

## The proposed boundaries – an overview

In the Preliminary Observations fact sheet the Commissioners identified three broad approaches to a distribution:

- Minimal change – making only those adjustments absolutely necessary to bring districts that are outside the upper or lower limits back within the permitted tolerance range.
- Incremental change – adjusting boundaries of districts that are outside the permitted tolerance range that are close to the relevant limit with consequent changes to other districts.
- Fundamental change – making adjustments that are required in order to reduce the disparity in elector numbers on a more far-reaching scale across the State, one consequence of which might be a reduction in the number of districts in one region and a corresponding increase in the number of districts in another.

The Commissioners also noted that the realities of the numerical landscape were such that whether an incremental or fundamental change approach were to be adopted, the electoral map reflecting the results of the 2015 distribution was likely to be quite different from the one that applies at present.

The Commissioners have found it necessary to adopt a fundamental change model and the proposals set out in this paper involve widespread and far reaching alterations to the boundaries of districts and regions. They include:

- changes to all but eight of the 59 districts;

- a reduction in the number of districts in one country region (Mining and Pastoral) and an additional district in one of the metropolitan regions (South Metropolitan); and
- adjustments to the boundaries of all six regions.

## The critical question – numbers of electoral districts in regions

### The question

The first and most critical question that the Commissioners faced was whether it is possible to retain the present allocation of 17 districts in the country regions and 42 in the metropolitan regions or whether it is necessary to increase the number in the latter, with a consequent decrease in the former.

### Background

Before the introduction of the so-called 'one vote one value' legislation (*Electoral Amendment and Repeal Act 2006*) there were 57 districts, of which 23 were located in the country and 34 in the metropolitan regions. That legislation increased the number of districts to 59. The first distribution after those legislative changes occurred in 2007. In that review the total number of districts in the three country regions was reduced to 17 and the number in the metropolitan regions increased to 42. That allocation between country and metropolitan regions was maintained in the 2011 distribution. The effect of the proposals set out in this report will be a further reduction in country representation so that there will be 43 districts in the metropolitan regions and 16 in the country regions.

## The numbers

The relevant statistical information concerning elector enrolments in country and metropolitan regions is set out in Tables 6, 7, and 8 in the [Preliminary Observations](#) fact sheet.

Since the 2011 distribution, 88 per cent of the districts have had a net increase in their elector populations, although growth has been most marked in the metropolitan area. There is a common perception that the population in country areas is declining.

That may be so in individual localities but in terms of elector enrolments overall it is not the case. The statistics demonstrate that since the 2011 distribution the number of enrolled electors in the country regions has increased by about 21,000. While the corresponding increase in the metropolitan regions is about 82,000, the number of country electors, as a proportion of total enrolments across the whole State, has declined only marginally.

What has changed more markedly is the difference in average VFADEs between country and metropolitan regions. Because the growth in elector numbers has been more pronounced in the metropolitan area, many metropolitan districts are now outside, or at the high end, of the permitted tolerance range with most country districts at the lower end. In 2011 the average country VFADE was - 3.49 per cent but in 2015 it stands at - 5.23 per cent. The comparable figures for the average metropolitan VFADEs are + 4.93 per cent and + 5.39 per cent respectively. In other words, the difference between the two averages has increased from 8.42 per cent in 2011 to 10.62 per cent in 2015. If a comparison is made between 2007 (when the present apportionment was set) and 2015, the difference is even more marked. And therein lies the problem. Of the 12 districts that are outside the permitted tolerance range, 10 are in

metropolitan regions and their VFADEs are all above 10 per cent. The two country districts that are outside the permitted tolerance range are in negative territory. It is easy to accommodate increases in raw elector numbers where the VFADEs are negative or well below + 10 per cent. It is more difficult where the VFADEs are already outside a (positive) permitted tolerance range or at the high end of the range.

The point the Commissioners make is that the argument in favour of reallocating a district from a country region to a metropolitan region arises not so much from a consideration of overall (raw) elector numbers as it does from the need to draw boundaries so that the VFADE of each of the 59 districts (whether country or metropolitan) is within the permitted tolerance range.

## Possible solutions

The Commissioners focussed their attention on four possible solutions to the numerical problems:

- leave the overall boundaries of the metropolitan area unchanged and redraw the boundaries of the 42 metropolitan districts within those confines;
- relieve the 'city crush' by expanding the overall boundaries of the metropolitan area into areas of lesser population so that excessive city numbers could be accommodated within a wider geographical area;
- transfer high population localities on the outer fringe of the metropolitan area into an adjoining (lower population) country region; or
- create an additional district in one of the metropolitan regions, with the inevitable consequence that a country district would have to be abolished.

The first of those scenarios proved to be almost impossible. Wherever the task of redrawing metropolitan district boundaries began (North, East or South Metropolitan), solutions to one or two of the regions could be identified but the exercise faltered when the third region was reached.

