

GETTING IT TOGETHER

From Colonies to Federation

**WESTERN
AUSTRALIA**

Road to Federation



MUSEUM
OF AUSTRALIAN
DEMOCRACY

OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE

INVESTIGATIONS OF
AUSTRALIA'S JOURNEY
TO NATIONHOOD
FOR THE MIDDLE
YEARS CLASSROOM

**MOAD
LEARNING**

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Road to Federation

In the late 1800s, Western Australia experienced many significant changes. One major milestone was reached in 1890, when Britain granted Western Australia the right to have its own elected government and Constitution. Over the following years, the colony was still establishing this new system of self-government. Yet there was also a possibility that more political change might occur soon because the colonies of Australia were all beginning to explore the road to Federation.

Western Australia's leaders were not convinced that their colony should federate. However, they knew that it was important to participate in the Conventions held in the 1890s to draft an Australian Constitution, and plan how a Federal Parliament would work. The Western Australian Premier, John Forrest believed that being involved in negotiations and planning would help protect his colony's interests and reach the best possible decision.

There were a number of reasons for Western Australia's leaders to be uncertain about Federation. The discovery of gold in the early 1890s led to rapid growth in the colony's population and wealth. Farming, the timber industry and shipping were also strong. This provided money to support its development. Conversely, the other colonies were experiencing an economic depression, which concerned some Western Australians who thought their colony's economic and political power would be weakened if it accepted Federation. For example, local goods and produce would face competition from the east. There were also concerns about the colony's isolation, especially because there was no railway linking Western Australia to the east. Would communication and transport over long distances be improved if there was a federal system of government? If not, how could Western Australia be sure that it would share equally with the eastern colonies in the benefits of Federation?

Because of such concerns, Western Australia's Government put off a decision about Federation, hoping that it could negotiate a good deal for the colony before making any commitment. But, there were many people in Western Australia whose views did not match those of the politicians. In communities around the eastern goldfields and the port of Albany, many people were strongly in favour of Federation and believed that their rights and interests would be better protected under a federal system. Pro-Federation organisations such as the Australian Natives Association and, later, the Federal League, had a lot of support in these parts of the colony. In Western Australia, there were increasing tensions because of the different opinions and political indecision.

In the end, the voters in Western Australia would be the ones to decide in a referendum. The government did not allow the referendum to take place until July 1900. The other five colonies had all held referendums and voted 'yes' to Federation by 1899.

Just 10 years after achieving self-government and only a few months before Australia's federal system began, Western Australians decided that their colony would become a State in the new nation.

Investigations

-  **1.** What issues led some Western Australians to oppose or doubt Federation?
-  **2.** What concerns about Federation were important to the communities of Western Australia's goldfields?
-  **3.** What if Western Australia had decided not to join in Federation?
-  **4.** Should the people of Western Australia have had a say in the colony's decision about Federation?
-  **5.** How was Federation promoted, and what were the results of the Western Australian referendum?

INVESTIGATION 1

What issues led some Western Australians to oppose or doubt Federation?

Before Western Australia could reach a decision on Federation, the people of the colony had to consider possible advantages and disadvantages. Many different views were expressed and debated.

The newspapers of the time often included letters and articles by people who had strong opinions that they wanted to share. These items provide insights into what some Western Australians were thinking in the 1890s – including why some believed that moves towards Federation should be avoided or, at least, taken with great caution.

YOU WILL NEED

Resource sheet 1

- extracts: newspaper, *The West Australian*

Your task

Explore the concerns that the people of Western Australia had about Federation.

Activities

1. In pairs, examine one of the items from *The West Australian* newspaper. Read it aloud and talk about what the article or letter is saying about Western Australia being part of Federation. Is it positive about the possibility? What reasons are given to support the article or letter's position?
2. Join with other pairs that have examined the same item. Discuss it as a group, then share your item and your understandings with the rest of the class.

3. As a class, list the issues and concerns that are represented in all the items. Brainstorm other reasons for and against Federation from the point of view of Western Australians.
4. Design two posters: one that is in favour of Federation and another that is against Federation. Think of an exciting slogan for both points of view.

INVESTIGATION 2

What concerns about Federation were important to the communities of Western Australia's goldfields?

