Fremantle. This step needed to be understood in the context of the Labor government's earlier decision to abandon the construction of the Fremantle eastern by-pass road and build a new port at Kwinana by 2015. The Coalition shadow transport spokesperson, Katie Hodson–Thomas, said a change of government would result in a start to the construction of the by-pass. Real estate agents and buyers were warned the land would be resumed if the Coalition won office.<sup>25</sup> With traffic problems along Leach Highway being regarded as extremely annoying for residents in the marginal electorate of Riverton, the late announcement was deemed in many quarters as a cynical vote gaining exercise. Incumbent Labor MP, Tony McRae, defended his party's stance

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<sup>23</sup> *The Australian*, 2.2.2005, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Charlie Wilson-Clark, 'Two schools of thought view for education', *West Australian*, 25.2.2005, p. 10.

<sup>25</sup> Jenny D'Anger, 'Liberals pledge early start on Freo bypass', *West Australian*, 23.2.2005, p. 9

as good policy while conceding that the late announcement was essentially playing 'hard politics' to win the seat.<sup>26</sup>

The seat of Riverton was also in the spotlight for another reason in the final few days before the election when the Liberal Party was reported to have complained to the Crime and Corruption Commission that a local nurse, Choy Chan Mar, had been misled into standing as an Independent Candidate with her preferences going to Labor's Tony McRae. In response, Labor State Secretary Bill Johnston said he was not aware of any involvement of his party in paying for the candidate's \$250 dollar deposit or the printing of her how-to-vote cards.<sup>27</sup>

One significant development late in the campaign was the Premier's announcement<sup>28</sup> that Labor would guarantee that as a consequence of any electoral reform the Mining and Pastoral Region would still retain its five Legislative Assembly seats. Labor's candidate for the seat of Kalgoorlie, James Donnelly, claimed 'one vote one value was now a dead issue in the Goldfields'<sup>29</sup> but retiring Greens MLC, Dr Christine Sharp, asserted she would not vote for any 'dodgy' one-vote-one-value legislation which appeared to shield one party (Labor) from its effects. Throughout the campaign the Coalition remained adamant about its abhorrence of one-vote-one-value, to the extent of promising if elected to 'entrench' the existing vote weighting protection for rural constituencies.<sup>30</sup>

However, of all the late twists in the campaign probably the most important arose from the mathematical omissions in the document which contained the Coalition's election costings. Remarkably this document was unveiled on the second last day before the election. Throughout the campaign both the Government and Opposition had charged each other with paving the way for future expenditure blowouts as a consequence of their respective promises stimulated by the government's strong fiscal position at the time of the election. Amidst calls for the introduction of a system for independent cost estimates of election promises<sup>31</sup> the Government received Treasury endorsement for its package with a caveat concerning 'razor thin' budget surpluses and increased State debt<sup>32</sup> with the latter set to rise as the State government borrowed heavily to pay for the Mandurah railway, new hospitals and a power network upgrade.<sup>33</sup>

By contrast, a humiliated Opposition leader was initially unable to explain 'the black hole' in his costings media release. Within an hour Barnett had telephoned media outlets to apologise and explain that the missing \$407,050,000 was the

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<sup>26</sup> *West Australian*, 24.2.2005.p. 9.

<sup>27</sup> *West Australian*, 26.2.2005.p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> *West Australian*, 10.3.2005.p. 21.

<sup>29</sup> *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 12-13.2. 2005, p. 1

<sup>30</sup> Robert Taylor, 'Coalition pledges to keep votes weighted', *West Australian*, 14.2.2005, p. 8

<sup>31</sup> Colleen Egan, 'Poll pledges must add up', *The Sunday Times*, 27.2.2005, p. 15.

<sup>32</sup> Bruce Cheesman, 'Gallop's sums get official tick', *Australian Financial Review*, 22.2.2005, p. 18.

