

# Direct Democracy Plan

# Autumn 2023



# Summary

## What is Direct Democracy?

In short, a pure Direct Democracy is where the electorate decides on policy initiatives without elected representatives. A semi-direct democracy is where residents are the higher authority, but representatives administer day to day governance.

A transition to a direct democracy will encourage more referendum votes in Tasmania, and provide opportunities for the community to call existing legislation to a popular vote or propose policies or law changes.

Some established semi-direct democracies have the power of recall, which means the ability to remove elected officials from office before the end of their term. Direct democracy can emphasise community deliberation on issues, and use consensus decision making or majority rule when making decisions.

Participation is key in direct democracies, and there are a range of additional tools that can be used. This includes the Citizen Assembly or Citizen Jury, Deliberative Opinion Polls, Online Policy Debates, and Participatory Budgeting. The aim could be for consensus to ensure that views are heard and considered in the final choice(s). Direct Democracy should provide the community with the opportunity to determine which issues matter and should be raised in State Parliament.

## Direct Democracy in Practice

My plan for improving democracy is using two key civic tools – a **Regional Parliament** and a **Community Assembly**.

### The Community Assembly is:

- A space and a time for individuals to come together, discuss, and deliberate before making decisions as a community, with a suggested schedule of monthly meetings held in local community spaces across the electoral division of Murchison.
- The ability for individuals to raise new issues and bring current issues to the discussion.
- The ability for individuals to suggest new laws and suggest changes to established laws.
- Where the community vote takes place.

The Representative must commit to honour & respect decisions made at Community Assemblies. Communities will nominate 1 volunteer delegate from each local Community Assembly to go to the 'Regional Parliament'.

### The Regional Parliament is:

- A monthly gathering of nominated delegates from each Community Assembly.
- Where recorded votes and the reasons for those votes from Community Assemblies are communicated between delegates and directly to the Member for Murchison.
- Where delegates are given responsibilities to make decisions about if to seek advice from Advisory Panels or Technical Experts.
- Video recorded and published on an open platform for the benefit of the community.

# Direct Democracy Structure & Finer Details

How will Direct Democracy work? How would the MLC or the community 'collect' the votes?

## A) The Local Community Assembly

- **Meeting Frequency**
  - Meets face to face, monthly, to discuss, debate, and vote on pre-arranged agenda items.
- **Assembly Guiding principles** of these gatherings include:
  - to 'be' a community that talks about its issues
  - to be respectful, civil, and open-minded
  - to listen and hear different perspectives
  - to learn that individuals do not always agree on matters
  - to appreciate diversity of thought
  - to share insights and reasons with other community members
- **Number of community members per Assembly**
  - Groups of between 10 & 30 people meet.
  - Community members can only be part of one Community Assembly at a time, but can change and be part of another Community Assembly if they wish.
- **Establishing New Community Assemblies**
  - If Community Assembly gets above 40 attendees for 3 months in a row, a new Community Assembly will be formed - to meet at a different time and / or venue.
  - New Community Assemblies must have 15 members to begin, and must have the MLC present to formally establish the new Community Assembly as part of the network across Murchison.
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- **Voting**
  - Community Assemblies will be the space for respectful and reasonable debate and votes are by simple physical division. When a vote is called, members will be invited to vote and instructed accordingly.
- **Vote Recording Instructions** - Each vote needs to be recorded in the following manner:
  - Chair to call for a division - Ayes / I's to the right, Noes to the left. Or a 'FOR' side and 'AGAINST' side. These could be colour coded. "Those of that opinion, please move to the 'FOR' side. Those to the contrary, please move to the 'AGAINST' side."
  - Votes are conducted by 3 volunteers, one who chairs the meeting, one person to keep the time, and one person to make a written and/or photographic record of each vote, and give that to the Assembly 's Volunteer Regional Parliament Delegate.
  - Chair will declare the vote on the issue
  - Vote Recorder - Count the votes of those approved to vote (on electoral role, or residential address Murchison sighted); record the vote in doc table, with photo (optional)
  - Time Keeper & Photographer (doesn't vote, changes monthly) - Take a photo of the division (optional), send to vote recorder, checks that person doesn't speak for more than 3 mins on a given issue
- **Chairperson:** Chair and Deputy Chair will be negotiated between the Community Assembly and MLC in the early phases of the establishment of the Assembly. After the first few months, the Assembly can then decide who the Chairperson is and for what period.
- **Volunteer Delegates**
  - Every Community Assembly will have a Delegate nominated by the members of the Assembly.
  - The Delegate's period of nomination would be a 6 to 12 months, to ensure that this role doesn't become occupied for too long by the same person.