The communities that grew on the eastern goldfields of Western Australia were different from other parts of the colony. They formed a major part of the colony's population, but they were largely made up of 'othersiders' – newcomers to Western Australia who had moved to the colony from the east hoping to make their fortunes. These new arrivals did not necessarily feel that the interests of Western Australia were more important than those of the nation as a whole.

The communities of the eastern goldfields weren't sure that Western Australia's Parliament, based in Perth, would give them a better deal than they would receive under a federal system. Western Australia's Government valued the wealth the goldfields generated, and used it to fund many building projects. But, it also taxed the miners for the services they needed and for importing goods from other colonies.

During the 1890s, the colony became divided in its attitudes towards Federation. The government and some of the people it represented continued to doubt and delay. In the mining communities, however, opinions in favour of Federation grew stronger and stronger. By 1900, the eastern goldfields were willing to separate from the rest of Western Australia and form a new colony that would join the other colonies.

Explore why the 'othersiders', gold miners who had come to Western Australia, were in favour of Federation.

Your task

Activities

1. In pairs, read the petition and 'A Federal Fairy Tale'. Discuss how they are similar and different. Why do the 'inhabitants of the Eastern Goldfields' and the 'beautiful princess Kalgoorlie' want to be part of Federation? Share your understandings with others in the class.
2. Using an atlas and the map of Western Australia, draw the boundaries of the eastern goldfields region as described in the petition. Label Kalgoorlie and Coolgardie.
3. Decorate your map with illustrations (or clip art) to show the situation and desires of the eastern goldfields region as described in the petition.
4. Write a caption for your map to explain what it represents.
5. Re-read 'A Federal Fairy Tale'. Draw illustrations of the characters: Kalgoorlie, Coolgardie, the 'Knight' Sir John Forrest and 'the great fairy Australia'. Write a speech bubble for each character to show their point of view.

INVESTIGATION 3

What if Western Australia had decided not to join in Federation?

Much of the Western Australian debate about Federation focused on possible disadvantages for the colony. At the Conventions on Federation, the colony's delegates also focused on what Western Australia would want the other colonies to agree to if it did join. They wanted to make sure that the colony was assured of a good deal before they would consider being part of the federal system.

Western Australia wanted to continue to make money from intercolonial tariffs, or taxes charged on goods imported from the other colonies. Premier John Forrest and the colony's other delegates also wanted to be sure that a railway line linking Western Australia to the other colonies would be built.

By the end of the 1890s, it was clear that Western Australia would not get all it wanted. Would it really be a good idea to reject Federation? Should it wait and join later? Western Australia needed to consider the possible dangers of not joining in Federation. One risk was internal division – the eastern goldfields might separate and federate as a new colony. And, joining later might mean Western Australia would not have the same rights as an 'original State'.

YOU WILL NEED

Resource sheets 2–3

- extract: the Australian Constitution

Your task

Discover the reasons why it was advantageous for Western Australia to join Federation as an 'original State'.

Activities

1. In pairs, read the selections from the Australian Constitution. Put an 'X' next to the sections that describe what colonies will not be able to do when they are part of a united Australia. Put a '✓' next to the sections that describe the advantages of being part of Federation.
2. Re-read the sections that apply to 'original States', which are colonies that joined Federation from the beginning. What disadvantages would a colony face if it did not join together with the rest of the Australian colonies in 1901?
3. Thinking about the eastern goldfields petition (Resource sheet 2), speculate on what could have happened had Western Australia not joined in Federation. You may modify and decorate a political map of Australia or explain the situation in a paragraph.
4. Do one of the following activities.
 - Write a letter to John Forrest, Premier of Western Australia, listing the reasons why Western Australia should join the other colonies in federating.
 - Write a jingle for a song, a poem or a rap, to persuade the people of the colony of Western Australia of the advantages of joining in Federation as an 'original State'.
 - Create a cartoon or poster urging the people of the colony of Western Australia to join in Federation.