<sup>33</sup> Grahame Armstrong, 'Debt blowout fear', *The Sunday Times*, 23.1.2005, p. 7.



consequence of a simple typographical omission from the published document. In different circumstances the impact might have been minimal but given the doubts raised by the canal costing debate and the adverse media coverage of the error<sup>34</sup> the Premier was quick to suggest that Colin Barnett ‘can’t be trusted with our state’s finances because he can’t add up’.<sup>35</sup> Tellingly, the *Australian* in its final editorial before polling day observed that the ‘strongest case for a second Gallop Government is made by Mr Barnett’<sup>36</sup> while even the *West Australian*, notwithstanding sustained criticism of the government over its first four year term, suggested that voters should ‘opt for the incumbent, even if they do so grudgingly and with serious reservations’.<sup>37</sup>

## Results

There were some striking parallels between the televised count on election night in 2005 and the same scenario four years earlier. As in 2001 a narrow coalition victory was at least a possibility in the first hour or so of counting. Instead, within an hour and a half it was all over with Opposition leader Colin Barnett conceding when many of his supporters had still not quite accepted the reality of defeat. The final outcome also was astonishingly similar to 2001 with Labor having the same number of Lower House members as before and an almost identical two party preferred vote. By contrast, the primary votes cast for the respective parties exhibited a significantly different pattern than was the case in 2001.

**Table 1:**  
**Vote swings and seats won, Legislative Assembly 2005**

Party	Candidates	Primary Votes	% votes	Swing	Seats Won
ALP	57 (56)	448,956	41.88	+ 4.64	32 (32)
Liberal	55 (54)	382,014	35.64	+ 4.48	18 (16)
National P	14 (11)	39,545	3.69	+ 0.43	5 (5)
Greens	57 (51)	81,113	7.57	+ 0.30	
Aust Dems	-- (38)	--	--	-2.64	
Independents	39 (71)	40,883	3.81	- 1.60	2 (4)
Christian Democrats	57 (13)	31,445	2.93	+ 1.97	
Family First	34 (-)	21,701	2.02	+ 2.02	
One Nation	45 (54)	17,579	1.64	- 7.94	
New Country Party	5 (-)	1,225	0.11	+ 0.11	
Others	12 (18)	7,489	0.70	- 0.20	
Formal	375 (366)	1,071,950	94.76		
Informal		59,312	5.24	+ 0.70	
Total Votes		1,131,262	89.84	- 0.72	

<sup>34</sup> *The Australian*, 25.2.2005, p. 14

<sup>35</sup> *The Australian*, 25.2.2005, p. 14.

<sup>36</sup> *The Australian*, 25.2.2005, p. 14

<sup>37</sup> *West Australian*, 26.2.2005, p. 18.

In total over 81% of the formal primary votes in 2005 were cast for either the ALP or one of the Coalition parties compared with 72% in 2001. With the Green vote virtually unchanged from 2001 the major parties gained effectively about two thirds of the 12% of the vote that had previously gone to One Nation, the Australian Democrats and the Independents. For Labor the 2005 election also provided the first occasion since the 1980s when the party polled over 40% of the primary vote in Western Australia in an election for the Lower House at either state or federal level.

**Table Two:**

**ALP Primary Vote: Lower House State and Federal Elections 1993–2005**

1993 state election	37.1%
1993 federal election	39.3%
1996 state election	35.8%
1996 federal election	34.7%
1998 federal election	36.2%
2001 state election	37.2%
2001 federal election	37.1%
2004 federal election	34.7%
2005 state election	41.9%

As can be seen from the table Labor's primary vote at the state poll increased by more than 7% compared with the October 2004 federal election whereas in each of 1993, 1996 and 1998 the difference in support at the two comparable adjacent polls had been of the order of 2% or less. This would certainly seem to suggest that campaign performance and the specific issues that arose during the campaign must have played a significant role in the eventual outcome.

On the Labor side Tony Dean in Bunbury was the only incumbent MP to lose his seat though the party also failed to win the new seat of Murray which was notionally Labor following the redistribution. On the other side of the ledger former Minister Tom Stephens regained Central Kimberley and Pilbara (a redrawn version of Pilbara previously held by retiring Labor Independent Larry Graham) and the northern suburbs seat of Kingsley was unexpectedly lost by the Liberals to Labor's Judy Hughes following an apparent backlash against the Party's decision to endorse Colin Edwardes, husband of the retiring member, former Cabinet minister Cheryl Edwardes.