- The Delegate can be the same person as the meeting chair, or a different person.
- Initially Community Assemblies won't be an official government led practice, but a community led practice. This is the basis of how decisions would be made in a direct democratic way. For this practice to successfully function there needs to be people in the community that step forward to make their positions known and vote on issues.
- **Community Assembly Locations:**
  - Each community that wanted a Community Assembly could have it.
  - i.e. Queenstown Community Assembly, Waratah Community Assembly, Zeehan Community Assembly, Somerset Community Assembly, Wynyard Community Assembly, Rocky Cape Community Assembly, Stanley Community Assembly, Smithton Community Assembly, Currie Community Assembly, and so forth, etc.
  - More than one Community Assembly can occur in a township if there is demand for more.
  - If there are multiple Community Assemblies across the region, the night or day of meeting could be flexible to ensure that these events are flexible in meeting the needs of the community.
- **Power to dissolve Community Assembly:**
  - The Chairperson of a Community Assembly can abandon the meeting of the Assembly if determined that one or more community members have ceased being respectful or considerate when the person who has the floor is talking.
  - If an assembly meeting is abandoned, the MLC may be requested to intervene or come to the next meeting to oversee.
  - A Chairperson can ask their Delegate put a request the MLC that an individual be barred from attending or voting due to repeated and sustained disruptive actions.
- **Complaints**
  - Complaints by community members about their local Community Assembly can be directed through the Delegate OR directly to the MLC

## B) Regional Parliament and Volunteer Delegates

- Regional Parliament meets monthly with the primary purpose of sharing votes from the community.
- The Regional Parliament Delegate from the Community Assembly goes to the Regional Parliament and communicates the vote, and the arguments, and the proposals by their local Community Assembly for future votes.
- The Murchison Member of the Legislative Council (MLC) will also communicate upcoming legislation to be voted on by the Assembly via Regional Parliament.
- The MLC will also communicate upcoming legislation to be voted on by the Community Assembly. The MLC will receive the votes from the delegates, collate this data, and publish these numbers publicly for all to view. Names will be withheld from vote data – so only each individual Community Assembly will know how you voted on an issue.
- Regional Parliament will be digitally recorded for transparency and accountability purposes.
- The MLC will also receive questions and motions to raise in State Parliament directly from delegates and the Community Assemblies.
- The MLC will be fully aware of how they are to vote on Proposed Legislation in State Parliament.
- If it is identified that regions disagree on an issue, delegates to Regional Parliament may decide to hold a secondary vote.
- Depending on the number of Community Assemblies and corresponding delegates, it may be advantageous to hold a second or third Regional Parliament day.

## C) Time and numbers per Assembly:

The great thing about this system is it is scalable and it could work with 10 people, or it could work with 10,000 people. Obviously, the more people that participate – the more authentic the direct democracy would be – but 10,000 is almost half of Murchison, so if we had 40%-50% of residents regularly voting on issues, that would be an incredible outcome for local democracy.

- A monthly Assembly could go anywhere from 2-3hrs
- A monthly Regional Parliament would probably go for half a day
- Times would be dependent on the issues presented.

As an example – if there were 4,000 people who wanted to vote on **all issues** it would look like this:

- 4,000 people divided by 30 members per Assembly = **133 Community Assemblies**
- 4,000 people divided by 10 members per Assembly = **400 Community Assemblies**
- There would be between **130 and 400 Community Assemblies**
- A Regional Parliament could probably accommodate up to 40-50 delegates – so this would equate to between **3 & 10 Regional Parliament half days**.

Realistically, I am probably guessing the participation initially will be much lower – between 500 and 1500 regular and sustained participants. But there would be capacity to scale up (or down).

Working on a more realistic number of 1000 regular community members – with groups of around 20.

$1,000 / 20 = 50$  Community Assemblies

A Regional Parliament of 50 delegates might be the maximum, so probably around 2 Regional Parliaments would be necessary using these numbers (i.e. 2 half days per month).

## D) Communication

A central communication platform – like Murchison Votes – on Facebook or another similar platform could be used to communicate general information.

The decentralised communication from **Individuals – Assembly – Delegate – Regional Parliament – MLC** and back through this channel would be the most reliable form of communication. This would be best through Email or Mobile Chat Group

So Local

- Community Assembly - Signal Mobile App Messaging group or email network (Delegate to communicate)
- Regional Parliament - Signal Mobile App messaging group or email network (MLC to communicate)
- MLC to maintain a register of Community Assemblies, meeting time, meeting venue, contact persons.
- MLC to collate the votes, and publish the vote data on the central Regional Parliament communication platform (i.e. Murchison Votes)

## E) Voter Registration

- Community members can only be part of one Community Assembly at a time, but can change and be part of another Community Assembly if they wish.
- There are pros and cons to checking eligibility to vote in a Murchison based Community Assembly. There are limited risks that individuals outside of Murchison that are going to regularly come to Murchison to vote on particular issues to influence the decision of the MLC.
- However, to prevent this from happening, for a resident to vote, there could be a process for being 'registered' to vote.
- At the first Community Assembly that an individual attends, the individual could provide some photo I.D, showing that persons listed address to the Community Assembly Chairperson. This could then be checked as a Murchison address, and then added to the Community Assembly list. This list would be the responsibility of the current Chair Person, and an updated copy would also be provided to the MLC.
- As soon as voters were checked, they could join in the votes.
- Voters can check if they are on the electoral roll with a Murchison address using the Australian Electoral Commission website.
- The MLC would also be able to double-check on the registration status of individuals if there was any doubt.
- If a resident was not on the electoral roll, but wanted to vote, they could write a letter and show I.D. to prove that they are a stakeholder and wish to be able to vote on issues.