The Commissioners note that none of the submissions or comments received from interested parties that included detail of the boundaries of individual districts in a 'whole of state' scenario advanced a solution based on existing metropolitan boundaries.

In relation to the second possibility, due largely to community of interest and land use considerations, there are few, if any, options to expand the boundaries of the metropolitan area to the north or the east. A suggestion to include the district of Mandurah in the South Metropolitan Region was considered but there was strong opposition from representatives of the local community largely because (and despite its proximity to the metropolitan area) the interests of that community are said to lie more with the areas in the south west. Once again, the Commissioners note that none of the submissions or comments received from interested parties that dealt with a 'whole of state' scenario put forward an effective solution, reconciling communities of interest and land use, based on expansion of existing metropolitan boundaries into the south-west.


That leaves the third possibility and, by process of elimination, the fourth. The Commissioners' own thinking and the majority of the suggestions and comments received from parties addressing a 'whole of state' scenario related to these options and it is to them that the Commissioners now turn. The discussion that follows will also deal with another question: if there is to be a reduction in the number of districts in the country regions, which district should be abolished?

### **The suggestions and comments of interested parties**

There was a divergence of views expressed in the public submissions as to whether the 17/42 apportionment of districts should continue.

The Liberal Party of Australia WA Division ('Liberal Party') suggested that 'careful and deliberate incremental change' would suffice to bring all electoral districts within the allowable limits without the need to transfer districts from one region to another. However, the Liberal Party's posited solution leaves a large number of their proposed metropolitan districts at the upper end of the permitted tolerance range, also includes transfer of two localities (Golden Bay and Singleton) to the adjoining district of Mandurah and proposes an adjustment of the boundary between the South West and Agricultural Regions by moving the Shire of Collie from the former to the latter. A number of comments (including many from community groups) opposed the relocation of the two localities and of Collie.

When the numbers are examined closely it becomes apparent that the relocation of Golden Bay and Singleton to Mandurah and of Collie to the Agricultural Region are important components of the solution advocated by the Liberal Party. Local residents in Golden Bay and Singleton expressed strong views that their communities of interest lay in the metropolitan area. In comments lodged by the Shire of Collie, the Bunbury-Wellington Economic Alliance and some individuals, compelling arguments were advanced as to why the community of interests of Collie and environs lie with the Bunbury area (South West Region) rather than with the agricultural areas to its east.



The Nationals of Western Australia ('The Nationals WA') also advocated the retention of the existing 17 country districts, with some locality adjustments to the districts of North West Central, Kalgoorlie and Wagin to bring all country districts within the prescribed tolerance range. The Nationals WA acknowledged that this approach resulted in many metropolitan districts being at the higher end of the permitted tolerance range, averaging above + 5 per cent in metropolitan districts compared with just under - 5 per cent in (their proposed) country districts, but submitted that this allowed the preservation of significant communities of interest across regional Western Australia. The Nationals WA did not attempt to review individual metropolitan districts, but suggested that any adjustments that were required in the metropolitan regions were unlikely 'to have significant impact on effective representation, relevant community of interest, communications and community engagement'.

Both WA Labor and The Greens WA advocated the abolition of a district in the country with a corresponding increase in the metropolitan area. They differed, however, as to where the proposed new district should be located. The Commissioners will return to that question later.

WA Labor presented two options for consequent adjustments to the Mining and Pastoral and Agricultural regions. One approach suggested was to transfer part of the existing district of Eyre into the Agricultural Region and the rest into Kalgoorlie, at the same time uniting the whole of the city of Kalgoorlie-Boulder into the one electorate. Under this option they also suggested moving the Shires of Ravensthorpe, Esperance and Dundas into the Agricultural Region and moving the Shires of Westonia and Yilgarn to Moore.

The alternative approach suggested by WA Labor was the transfer of the Shire of Ashburton to Pilbara, the extension of Moore as far north as Exmouth and the extension of Kalgoorlie westwards. Although not stated, and requiring Wagin and Central Wheatbelt to push north and west respectively, this option suggests abolition of North West Central.

The Greens WA suggested that a new district in the metropolitan area could be made possible by eliminating the district of Eyre from the Mining and Pastoral Region, placing all of Kalgoorlie/Boulder within the electorate of Kalgoorlie. For this to be achieved they also suggested adding the Shire of Dundas to Kalgoorlie and moving the Shires of Ravensthorpe and Esperance into Wagin.

There were two submissions from individuals that covered the whole of the State. Dr Mark Mulcair (who has contributed to a number of past Federal and State distributions), and a person who wished to remain anonymous (submission S-009), both advocated that the districts of Kalgoorlie and Eyre should be amalgamated, allowing a new district to be created in one of the metropolitan regions.

