

The Case against the introduction of Daylight Saving in Western Australia

The difficulty with daylight saving is that there will be both winners and losers. Community opinion is clearly split and your vote will be crucial in deciding the outcome. The case for a No vote is strong, it is based on good science and plain common sense, it is a vote that considers our present circumstances as well as our future needs, it is a vote that puts the needs of Western Australia first.

There is no doubt that there will be both winners and losers in this referendum. The question before us is do the proposed benefits exceed the losses and more importantly will those people who lose out lose more than those who win. When manipulating something as fundamental as time zones, we must look at the big picture and recognize that the things we do and enjoy today will not necessarily remain the same as we progress through our lifetimes. You may live by a beach today, but you may live in the far North in the future.

The need that people once had to alter time to suit their lifestyles has long been supplanted by improvements in technology, flexibility within the workplace and environmental concerns. The simple fact is that Western Australians are lucky they never adopted daylight saving when it may have been relevant, for we now find ourselves well adapted to our environment without the need to artificially alter the clock, we can be a state looking to the future, not the past.

An obsolete idea

The idea of daylight saving was first conceived by Benjamin Franklin during his time as an American delegate in Paris in 1784, in an essay, "An Economical Project." as a way to save on the expenditure of candles which were expensive and a staple in his day. Franklin intended it as a joke. It was first advocated seriously by London builder William Willett in 1907 in the pamphlet, "Waste of Daylight". This is not a new or even progressive idea. It was conceived in circumstances vastly different to what we experience today.

The main purpose of Daylight Saving Time is to make better use of daylight. We change our clocks during the summer months to move an hour of daylight from the morning to the evening. It saves nothing, it simply moves an hour of daylight and heat from the morning to the afternoon. Whilst this may be advantageous in places like the UK, in our climate it is simply not appropriate. The economy of candles has no relevance today, any savings that may have once been gained through lighting savings are now massively outstripped by the cost of Air Conditioning.

Cost to Families

Perhaps the greatest myth associated with daylight savings is that it provides additional family time. Quite simply this is not true. The same number of hours are available in the day. If anything the movement of an hour of sunlight to the end of the day is particularly harsh on families with small children where they have been conditioned to sleep at night and routine is paramount to their continued health and good behavior. Sending our children to school tired is not in their best interests, nor likely to achieve best educational outcomes.

One Perth Mum says

"Daylight saving in WA is terrible - my 6yo son is now rising at 5.30am (all times mentioned here are real WA time) in the dark to get on the school bus in time, but the real toll is being on the bus for an hour at peak heat, 2.10 pm, every day. He is in bed at 6.30pm and the sun is setting about 7.30pm, so going to sleep is not easy unless he is really exhausted."

Not only families are impacted, many working single people have expressed concerns, to quote one member of our community;

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“You have to ask yourself, how many will actually embark on a 7pm beach trip or picnic or aimless stroll? I do hope I'm not being naïve when I assume most 9-5'ers don't particularly feel the need to go to the beach every night. No, the majority will enjoy the comfort of their homes after the sheer frustration of the journey home, be that via peak time traffic or the public transport system.

I belong to the group of seemingly forgotten fulltime working singles. The much vaunted "Family time" means nothing to me. I try to enjoy a physically active lifestyle and take full advantage of all the wonderful events on offer over the summer months.

How has daylight saving affected a typical day for me?

Morning: wake at 5.00

Go walking? As a single female I think not.

Go swimming? Yes, but I have to dig very deep to find the motivation as the entire exercise is performed while the sky remains pitch black outside.

The sun is just rising as I park my car and walk to work!

After Work:

Still only 45 mins for the mad dash to the shops but at a hotter time of day

Go to a step class? No it's too hot now

Walk around the park? Only if you can stand the flies and the heat

Try and convince yourself it's tea time when the sun is almost at noon time height in the sky

Go swimming? Not if you are a serious swimmer - the lanes are chocked up with all the kids sent there by their parents to get them out of their hair.

So I usually just put on the air conditioner and wait for it to cool down outside My fresh morning hour has been replaced by a steaming one at the end of the day”

For the Environment and Business

There have now been several studies both here and abroad that demonstrate that Daylight Saving increases electricity consumption. During WA's recent trial, Synergy indicated an increase in electricity consumption, due to the increased use of air conditioners. . Family members who are home by 4.00pm will be experiencing the heat intensity of a 3.00pm sun. Their only option is to use air conditioning at a time when business demand will also be at its highest.