INVESTIGATION 4

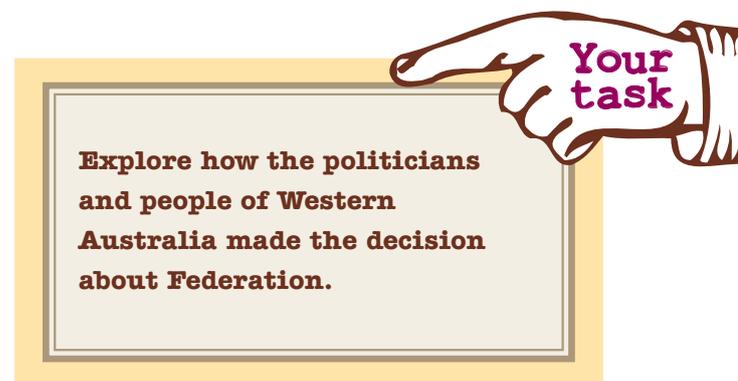
Should the people of Western Australia have had a say in the colony's decision about Federation?

In Western Australia, the role of the people in making decisions about Federation was different from the situation in other colonies. In the other colonies, with the exception of Queensland, the people selected delegates to represent them at the 1897–98 Federal Conventions. Western Australia's delegates were all appointed by the Western Australian Parliament, not chosen by the people. The other colonies had referendums on Federation in 1898 and 1899. In these, the voters themselves said 'yes' to the Constitution Bill and joining the proposed Federation.

Western Australia's Government did not give the people of their colony a chance to vote until months later. Why weren't the people given a say earlier? Were the politicians justified in delaying a vote for so long?

Activities

1. As a class, brainstorm a list of important decisions facing Western Australia at the time of Federation. Remember to think about issues such as taxes, transport, parliament, voting and the economy. Discuss which decisions you think should be made directly by the people and which should be left to parliament. Provide reasons for your thinking. What are the strengths and weaknesses of parliamentary representation?
2. In groups of three, take turns reading the views of the Western Australian parliamentarians as they debated whether to allow the people of Western Australia to vote on Federation in 1899. Create a



PMI (plus, minus and interesting) chart on the views in the debate, making sure to record the reason for each view.

3. In your groups, devise a class presentation on whether the people of Western Australia should have been able to vote on Federation.
4. As a class, hold a vote to decide whether the people of the colonies should have been able to vote on accepting the Constitution Bill, or if their representatives in the colonial parliaments should have made the decision.

INVESTIGATION 5

How was Federation promoted, and what were the results of the Western Australian referendum?

On 31 July 1900, Western Australians voted on whether their colony would join the Commonwealth of Australia. This was only five months before the Commonwealth's inauguration.

As well as being about an important and urgent issue, the vote was significant in other ways. It included a wider range of people than ever before in the colony's history, with women being allowed to vote for the first time.

Western Australians already knew how some leaders would vote. Premier John Forrest had put aside his reluctance to accept Federation and now believed that his colony should join. During the six-week campaign period, the 'yes' and 'no' cases were both actively promoted. Nobody could be sure what the result of the referendum would be or how it would compare with the results from other colonies.

YOU WILL NEED

Resource sheets 2 and 5

- referendum promotional material
- data: referendum results
- map: Western Australian electoral districts
- map: Western Australia (completed Resource sheet 2)

Your task

Discover how Western Australians voted for Federation, and why.

Activities

1. In a small group, closely examine the map of Australia as shown in the referendum promotional material. List all the arguments used to persuade people to vote for Federation. Which do you think would be most effective? Provide reasons for your thinking.
2. Study the photograph showing the results of the referendum. What percentage of Western Australians voted 'yes' and what percentage voted 'no'?
 - To find the percentage of 'yes' votes, divide the number of 'yes' votes by the total number of votes and multiply by 100.
 - To find the percentage of 'no' votes, divide the number of 'no' votes by the total number of votes and multiply by 100.
3. In pairs, locate the results for the electorates of Murchison, Toodyay, Beverley, Coolgardie, North Coolgardie and Dundas on the results board in the photograph. Repeating the steps in Activity 2, find the percentage of 'yes' and 'no' votes for these electorates. List them in a table. Examine the results for these electorates and describe what you see.
4. Look at the map of the Western Australian electoral districts, 1900. With a partner, locate the electorates of Murchison, Toodyay, Beverley, Coolgardie, North Coolgardie and Dundas on the map. Recalling your map of the eastern goldfields (Resource sheet 2), which of the electorates would you describe as the eastern goldfields electorates? Look again at your table. What conclusions can you reach about the popularity of Federation in Western Australia?



