

COMMENTS ON SUGGESTIONS FOR WESTERN AUSTRALIAN REDISTRIBUTION 2019



(Mark Mulcair)

Introduction:

I had intended to submit a Suggestion for the redistribution; however, I found that I was unable to construct a coherent set of boundaries. The disparity in enrolment between urban Perth and rural WA suggested that a new seat should be created in Perth, but the LDA and rigid Regional boundaries made abolishing a seat in regional WA very difficult. If I tried to retain the existing number of urban and rural seats, I found myself having to set most of the urban seats at the top of tolerance, and the rural seats towards the bottom. This made balancing the numbers quite difficult.

There were basically four options I explored when trying to construct my Suggestion:

- 1) Maintain the existing number of urban vs rural Districts, and maintain the existing boundaries of the metropolitan area.
- 2) Maintain the existing number of urban vs rural Districts, but vary the metropolitan boundary, e.g. by adding parts of southern Rockingham or Serpentine-Jarrahdale to a Mandurah based District.
- 3) Add a metropolitan District and abolish a rural District, while leaving the existing urban/rural boundary unchanged.
- 4) Add a metropolitan District and abolish a rural District, but vary the metropolitan boundary, e.g. by expanding an urban District to take in some rural areas.

In the state-wide Suggestions, the Liberals and Nationals follow (1), Labor's suggestion employs (2), and David Walsh attempts (3) with his submission. They have all made a better fist of things than my aborted attempts, although all three approaches do run into some problems.

General Agreements:

While there are some significant differences between the proposals, there are also some key areas where they tend to agree. This suggests that whichever approach the Committee decides on, they should be able to at least:

- Re-arrange West Swan and Swan Hills into more coherent 'Ballajura' and 'Ellenbrook' based Districts.

- Place Banksia Grove in a Wanneroo-based District, instead of remaining a detached outpost of a Swan-based seat.
- Contract Butler up to the coastal suburbs surrounding Butler itself.
- Unite all of Joondalup in the District of that name.
- Extend Morley's northern boundary to run along Reid Hwy in its entirety.
- Unite the Mundaring area (or as much as practical) in a single District, instead of splitting it three ways as it is currently.
- Re-arrange Thornlie and Southern River into more logical shapes, and to provide neater splits of Gosnells and Canning Vale.
- Transfer the northern parts of Kardinya and Murdoch into the District of Bateman.
- Remove the small portions of Baldivis and Kwinana from Darling Range
- Leave the inner suburban seats relatively untouched, with most of the significant change occurring in a band around outer Perth (where change is necessary anyway for quota reasons).

None of the proposals seem to recommend that a rural seat should change Regions. However, I still believe that Albany is a better fit in the Agricultural than in the South West Region. This would particularly be the case if an Agricultural District was to be abolished or significantly changed.

Nationals Suggestion:

As at previous redistributions, the Nationals propose basically the bare minimum of changes in Agricultural and Mining/Pastoral Regions, in order to place all Districts within quota. It is true that Regional WA experienced a significant change at the last redistribution, and I agree that Districts should not be made preposterously large. However, I feel that they have gone too far in the opposite direction, resulting in a very unbalanced and unsustainable set of Districts.

Apart from Kalgoorlie, every District in the Agricultural and Mining/Pastoral Regions would be well under quota. This is generally an area of low growth, certainly compared to the South West and metropolitan areas, so it is not really justifiable to leave all these seats at the bottom of tolerance.

Of particular concern is the Nationals' proposal for North West Central. The District is left at the very bottom of the -20% tolerance, and dominated by LDA electors instead of real people, in an area where population has tended to be stagnant. This is simply not sustainable even in the short term.

In contrast, almost every District in South-West Region would be above quota, in an area where growth is much higher. The three Mandurah-Peel based Districts in particular are placed at the top of the 10% tolerance, where every growth trend suggests they need to be placed towards the bottom.

If the Committee intended to pursue such an incremental approach, I would recommend the Liberals' submission of that of the Nationals.

Liberal Party Suggestion:

As mentioned above, the Liberals implement a similar minimalist approach to the Nationals, but they do make a stronger effort to balance the inequalities in rural seats. The Shire of Collie, although it fits well with Bunbury and the South-West, is probably the “least worst” option to significantly boost the numbers in Agricultural Region. The Liberals have also made an effort to boost the numbers in North-West Central (although it is still dominated by LDAs over actual people).

By maintaining the existing pattern of seats, the Liberals are forced to split some suburbs or self-contained areas to manage the quota. This was a problem that I ran into when attempting this approach.

Overall, I would prefer the Liberal proposals to those of the Nationals. However, there are a number of issues that the Committee might need to address:

- A creeping northward movement of Butler, Burns Beach, and Joondalup was something I explored, and in isolation is a workable alternative to Labor and David Walsh’s proposals. However, I don’t agree with the decision to split the suburb of Warwick. Since the District of Kingsley is at the low end of tolerance, it should be possible for it to gain Edgewater without any flow-on effects to other seats.
- Their proposal for Kalamunda and Swan Hills would appear to leave the communities along the Great Eastern Highway split between two seats, instead of uniting them in Kalamunda.
- I agree in principle with the decision to add parts of Maddington to the District of Forrestfield. However, the river or Albany Highway would be stronger boundaries than Alcock Street.
- I do not support the suburb of Thornlie being split three ways. At a stretch, Thornlie might need to be split to accommodate central Gosnells being united in one seat, but a three-way division seems too drastic.
- The fairly self-contained Atwell/Aubin Gove/Banjup area would also appear to be split three ways. Since Banjup only has 873 electors, it should be possible to accommodate them in either Kwinana or Cockburn.