The Liberals who had lost 13 seats in the disastrous 2001 poll made a net gain of only three seats (five gains and two losses). Victories in Bunbury and Murray meant the Liberals made a net gain of one seat from Labor while an additional two seats were regained from Independents—the safe seat of South Perth, with the retirement of Independent Phillip Pandal, and Vasse in the South-West where the sitting Independent and former Liberal member Bernie Masters came within two hundred votes of defeating the endorsed Liberal. The fifth success was in Roe in the southeastern agricultural region which came back to the fold from the Nationals

after a sixteen-year gap but this was counterbalanced by the defeat of one term member Jeremy Edwards who lost the northern wheatbelt seat of Greenough to the Nationals leaving the latter as before with five seats, just enough to retain their status as a separate party.

Two independents survived the poll — Dr Elizabeth Constable who easily retained Churchlands; and Dr Janet Woollard who held on with the aid of Labor preferences against the high profile but controversial former Liberal minister Graham Kierath who had unexpectedly been ousted from his formerly safe seat of Riverton in 2001.

Labor polled particularly well in the Perth Metropolitan area and especially in the highly volatile northern suburbs ‘mortgage belt’ in sharp contrast to the October federal poll. Its primary vote across all metropolitan seats was 4 to 5% above its 2001 performance and there was positive swing of around 3% in the marginal northern suburbs seats of Wanneroo, Kingsley and Mindarie while Tony O’Gorman held his 2001 vote to retain Joondalup against strong Liberal opposition. Other important victories were in Swan Hills where Jaye Radisich, who in 2001 at 24 achieved a swing of more than 10% to become the State’s youngest ever female MP, survived an unfavourable redistribution to retain the seat by more than 1800 votes; and in the marginal southern suburbs seat of Riverton, where controversial MP Tony McRae (Graham Kierath’s conqueror in 2001) retained his seat by nearly 800 votes despite the unfavourable newspaper publicity in the closing days of the campaign.

In the rural areas Labor’s primary vote, even with the controversy over one-vote-one-value, rose by nearly 5% suggesting at least one third of the 13% swing away from One Nation in rural seats found its way directly or indirectly to Labor. In the new seat of Collie–Wellington there was a swing of nearly 7% to Mick Murray who had won the old Collie seat in 2001 by only 34 votes and 4.6% to David Templeman in Mandurah; while Labor also held on to the highly marginal seats of Albany and Geraldton. In Bunbury, the swing against Labor’s Tony Dean was less than 1% and he came within of 100 votes of victory against the Mayor of Bunbury Tony Castrilli, leaving the bellwether seat represented by an Opposition member for the first time since 1974.

In the Mining and Pastoral region Labor lost ground in Kimberley (where the canal project debate may have contributed to Carol Martin’s survival by a few hundred votes) and in its former stronghold Kalgoorlie where there was a swing of 8% to future Liberal leader Matt Birney, but elsewhere the party polled strongly or at least held its ground.

Much speculation surrounded the likely performance of Family First following its unexpected Senate victory in Victoria. However, in the West it was the pre-existing Christian Democrats which took the initiative among the two religious parties by announcing that it would nominate candidates for all 57 of the Legislative Assembly seats and all six Upper House regions. Family First also ran a ticket in

all Upper House seats and 34 of the Assembly seats. Between them the two parties mustered close on 5% of the primary vote very much in line with expectations but it is difficult to find any Assembly seat where preferences can definitely be said to have decided the outcome except in Bunbury where religious party and nurses candidate preferences unseated Tony Dean despite an 8% increase in Labor's primary vote.

From the best estimates available several weeks after the election it is estimated that Labor's two party preferred vote across the State was 52.8% compared with 52.9% in 2001 and only 44.8% in 1996. In the metropolitan area Labor's two party preferred vote was probably between 55 and 56% compared with 54% in 2001.

In total 14 new members (compared with 23 in 2001), including former ministers Dr Kim Hames (Liberal) and Tom Stephens (Labor) entered the Legislative Assembly replacing the 3 members (1 Labor, 1 Liberal and 1 Independent Liberal) who were defeated and 11 (1 Labor 6 Liberals, 2 Nationals and 2 Independents) who retired. The number of female members remained at 13 of whom nine represented the ALP while only two—front benchers Sue Walker and Katie Hodson-Thomas — were Liberals, a reduction of one from the situation before the election.