What are you thinking now?

Now that you have completed the investigations in Road to Federation, use your knowledge to explore the connections to your life today. Do one or more of the following activities.

- 1.** Writing letters or emails to the editor of a newspaper is a very important way of participating in public debate. Look at the letters page of a newspaper. What kinds of issues are people writing about? Choose one issue and collect letters about it over a period of five days. Summarise the different points of view expressed in the letters. Write a letter or email expressing your point of view.
- 2.** Think of an issue or event in your school or community that you would like to comment on. Write a short play, or invent characters for a computer game or puppet show to express your thoughts and opinions in a fun and creative way.
- 3.** With another student, think about how you would appeal to national unity in Australia today, and for what purposes. Design a print or electronic advertisement for 'One Australia', using your ideas about nationhood.

RESOURCE SHEET 1

Mr John Forrest, Premier of Western Australia

[Western Australia] has few exports to the other colonies, and large importations from them. It seems to me that half our revenue is derived from Customs, and we would have to give up that to the central Government. Of course it is said that a considerable portion of that will be refunded, but we have no guarantee of this. We have to face this difficulty that we have incurred large liabilities, and laid out considerable sums, and if we are deprived immediately of half our revenue, without any certainty that any portion will be returned, we will have to look about and tax ourselves in order to make up the deficiency.

The West Australian, 15 April 1891.

Mr John Hackett, MLA

As regards Western Australia, that colony has not considered the question as fully as it deserves. No doubt she will do this, and that she has not already done so is simply due to the fact that her own hands have been so full with the task of inaugurating her own constitution and initiating her bold and even momentous public works policy, that she has had little else to think of.

The West Australian, 15 April 1891.

Letters to the editor

I think no Federation is possible ... unless absolute security is given for the state rights of the smaller states, which security can only be given by having one Chamber in the Federal Government which represents equal state rights. Of the two Chambers ... one should be elected on the basis of “one man one vote” and one on the basis of “one state one vote,” and no small state would be safe in accepting less than this. The only logical argument in favour of “one man one vote” is that each individual’s interests, be they small or large, are to him as important as those of any other individual, and the argument applies with even greater force to state interests.

WE Abbott, *The West Australian*, 8 December 1896.

A great deal of sentiment has been expressed with respect to “one nation, one flag,” as though that would bring in a reign of prosperity. For my part, I am unable to see that we are other than one nation at the present; in fact, we are more effectually so than any scheme of Federation can make us, and as to the “one flag,” well it might make a good coverlet for a bed, but I fear hardly large enough, to cover the unemployed in any one of the Eastern colonies.

‘Progress’, *The West Australian*, 21 August 1899.

RESOURCE SHEET 2

Petition to her Majesty the Queen from Persons residing on the Eastern Goldfields (extracts)

To The Queen's Most Excellent Majesty

2. Since the establishment of Responsible Government in Western Australia many of Your Majesty's subjects have come from outside the Colony to reside on the Eastern Goldfields. By their energy, enterprise, and capital, mines have been discovered and developed, and industries built up and established ... The inhabitants of the remaining portion of Western Australia ... possess representation in both Houses of Parliament greatly in excess of what they are entitled to, and have thus acquired a power which they have used ... towards the inhabitants of the Eastern Goldfields harshly, arbitrarily, and unjustly.

3.2 They have imposed unfair and unequal burdens on the inhabitants of the Eastern Goldfields of which the following are instances ... heavy customs taxation on food ... preferential railway rates ... special taxes on the gold mining industry ... refusal of railway communication with our natural port on the south coast ... expenditure of a large portion of public moneys in their district, while our ... needs are ignored.

4. The inhabitants of the Eastern Goldfields are unanimously in favour of joining the Federal Union of the Australian Colonies ... and for accepting for that purpose the Bill for the establishment of the Commonwealth of Australia ... adopted by the parliaments and people of five other Colonies ... [but] the Upper House refused to submit the Bill as adopted by the other colonies. We are thus prevented ... from realising our intense desire to join the Federal Union ... We therefore humbly pray, Your Majesty, that Colony of Western Australia may be divided by separating the Eastern Goldfields, and establishing a separate colony with its own parliament and government.