To accommodate the flow on effect, as districts were adjusted throughout the metropolitan regions, Dr Mulcair suggested moving parts of the district of Warnbro (the suburbs of Singleton, Golden Bay and Secret Harbour) into the South West Region. While a number of responses supported the overall thrust of Dr Mulcair's approach, reservations were expressed in some submissions about altering the current alignment of the Mandurah district away from the southern end of the metropolitan boundary. As has already been stated, comments from community groups opposed the removal of the localities of Singleton and Golden Bay from the South Metropolitan Region.



Submission S-009 advocated the creation of a new district that would include the Shire of Serpentine-Jarrahdale (from Darling Range) and the localities of Baldivis and Karnup (from Kwinana and Warnbro) and which would be situated in the South West Region, not South or East Metropolitan. The Commissioners note that the Shire of Serpentine-Jarrahdale has long been regarded as a part of the metropolitan area and that the community of interest arguments expressed in opposition to the removal of Golden Bay and Singleton from South Metropolitan would likely be mirrored in relation to Baldivis and Karnup.

One thing emerges from this consideration of the various suggestions and comments and which mirrors the thinking of the Commissioners in the framing of the proposals. If the current 42/17 apportionment of districts were retained, it would be very difficult to provide a solution to the problems in the metropolitan regions that did not involve the removal of some localities and (or) local government areas from the South Metropolitan Region to the South West Region. This would involve flow on effects to the South West and Agricultural Regions that raise material community of interest arguments.

### **Resolution of the critical question**

Earlier the Commissioners described the apportionment of districts between metropolitan and country districts as the first and most critical question.

That there is an imbalance between elector numbers in country and metropolitan regions is hardly surprising given the nature of the Western Australian landscape and the potential for variations of this type was recognised in the 2006 amendments to the Act that enshrined the concept of LDAs. Some of the submissions received during the 2015 distribution suggested

that the imbalance could be addressed through a series of relatively minor boundary adjustments, without the need to change the overall apportionment of districts between metropolitan and country regions. It was pointed out, for example, that the total enrolment of the Mining and Pastoral Region, at just under 100,000 is sufficient to maintain five separate districts. Another submission contended that the current spread in the ADE from + 5.39 per cent in metropolitan regions to - 5.23 per cent in country regions is permissible under the legislation which allows for a maximum of 10 per cent variation either way. All of that is true, but those matters are not, in themselves, determinative as to the way in which the 59 districts are to be configured bearing in mind all of the factors to which the Commissioners must give consideration.

After painstaking and careful consideration, the Commissioners have come to the view that they have little practical alternative other than to increase the number of districts in the metropolitan regions by one. This will permit the drawing of rational boundaries so that all metropolitan districts are within the permitted tolerance range and the electoral map of the entire state will be a closer fit with a strict, literal application of the so-called 'one vote one value' principle (which is not to say that the current position offends the principle). Because the total number of districts is fixed at 59 this inevitably means the abolition of a district in a country region. This decision was not reached lightly. The removal of a district from the vast landscape of country Western Australia has a significant impact on the democratic process, especially for people in an electorate that is effectively abolished and for those who find themselves in geographically larger districts as a consequence.

A reduction in the number of country districts has the potential to disconnect some existing communities of interest and could make the means of travel more difficult for elected members of larger electorates and for their constituents. The Commissioners also recognise the virtue of stability in maintaining the current split of electoral districts between metropolitan and country regions. They are also mindful of the inherent difficulties created by the tyranny of distance. Those who live in places far removed from metropolitan centres have disadvantages that are not encountered by their city counterparts when they seek to engage in the democratic process (at each of the three levels of government) as a means of ensuring the provision of adequate services in the areas in which they live. That having been said, improvements in modern communication methods may alleviate some of these disadvantages.

On the other hand, given the limited options that exist to expand the overall boundaries of the metropolitan area or to transfer localities from the metropolitan area to adjoining country regions, the

task of accommodating burgeoning metropolitan elector numbers within 42 metropolitan districts, each of which is within the permitted tolerance range, is extremely difficult. As already indicated, potential solutions advanced in submissions (such as the transfer of localities from the Warnbro district to the South West Region, the transfer of the Shire of Serpentine-Jarrahdale from East Metropolitan to the South West Region and the relocation of the locality of Collie to the Agricultural Region) would disconnect well recognised communities of interest and would be hard to justify.

It is for these reasons, and on balance, that the Commissioners propose that the number of districts in the country regions be reduced to 16 with an increase to 43 in the number of districts in the metropolitan regions.

Reduced to statistics and, as these proposals do not include any change to the outer boundaries of the metropolitan area, the result of a reapportionment so that there are 43 metropolitan and 16 country districts, is set out in Table 2.