## F) Online voting Options

- Can we use digital technology? There could be a number of ways voting could be conducted using online methods. There are risks of security and privacy when using Digital technology, and overuse of digital technology can also be dehumanising. The system of coming together in shared spaces, getting to know each other is a process of community building and reconnecting. My proposal is actually to run a trial direct democracy independent of online voting and discussion, but here are some online methods that could support Direct Democracy in Murchison.
- Online Voting could utilise using existing platforms. A working shortlist of platforms can be identified and the community could test or trial three or four that appeared promising. Once a preferred platform was identified, this could be trialled extensively before deciding to lock in a final digital voting method.

Options:	Link
Vote Me App (Free)	<a href="https://voteme.app/">https://voteme.app/</a>
Google Form Survey (Free)	<a href="https://docs.google.com/forms/u/0/">https://docs.google.com/forms/u/0/</a>
<b>Paid</b>	
Survey Legend	<a href="https://www.surveylegend.com/">https://www.surveylegend.com/</a>

Pollinate App	<a href="https://pollinatepolls.com">https://pollinatepolls.com</a>
SurveyMonkey	<a href="https://www.surveymonkey.com">https://www.surveymonkey.com</a>
VoxVote	<a href="https://www.voxvote.com/">https://www.voxvote.com/</a>
Loomio	<a href="https://www.loomio.com/">https://www.loomio.com/</a>
Assembly X	<a href="https://assemblyvoting.com/lp/capterra-lp/">https://assemblyvoting.com/lp/capterra-lp/</a>
Eligo	<a href="https://www.eligo.social/en/">https://www.eligo.social/en/</a>
eballot	<a href="https://www.eballot.com/">https://www.eballot.com/</a>
Election buddy	<a href="https://electionbuddy.com/">https://electionbuddy.com/</a>

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## G) Experts & Legal Support

Delegates will have the ability to invite the consultation of technical expertise and law experts to determine the lawfulness, constitutional veracity, or feasibility of ideas and proposed bills to State Parliament. This could look like pro bono support or a financial exchange for the work completed depending on the scale and nature of the work.

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## H) Community Advisory Panels

Delegates will have the ability to invite community members to research particular issues – and individuals may be grouped based on interest, experience, and / or expertise to advise communities and present information reports for Delegates to provide to their Community Assemblies prior to voting. Whether these reports or resources are accessed by individuals who intend to vote on an issue will be up to them. These Advisory Groups can be short term or long term.

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## I) Community Juries

Delegates will have the ability to commission a Community Jury. This is a random selection of Murchison residents to deliberate over a decision before bringing this decision and any associated reports to the Community Assembly for a vote.

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## J) Participatory Budgets

A team or group of interested individuals may wish to be involved in setting Budgets and financial goals for the region- to identify a list of priority projects and what improvements or additional infrastructure

Murchison needs. This could then be discussed by Community Assemblies so that the Budget Team can be better informed when setting regional goals for the MLC to advocate to the State Government.

## Case Study: Estonia e-Election System

Estonia, a nation of 1.3 million people, situated in North Eastern Europe, is famous for its e-elections which enable casting a vote online instead of traditional paper ballots. Less known fact is that the whole elections process in Estonia is carried out digitally.

The system is used starting from initiating the elections to inserting the votes and creating reports for archives. Elections info system enables to organize different types of elections and Estonia has used the system for Parliament, local government and European Parliament elections. The referendum could also be conducted within the same system.

Elections info system makes elections much more cost effective while the security and the speed of reporting are maximised. The system consolidates the data and reports it in real time to interested parties through a portal (or in predefined file formats) – to media, citizens, candidates and parties etc.

The system makes elections more transparent and trustworthy as all the activities are logged and the persons behind each activity are easily established.

### Estonia's e-Democracy tools include:

- [EIS](#) – platform for public consultation on all draft laws.
- [VOLIS](#) – an online decision-making platform for local authorities.
- [Rahvaalgatus.ee](#) – a portal that enables citizens to compose and send collective initiatives to the Estonian Parliament.
- [e-Election system by Helmes](#)



See further:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=27IN6HmwuY4> – Initiatives in the Estonian

Parliament <https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-158444?lg=EN/SV> – European Citizens Initiative