Smoothing energy demand should be a priority, but this isn't helped by Daylight Saving. Instead Daylight Saving will accentuate peak energy demand, which causes the use of expensive to run peak period electricity generating equipment, that is more greenhouse polluting than baseload generation.

In a Perth summer there are many days when the sea breeze and cool evening air can be used to cool a home. But this process is made less viable when natural home cooling is delayed by an hour. A home that normally cools to an acceptable sleeping temperature by midnight, won't have the same temperature until 1.00am with Daylight Saving. Most people can't afford to go to sleep an hour later, so their only option will be to use air conditioning instead.

Global warming and greenhouse emissions are a problem that cannot be ignored. We are asked to take steps to reduce our consumption of energy every day. Rejecting Daylight Saving is an instant win for the environment.

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This referendum has been put and rejected by the people of WA on 3 separate occasions, 1975, 1984 and 1992. In each of these previous attempts it has been argued that we need to adopt daylight savings for the good of WA business. In 2009 however we find ourselves in a substantially different environment than on the previous occasions.

The east coast of Australia is not our financial hub. WA's economic prosperity is much more linked to our neighbors in the north than our cousins in the East. Our commercial heart is South East Asia and they are in the same time zone as us! The concept of 'Daylight saving' may reduce the difference with Sydney and Melbourne but it creates a difference with Singapore, Taipei, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur and Beijing. Perth would then be out of synchronization with ALL of its trading partners.

In this modern era of the internet, the mobile telephone and email, the timezone differences that once isolated us no longer present a significant barrier. Today you are far more likely to be speaking to someone in a call centre in India than Sydney, even if you call an Australian company. This is the global reality of the age we live in.

Not Relevant to the North

The Northern Territory and Queensland have not adopted daylight saving with the good reason that it is not appropriate for their latitude. WA of course shares the same latitude for the north of this state. Undoubtedly the majority of our population exists within the southern region, but we must ask ourselves is it equitable that in return for an hour of additional recreation in Perth, residents in the north of the state will have to endure additional inconvenience.

Quoting Dr John Ridd

“In the deep tropics the sun is not a friend except in the very short winter period. For the vast majority of the year the sun is so powerful it makes doing anything outdoors unpleasant after about 7.30am. The whole place gets “cooked” - house, roads, the ground and so on. There is little cooling until the sun sets, until then you wait for that time when relief comes. And that occurs when the sun decides, not the clock. Being bombarded by a celestial heater at the rate of approximately a kilowatt per square meter is not just unpleasant it also presents a significant risk of dehydration.”

Lifestyle Facts

The best hours for beach use in summer is before work, and sadly, Daylight Saving steals that from us. Frankly the majority of West Australians do not get the opportunity to enjoy this beach lifestyle in any event. Most people have responsibilities such as housework, homework and other activities. Remember this does not add an hour, it only moves it. We still only have 24 hours in the day to carry out our busy lifestyles.

The fact is that many people prefer to exercise early in the morning. In the later period of Daylight Saving, Morning exercisers are faced with the prospect of exercising in the dark. The reality is that that additional hour of light in the evening will not be spent exercising but at home watching TV in front of an air conditioner. Daylight Saving is not the healthy lifestyle choice proponents would have us believe.

For those who wish to get away an hour earlier the modern workplace, and in particular the State Public Service which has had 'flexi-time' for many years, will often agree to vary start and finish times for its employees. Shift based occupations can simply move their rosters back an hour to achieve the same end. Retailers may even benefit from the extra hour's trade generated by

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employees wishing to start earlier. There can be no pressing need to oblige the entire population to get to work an hour earlier simply because some people wish to alter their lifestyle.

The Question

“Are you in favour of daylight saving being introduced in Western Australia by standard time in the State being advanced one hour from the last Sunday in October 2009 until the last Sunday in March 2010 and in similar fashion for each following year?”

There is no constitutional reason Daylight Saving needs to be put to referendum. Political realities however tell us that in the event that this referendum passes then there is zero likelihood that it will be implemented in a way other than the terms of the question. It means we will lose March mornings forever. A no vote leaves the door open to a more reasonable proposition in the future.

In conclusion the only reasonable course of action is to vote No and reject daylight saving on the grounds that it simply does not have any geographic, economic or social basis in the State of Western Australia.