**Table 3:**  
**Vote swings and seats won, Legislative Council 2005**

<i>Party</i>	<i>Primary Votes</i>	<i>% votes</i>	<i>Swing</i>	<i>Seats Won</i>
ALP	476,608	43.36	+ 5.42	16 (13)
Liberal	407,927	37.11	+ 3.15	15 (12)
National P	23,985	2.18	- 0.22	1 (1)
Greens	82,723	7.53	- 0.47	2 (5)
Aust Dems	10,198	0.93	- 2.79	
Independents	12,542	1.14	- 0.47	
Christian Democrats	25,058	2.28	+ 0.74	
Family First	22,089	2.01	+ 2.01	
One Nation	17,480	1.59	- 8.29	
New Country Party	3,364	0.31	+ 0.31	
Hospital Support Groups	9,776	0.89	+ 0.89	
Others	7,552	0.69	+ 0.28	
Formal	1,099,302	96.82		
Informal	36,118	3.18	+ 0.54	
Total Votes	1, 135,420	90.17	- 0.53	

### *Legislative Council*

In the Legislative Council poll Labor with 16 seats (an increase of 3 all at the expense of the Greens) and the Greens between them won 18 of the 34 seats the same total as in the old Parliament. This outcome ensured that after 22 May 2005 the government as before could pass its legislation with Greens support but still

lacked an absolute constitutional majority after providing a President. However, Labor's victory in the Lower House now provided what proved to be the critical window of opportunity for the government to steer its one-vote-one-value legislation through the Legislative Council before the 22 May changeover with the support of Independent Alan Cadby who had left the Liberal party after failing to secure a winnable position on his party's North Metropolitan Region ticket.

One of the more puzzling features of these figures is that in a reversal of the usual pattern voters seemed more likely to vote for major party candidates in the upper House than in the House where governments are formed. By contrast, the total Greens vote was almost identical from one House to another as was the vote for the Christian parties except that the Christian Democrats picked up a few extra Assembly votes because they contested all 57 seats. One partial explanation for the variations might be that in the Legislative Assembly elections a number of Labor and Liberals voted for high profile Independents where in the Upper House they voted their own party ticket. Whatever the cause voters' disinclination to use their Upper House vote as a counterbalancing opportunity followed the trend evident in voting for the Senate in the October federal election.

Region by region of course there were important variations. In all three metropolitan regions Labor polled strongly and was able to win (at the expense of the Greens whose primary vote fell from 9.0% to 7.8%) three of the five vacancies in the South Metropolitan Region while comfortably retaining its three East Metropolitan region seats with a 6% swing and over 50% of the primary vote. In the North Metropolitan Region the Labor vote was lower but ahead of the Liberals who achieved a swing of only 3.5% on the primary count compared with Labor's 5%. The Greens lost some ground polling 8.8% of the primary votes compared with 9.7% in 2001 but Giz Watson was returned for a third time aided by Labor preferences.

In the rural regions all three former One Nation members (one standing as an Independent and the other two for the new Country party) were defeated along with two of the three Greens. The election was also disastrous for the Nationals who failed to make headway in either the Agricultural or South West Regions. In the Agricultural region despite a steep decline in support for the former One Nation candidates the National Party primary vote remained static at 19% while the Liberals achieved a 9.4% swing to win three of the five seats. Even more critical was the outcome in the South West Region where the Nationals' preference deal with the Greens, the cause of a heated exchange between Liberal MHR Wilson Tuckey and Nationals leader Max Trenorden during the campaign, effectively delivered the Greens the second seat they needed to hold the balance of power in the new Legislative Council. In the Mining and Pastoral Region Labor improved its primary vote by 4.5% and in the absence of its former member turned Independent, Mark Nevill, was able to regain its traditional third seat in the region.