Adapted from Western Australian Parliamentary Debates, 1900.



Eastern Goldfields Reform League displaying their petition

Separation for Federation petition, 1898, JJ Dwyer, State Library of Western Australia, 000765D.

A Federal Fairy Tale

There was once upon a time a rich and beautiful princess called Kalgoorlie, with a sister called Coolgardie, and other younger sisters who will be rich as they grow older. It was their misfortune to be born in a land ruled by a cruel and greedy Knight, called Sir John Forrest ... As they grew from little girls into young women, they began to hate the horrid swamp called Provincialism in which the Knight kept them imprisoned and they cast longing eyes on the fair country of Federation, where from the swamp they could see the great fairy, Australia, enthroned. They besought the Knight, saying, "Let us go to that land, and we will take you too out of this swamp, share our gold with you, and all your greedy relations even shall accompany us." But the Knight said "No, I am at home in the swamp, for I am master of all creatures in it, and while you are here I can do with your gold as I will. I and my friends would die of a dreadful malady called unimportance in that land of Federation, therefore you shall not go." The princess Kalgoorlie has a kind heart, and does not wish the Knight and his friends to die of unimportance, therefore she strives to go with her sisters to the land of Federation, leaving the Knight in the swamp which he loves, and she prays the great lady Australia to help her to her desire.

Kalgoorlie Western Argus, 26 April 1900.

Map of Western Australia



RESOURCE SHEET 3

Sections of the Australian Constitution

Section 7: All original States are entitled to the same number of Senators, and a minimum of six.	Section 24: All original States are entitled to a minimum of five members in the House of Representatives.
Section 92: Trade between the States shall be free of a duty or tax.	Section 95: The Parliament of Western Australia, if that State is an Original State, may impose a tax on goods entering that State, if they have not come from overseas, on a sliding scale for a period of five years.
Section 114: A State shall not have its own army.	Section 115: A State shall not print its own money.
Section 117: A State must treat members of other States as it does its own.	Section 119: The Commonwealth is responsible for defending the States against invasion.
Section 121: The Commonwealth Parliament can decide the number of representatives in the House of Representatives and the Senate for a new State.	

Adapted from the Australian Constitution.

RESOURCE SHEET 4

Western Australian Parliamentary Debates – should the people vote on the Constitution Bill?

Mr Conolly

In this question is involved a constitutional principle ... But I should like also to state that, had the people in this colony previously had a reasonable opportunity of expressing their views on federation ... they would not have demanded a referendum so warmly or with such vigour. Had the Government of this colony in the first place adopted the proper constitutional course, in allowing the representatives of this colony at the Federal Convention to be selected by the people, probably to-day the people of this colony would not be crying out so loudly ... to vote on the question of federation itself.



Mr Wood

There is no power in the world to prevent the Bill going to the people: it is the people's question, and the people alone are the tribunal which must deal with it ... When we anti-federalists and federalists meet on the battle ground of our constituencies, I shall do my best to have the Bill thrown out altogether. I shall influence my constituents, if I can, to vote "no." At the same time I shall do all I can to have the Bill sent to the people, and let them be the judges.



