

## Letters to politicians

Writing informed and personal letters to Members of Parliament can make a significant impact on government policy.

### Structuring your letter

Include your return address in the letter.

The first paragraph:

- Include the topic of your letter. For example, "I am writing to express/voice (etc) my concern/disappointment (provide details)..."
- If you are writing to your own Member of Parliament, state that you reside in their electorate early in the letter.

Choose three important points to focus on:

- Flesh out the most persuasive points likely to gain support for your position.
- Address a new point in each paragraph.
- Writing three short letters to individual people is more effective than writing one long letter.
- Ensure your facts are accurate and credible.
- Acknowledge opposing arguments and evidence.

Personalise the issue:

- Explain how the issue affects you, your family or your community.
- A personalised letter may be more persuasive and have more impact.

Personalise your relationship:

- Indicate if you have ever voted for them, met them, supported their election campaign etc.
- The letter may be more effective if the politician feels closer to you.

Be cautious in relation to their views:

- If unsure of the views of the politician or political party on the issue, research it, ask them or explain why they should support your views.
- Avoid making assumptions about their views and comments which could be construed as critical towards them or their party.

Be courteous:

- Do not offend needlessly. We all respond better to courtesy, friendliness and a pleasant approach than to abuse.

Call for action:

- Ask them to act on the issue (e.g. "increase funding in the budget for..." or "publicly commit to...").

Ask for a reply:

- End the letter with a statement encouraging a reply (e.g. "I look forward to your response on this matter").
- Write back if you do not receive a suitable response within a reasonable timeframe.

## Where to send letters

It is best to send letters to electorate offices rather than Parliament House.

Parliament websites hold lists of Members' contact details for their electorate office and Parliament House. These are available in various formats including mailing labels and can be downloaded from the URLs below.

- Parliament of Western Australia Member of the Legislative Assembly and Members of the Legislative Council electorate office mailing labels  
<http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/web/newwebparl.nsf/iframewebpages/Members+-+Mailing+Labels>
- Federal Parliament House of Representatives Members' mailing labels  
<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/members/index.htm>
- Federal Parliament Senate Members' mailing labels  
[http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/senators/contacts/labels\\_csv\\_files.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/senators/contacts/labels_csv_files.htm)

## Example: Letter to a politician

Mary Andrews  
112 Warton Road  
Gosnells WA 6008

Mr P. Abetz, MLA  
PO Box 441  
Gosnells WA 6110  
22 January 2009

Dear Mr Abetz,

I am writing to you today as a constituent of the Southern River electorate to express my concern over physical activity and road safety issues relating particularly to local schoolchildren.

As I am sure you are aware, rates of overweight and obesity among Australian schoolchildren are already too high and are rising. The *WA Child and Adolescent Physical Activity and Nutrition Survey 2003* found that between 1985 and 2003, the prevalence of overweight and obesity amongst 7–15 year olds in WA increased from 9.3% to 23.1% in males and from 10.6% to 30.5% in females (Hands, Parker, Glasson, Brinkman, & Read, 2004). Furthermore, 42.9% of WA adults and 31% of WA children were not sufficiently active during 2007 (Wood et al., 2008; CSIRO Preventative Health National Research Flagship & University of South Australia., 2008).

While these issues are of concern throughout the state and nation, there are significant ways in which we can begin to address them in the Southern River electorate with your support.

The Walking School Bus™ is a group of primary school children who walk to school with one parent as a 'driver' and another parent at the rear of the 'bus'. The children are picked up at designated 'stops' along a planned route which is reversed on the way home. There are many examples of the Walking School Bus™ being successfully implemented and sustainable in WA schools. The bus provides a safe and active form of transport, teaches children road sense and reduces traffic congestion around schools. I seek your public commitment to introduce and support the Walking School Bus™ for Southern River schools. More information on the program and participating schools can be found at <http://www.dpi.wa.gov.au/travelsmart/14915.asp>

It has become clear that the limited existing cycle paths in the electorate you represent have become significantly degraded and are unsatisfactory in supporting existing local cyclists and encouraging residents and school children to cycle as a form of active transport. I have heard many deeply concerning stories of local children who have had near misses with cars on their way to school because of the lack of satisfactory cycle paths. I seek your commitment to funding an upgrade for the existing cycle paths in the Southern River electorate and engaging in a community consultation process to determine where additional cycle paths may be constructed so as to encourage your constituents to cycle and reduce reliance on motor transport.

I believe strongly in the importance of promoting physical activity and road safety in the local community and particularly with children. As the elected representative of the local community, I hope that you would also hold the health and safety of your constituents in the highest regard and would be open to ways of promoting physical activity and road safety in the local community so as to maximise the health, productivity and happiness of your constituents.

Thank you for your time. I would be happy to discuss this further with you and look forward to receiving your reply.

Yours Sincerely,

Mary Andrews.