David Walsh Suggestion:

David’s submission is something very similar to what I attempted, especially in metropolitan Perth. The Metropolitan and South-West parts of David’s suggestions are generally very logical; northern Wanneroo is the best place to create a new seat, and the flow-on effects result in logical boundaries for Wanneroo, Girrawheen, Ballajura, Ellenbrook, and Mundaring.

I would, however, make a small adjustment to David’s proposed ‘Mundaring’ and ‘Midland’. His proposed Mundaring would take in urban areas just as Stratton and Jane Brook, whereas Midland would take in semi-rural parts of the Swan Valley. I would suggest these two areas be

swapped (if possible), so that all of the urban area around Midland is untied in one seat, whereas Mundaring would remain more rural in nature.

While I understand the logic behind splitting Bunbury into 'north' and 'south' Districts, I still think it is more logical to maintain the existing arrangement. Inner Bunbury should remain united in a single seat, with a 'Preston' or 'Leschenault' type District based on the outer suburbs and semi-rural areas around it.

The main difficulty with David's arrangement, which I also ran into, is drawing coherent boundaries in Agricultural and Mining/Pastoral Region. There is a significant shortfall of electors in this area, but a combination of the LDA and the rigid Regional boundaries makes it very difficult to address. I was unable to find a way to create a coherent District in the north-west of the state, without being forced to group agricultural and pastoral areas together. It seems David has had the same problem:

- Both Moore and Roe would be Districts that stretch from clearly Wheatbelt shires into remote desert areas. Moore would extend from the outskirts of Perth to Wiluna, while Roe stretches in a narrow band right across southern WA.
- The proposed Kimberley would be placed at the very top of tolerance, in an area where growth has usually been reasonable. I'm not sure that placing all of East Pilbara in Kimberley will hold up even in the short term.
- The imbalance between the rural Districts is exacerbated, with only 3 Districts remaining in Mining/Pastoral Region, compared with 8 for South-West.

Unfortunately, the alternatives I explored do not work well either:

- Esperance, Dundas, Coolgardie, and Kalgoorlie-Boulder combined would take Kalgoorlie over quota, so there is no logical way to transfer Esperance to Mining/Pastoral Region, unless Kalgoorlie itself is split.
- Chapman Valley and Northampton could be transferred to North-West Central, but this would still leave excess numbers in Agricultural Region, making it difficult to abolish a District there.
- Splitting Kalgoorlie from Boulder would allow Esperance, Ravensthorpe, Westonia and Yilgarn to be transferred to Mining/Pastoral Region. However, it would also result in a District stretching from Kalgoorlie to the north-west coast. The old Murchison-Eyre did something similar to this, but I was not quite able to make the numbers work out without adding Agricultural shires.

If the Committee is able to find a better way to abolish a rural District, then I would certainly support David's proposals for Perth. Perhaps it would be acceptable if one District crossed the Agricultural/Mining boundary instead of two. A 'Mid North' region could incorporate the northern part of Moore with the bulk of North-West Central, so that Moore and Central Wheatbelt were the two Districts amalgamated.

ALP Suggestion:

Labor proposes to maintain the existing Districts, while transferring a part of outer urban Perth to a rural Region. This arrangement is perfectly workable, and helps address the excess in Perth without causing major flow-on effects to rural WA. Contracting the existing 'Darling Range' right up to the areas around Armadale was one option I explored, and the flow on through Eastern and Northern Metropolitan make reasonable sense. I have no objection in principle to the general outline of Labor's proposals.

However, I don't agree with their decision to transfer parts of Wanneroo to the District of Moore. There is very limited connection between the Yanchep area and the remainder of Moore, with significant parklands separating them from each other. Labor cites the existing federal Division of Pearce in support of their proposal, but Pearce is a genuine urban-rural hybrid seat containing almost all of northern Wanneroo, plus additional urban areas in the City of Swan. This is very different to an overwhelmingly rural seat with a small urban appendage.

Gaining parts of urban Perth would also force Moore to lose some of its Agricultural shires to North-West Central. As I noted with David Walsh's suggestion, it is possible that one District might need to straddle the Agricultural and Mining/Pastoral boundary, but I just think Labor's arrangement causes too much trouble for a less-than-satisfactory outcome.

I think a much better idea, if numbers permitted, would be to transfer Singleton and Golden Bay to Mandurah. There are much stronger connections between southern Perth and the Mandurah area, with major highways and railways running between the two areas. These changes could then flow through Eastern and Northern Metropolitan Regions, to allow Wanneroo to gain the excess from Butler.

Other comments:

- Labor's proposal to split Leeming is probably not the best solution for Riverton. I think transferring Parkwood (as suggested by David Walsh) is better.
- Labor proposes transferring the Darlington area to Midland, but it is not clear from their text where Midland would shed electors to remain within quota.

Other Suggestions:

Most of the other submissions are from individuals or councils, and deal either in very general terms or with specific parts of the state. In general, their arguments are accommodated by many of the state-wide suggestions.