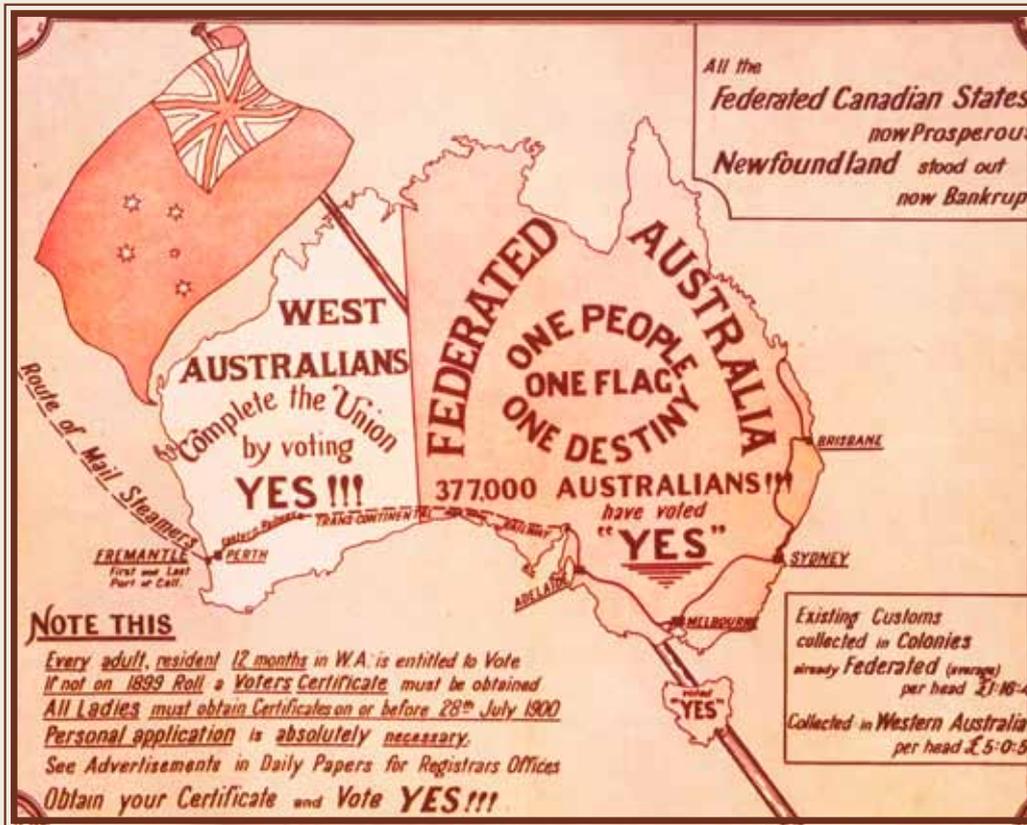
Hon F. Whitcombe

I consider that, as their representative here, I am called on not to vote or go with one portion of my constituency ... I have a right to use my own judgment ... I intend to oppose this Bill being sent to the referendum, because I do not think that a safe course. Assuming we are the custodians of the interests of this colony, we are in the same relative position as a parent to a child; and would a child be allowed to approach drugs or medicines which might be harmful, and of which the child does not know the consequential effects? For the same reason I think the people of Western Australia do not yet appreciate the disadvantages of the proposals placed before them, and I will do my best to keep the question from them until they can understand what those disadvantages are.

Adapted from Western Australian Parliamentary Debates, 1899.

RESOURCE SHEET 5

Referendum promotional material



West Australians complete the union by voting yes, 1900, National Library of Australia, nla.pic-vn3302372.