For a time it did appear likely that a minor party candidate, Christian Democrat or Family First, and in the case of the South Metropolitan Region Fremantle Hospital Support Group, would win an upper House seat, in each case from a very low primary vote base. As it eventuated, this did not occur. However, the issue remains open as to whether the workings of the existing ticket voting system has developed to the point where interchange of preferences between minor party groups, and on occasions for tactical reason, major parties as well, leaves open the constant opportunity for members to be elected representing a party with 3% or less support at the primary vote level.

Of the 34 members of the Legislative Council as at the end of 2004 some 13 will not be in the House following 22 May. Six were defeated and 7 retired. Of the 13 new members elected to take their seats in May, 6 were women meaning from 22 May there were 14 women (8 Labor, 5 Liberals and 1 Green) in the chamber compared with 12 during the Council's last few months. The total of 27 female members (including 17 Labor members) in the two Houses puts female representation at just under 30% of the total compared with 14% in 1989 and 18.7% in 1996.

### ***Referendum results***

Both referendum questions were decisively defeated with 41.3% formal votes in favour of the first question concerning weeknight trading and 38.6% voting for eased restrictions on Sunday trading. Only 5 electorates supported Question One and 2 supported Question Two. Easily the highest 'Yes' votes came in the Mining and Pastoral region with 49.7 and 50% of formal votes in favour of each of the two questions: there was a strong majority for both questions in the Central Kimberley–Pilbara electorate and majority support for Question One in Kimberley and in Murchison–Eyre. In the whole of the metropolitan area only the electorate of Peel voted Yes on both questions (50.6% and 50.2%) and in the district of Perth there was a 50.9% vote for Question One. The strongest No votes (over 70% in both cases) were in the Agricultural Region and throughout the whole of the SouthWest the Yes vote was above 40% on both questions only in Mandurah. Apart from Peel and Perth the only other metropolitan electorates to poll Yes votes above 45 on either question were Mindarie, Victoria Park, Nedlands, South Perth and Maylands.

### ***Assessment of the outcome***

In summary, as Premier Gallop's Labor government had served only one term in office, and with the advantages of incumbency in marginal seats at a time of ongoing economic prosperity Labor would seem to have been well placed for victory. On the other side of the ledger there was its relatively mediocre poll ratings throughout its four year term and its disastrous performance at the federal poll and nothing in the pattern of voting throughout the 1990s suggested the party

could overcome its negative federal image as Peter Beattie had been able to do in Queensland on more than one occasion. Inevitably then the focus will be on the campaign itself with ongoing surprise elements including Premier Gallop's apparent effective apology strategy on taxation and health, and the way in which Opposition Leader Colin Barnett — for right or for wrong — made himself and his policies the major talking point of the entire campaign. For some time to come many Liberals will continue to argue that this was defeat snatched from the jaws of victory.

### *Postscript*

In what was perhaps the most critical outcome of the 2005 election the government moved swiftly to capitalise on its window of opportunity before the newly elected members of the Legislative Council took their seats on 22 May. Confident of the support of retiring deselected MLC Alan Cadby and the Greens the government introduced the One Vote One Value Bill 2005, though during its passage in the Legislative Council, the title of the Bill was amended to the Electoral Amendment and Repeal Bill 2005, as the original title was considered a misnomer by the Council. In addition, as part of the Attorney-General's so-called creative solution to enable the government to honour the Premier's promise to preserve the number of seats in the Mining and Pastoral Region, a second Bill, the Constitution and Electoral Amendment Bill was introduced into the Legislative Council in May providing for an increase in the membership of the Legislative Assembly from 57 to 59 seats.

In summary, the new legislation as it emerged from the Parliament removed the vote weighting for rural seats in the Legislative Assembly allowing only a 10% above or below variation from the average district enrolment. Those districts which otherwise would be over 100,000 square kilometres in area were to benefit from a large district allowance to reduce the numbers of electors required. In the Legislative Council the equal ratio split between metropolitan and rural members in the Legislative Council was retained but with an increase in membership to 36 allowing each of the six regions (three city, three country) to return 6 members each. Significantly, the legislation also provided for the redistribution process to occur two years after each election instead of the once every eight years provision that previously operated. It is not too much to say that the Coalition defeat at the 2005 election resulted in one of the three or four most important changes in the Western Australian electoral system since the advent of responsible government one hundred and fifteen years ago. ▲