Table 2: Proposed numbers of electors and average enrolments for country and metropolitan area 2015

State ADE <sup>1</sup>	Country total electors with LDA <sup>2</sup>	Country ADE	Average country VFADE <sup>3</sup>	Metro total electors	Metropolitan ADE	Average Metropolitan VFADE
24,923	400,610	25,038	+ 0.46%	1,103,174	25,655	+ 2.94%

<sup>1</sup> Average District Enrolment.

<sup>2</sup> Large District Allowance.

<sup>3</sup> Variation from average district enrolment at 9 March 2015, includes large district allowance for districts in Mining & Pastoral Region.

### The country district to be abolished

Except for an implication that arises in the submissions lodged by WA Labor, the preponderance of views contained in the suggestions and comments that dealt with the issue of reapportionment is that if the country regions are to lose a district it should be Eyre. This mirrors the thinking of the Commissioners in framing their proposals.

If the number of districts in the Agricultural Region were reduced to three without any regional boundary change, the average VFADE would be + 22.16 per cent, which is outside the permitted tolerance range. In these areas, land use is of great significance and it is not easy to identify areas that could feasibly be moved from the three remaining districts and added to Mining and Pastoral or the South West to alleviate the problems. In relation to a southward expansion of North West Central (Mining and Pastoral) to take up part of Moore, the comment lodged by Mr Shane Love MLA is instructive. For the same reason there is little or no scope for the Agricultural Region to cede areas to the metropolitan regions and, in any event, this would only compound the problems in those areas.

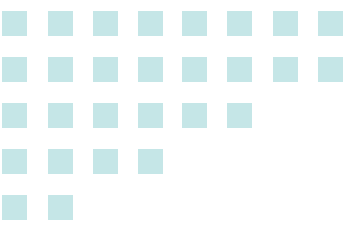
If the number of districts in the South West Region were reduced to seven, without any regional boundary change, the average VFADE would be + 15.33 per cent, which is also outside the permitted tolerance range. The South West is relatively stable but there are areas in which growth in population over the coming years is almost certain. Again, it is difficult to identify portions of land that correspond with the legislative description of the South West Region and which could be transferred to another region.

That, then, leaves the Mining and Pastoral Region. As was noted in the [Preliminary Observations](#) fact sheet this region has historically been structured on a largely horizontal (rather than vertical) orientation. The Commissioners have been unable to identify a feasible alternative to that approach and they note that none of the submissions put forward such an alternative.

The district of Kimberley is relatively stable and has a well-defined southern boundary. The district of Pilbara, too, is relatively stable and follows local government boundaries. The suggestion in one submission that Moore be expanded northwards almost to Exmouth (which may be necessary if the North West Central district were to be abolished) would be difficult to justify as primary production land uses are predominantly agricultural in the south and pastoral in the north.

The City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder is, and has been for more than a century, an important regional centre in the Western Australian landscape and a district in which it is the major centre is, in the opinion of the Commissioners, desirable.

Reconfiguring the boundaries of Eyre presents problems. The northern boundary of Eyre could not be moved north to take in the remainder of the City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder as this would take it outside the permitted tolerance range. If Eyre were to be preserved without including the population centres of Kalgoorlie-Boulder it is difficult to see how the three remaining districts could accommodate the huge land mass represented by the current districts of Kalgoorlie and North West Central. To do so would involve significant changes to the configuration of Kimberley and Pilbara. In the interests of stability (at least in this area) the Commissioners would prefer to avoid that result.



If it were somehow possible to reconfigure the Mining and Pastoral Region within its current outer boundaries but with four districts rather than five, the average VFADE for those four districts would be + 9.32 per cent. Even though that includes LDAs, the Commissioners do not believe that this is desirable. It follows that if the Mining and Pastoral Region is to lose a district, some population centres will have to be transferred to another region, most likely the Agricultural Region. In this respect, the predominant land use in some southern sections of Eyre is agricultural (acknowledging that there is some mining). The least disruptive alternative is to include those sections of the current district of Eyre in a district in the Agricultural Region.

It is with all of that in mind that the Commissioners propose that the district of Eyre be abolished.

### **The location of the additional metropolitan district**

The Commissioners are then left with the difficult task of proposing where the new metropolitan district should be located, taking into account the high level of growth at both the northern and southern fringes of the metropolitan area. The Commissioners examined myriad scenarios and options to address this issue and prepared detailed maps of alternative approaches for comparison. They also paid careful attention to the different approaches put forward by advocates of an additional metropolitan district.

After lengthy consideration the Commissioners propose that the new district should be in the South Metropolitan Region, centred on the suburb of Baldivis. This will deliver more clearly defined boundaries across the entire metropolitan area than would be the case if a new district were to be created in either the North or East Metropolitan Regions, as well as minimise the need to split local suburbs. Although this results in the South Metropolitan Region having one more district than the two other metropolitan regions, it remains consistent with section 16H which requires that metropolitan regions have to have *approximately* the same number of districts.