Results of the Western Australian referendum

YES NO
44652 19636

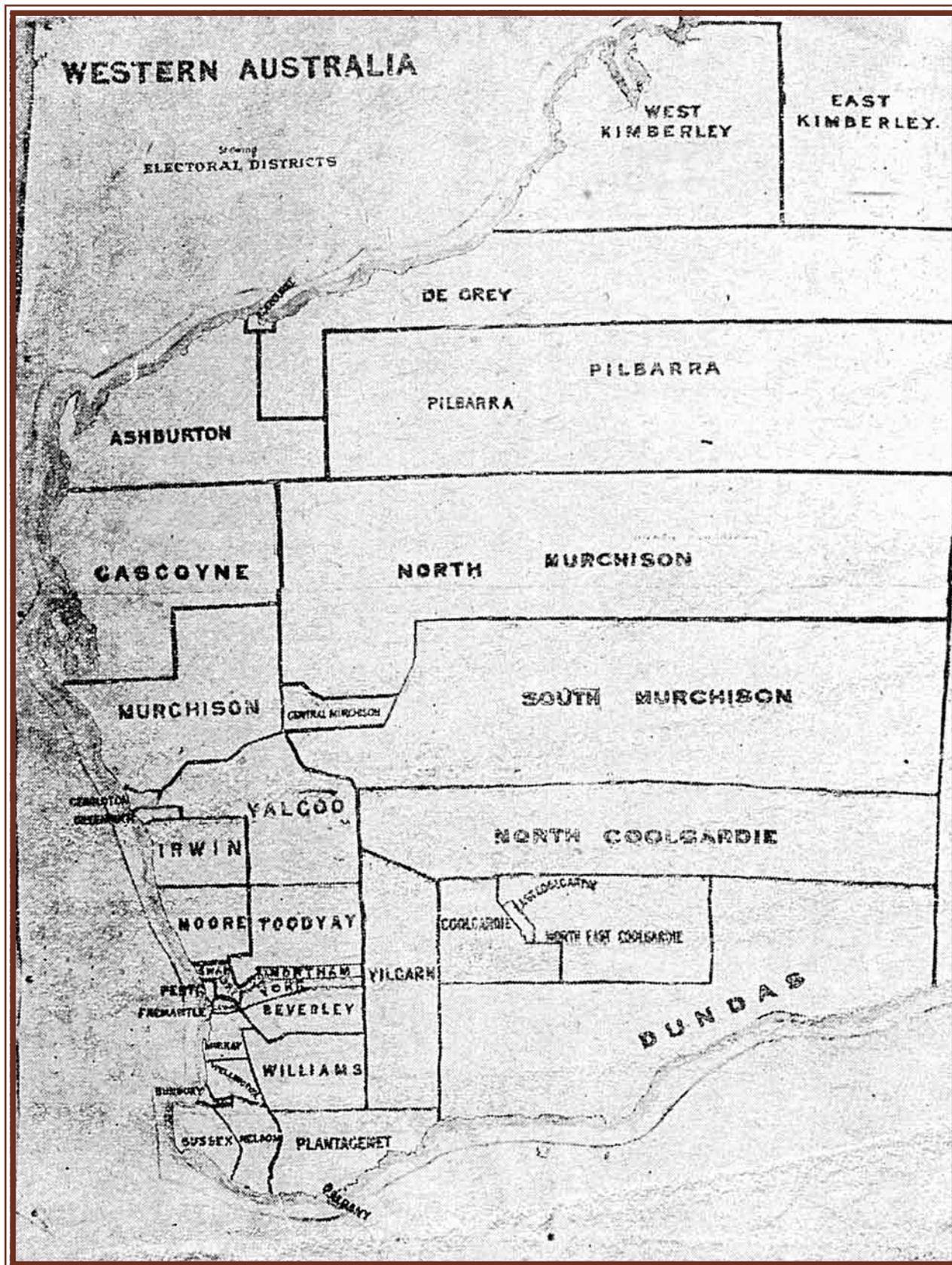
YES NO		MAJORITY OF FAVOR 25016		MAJORITY OF FAVOR 25016		YES NO		YES NO	
ALBANY	914 67	N.E.C'GARDIE	2723 143	GREENOUGH	18 411	MURRAY	469 674	ROEBURNE	98 18
ASH'URTON	32 17	DE GREY	84 15	IRWIN	34 310	NELSON	402 487	SUSSEX	246 474
BEVERLEY	86 415	DUNDAS	816 30	E.KIMBLEY	57 1	NORTHAM	593 833	SWAN	852 903
BUNBURY	493 802	FREMANTLE	532 277	W.KIMBLEY	97 34	PERTH	2386 1328	TOODYAY	75 578
CANNING	405 509	E.F'MANTLE	1322 804	MOORE	65 463	E.PERTH	1128 820	W'INGTON	581 695
C'LGARDIE	4337 170	N.F'MANTLE	1289 678	MURCHISON	26 222	N.PERTH	1416 844	WILLIAMS	213 749
E'LGARDIE	11502 732	S.F'MANTLE	1544 1382	C.M'CHISON	777 65	W.PERTH	2078 1388	YALGOO	155 114
N.C'LGARDIE	3727 117	GASCOYNE	53 66	N.M'CHISON	597 83	PILBARRA	308 9	YILGARN	460 138
		GERALDTON	254 679	S.M'CHISON	910 209	PTAGENET	359 213	YORK	139 670

FEDERAL POLL JULY 31ST 1900
"The West Australian" RECORD BOARD

Record board of the Western Australian results for the Popular Referendum on Australian Federation, 31 July 1900, State Library of Western Australia, 009979PD.

RESOURCE SHEET 5 continued

Map of Western Australian electoral districts, 1900



Map of Western Australian electoral districts 1900, *Western Argus*, 12 October 1899, State Library of Western Australia, Batty Library.