

The Electoral Distribution Commissioners
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My dear Commissioners

While not commenting on any proposed Legislative Assembly District boundaries I submit that changes ought be made to the boundaries of the South West Region and in consequence the boundaries of the South Metropolitan and Agricultural Regions to give better effect to the requirements of Section 16H (1) & (2) and 16 I of the Electoral Act 1907.

A REINCLUSION OF THE DISTRICT OF MANDURAH INTO THE SOUTH WEST REGION

I believe that the District of Mandurah should remain a part of the South West Region for the reasons enumerated.

- 1 Section 16H (1) (d) of the Act requires that the South West Region include coastal and forest areas in the south west of the State. Clearly the District of Mandurah meets the necessary qualification for inclusion in the South West Region, as it has been included in that Region by Boundary Commissioners in successive redistributions. The current proposed boundaries are not so significantly different as to disqualify the district from inclusion in the South West nor are the 'built up nature of the Mandurah locality, its proximity to Perth and continued development of the southern corridor between Perth and Mandurah' significantly different from the situation applicable to Mandurah when it was included in the South West in the 2003 and 2007 redistributions. Even the rail system was in place at the time of the 2007 redistribution and was not seen as any impediment to the inclusion of the district in the South West.
- 2 Section 16H of the Act 'Basis for division of the State into regions' and 16E 'Matters to be considered in dividing the State into regions and districts' require that the Commissioners shall give due consideration to community of interest and existing boundaries of regions ... and existing local government boundaries and 'that those regions generally reflect the recognised communities of interest'. It is difficult to see how dividing the City of Mandurah and placing half of the City in the metropolitan area for electoral purposes and half in the country meets these criteria, notwithstanding the Commissioners' argument that this option "represents a marginally better balance of the various factors to which the Commissioners are required to give consideration".
- 3 The division of the City of Mandurah into city and country regions seems to make no sense when consideration is given to the fact that the whole of Mandurah is outside the MRPA boundary and the whole of the City is included in the Peel Development Commission area and receives Royalties for Regions funding equally with the South West Development Commission area.

4 Consideration also needs to be given to the requirement of Section 16H of the Act that those regions that are included in the metropolitan area shall “together form an area that is generally co-extensive with the metropolitan area of Perth (This being defined in 16(2) as the region that was, as at the relevant day, described in the Third Schedule of the Metropolitan Region Town Planning Scheme Act 1959). Over 90% of the electors of the proposed district of Mandurah are outside the metropolitan area of Perth as defined in the Act and this pushes the South Metropolitan Region beyond the preferred boundaries set out in the Act.

5 Parliament gave careful consideration to the Legislative Council apportionment between the metropolitan and non metropolitan areas. This apportionment was not made totally irrespective of elector numbers. It was considered important that a critical level of electors be maintained in the non-metropolitan regions to warrant the 18 seats allocated to them. It was for this reason that the metropolitan area was defined in the Act. It was certainly not envisioned that the Distribution Commissioners were to be accorded any substantive discretion to transfer tens of thousands of non metropolitan electors to the metropolitan rolls and in so doing alter the settlement determined by Parliament and undermine the electoral base of non metropolitan regions.

I note with concern the Commissioners admission that they also have under active consideration the transfer of the District of Dawesville (and with it another 23,258 non metropolitan electors) into the metropolitan area, but that this was ‘least compatible with the incremental change model’ at this time’. It is generally perceived that the fundamental purpose of an ordinary redistribution is to adjust boundaries to take account of population growth or decline. It is surprising, to say the least, that Commissioners would exercise a discretion under the Act to increase the size of the South Metropolitan electorate to 359,651 electors while reducing the size of the adjoining South West electorate to 161,473 electors.

6 Section 16H (1) (a) (i) requires that the three metropolitan regions ‘each consist of approximately the same number of complete districts’. The current balance of 14 districts per region, which best meets the requirements of the Act, is maintained by leaving Mandurah in the South West.

B INCLUSION OF THE DISTRICT OF ALBANY IN THE AGRICULTURAL REGION

The Distribution Commissioners have in the past recognized the need to maintain a ‘balance’ between the non-metropolitan regions while having regard to the factors defined in Sections 16H and 16 I of the Act. In the last redistribution the Commissioners decided to transfer 9,343 electors residing within the Shires of Esperance and Ravensthorpe from the Agricultural to the Mining and Pastoral Region. It was determined that these shires which had previously been defined as primarily agricultural in nature could just as easily meet the definition for inclusion in the Mining and Pastoral Region. It was convenient that the additional electors brought the total elector population in the Mining and Pastoral from 64,730 to 73,776.

A similar situation now applies, with respect to the district and City of Albany and the Agricultural Region. While this district has previously been included in the South West Region there is equal if

not greater justification for its inclusion in the Agricultural Region. It is a part of the Great Southern Region (and the Development Commission area) and its hinterland is included in the Agricultural Region. It is not just the tail end of the South West! The District is constituted by the old Shire of Albany (which is entirely agricultural in nature) and the Town of Albany, (both now incorporated into the City of Albany). The situation is analogous to the City of Geraldton-Greenough which forms the northern portion of the Agricultural Region.

In the 2007 redistribution both the Liberal Party and the Labor Party argued for the inclusion of the District of Albany in the Agricultural Region. At that time it was argued that it was not entirely contiguous with the adjoining District of Wagin, being separated by the Shires of Cranbrook and Plantagenet which were then included in the seat of Blackwood-Stirling (a part of the South West Region). The proposed inclusion of these shires into the seat of Wagin now removes the principal argument against the inclusion of Albany in the Agricultural Region.

More importantly this allows an elector 'balance' referred to in previous Commission determinations to be restored.

The Agricultural Region as constituted by the 2003 redistribution had 94,877 electors represented by 5 MLCs whereas the South West Region had 152,494 electors represented by 7 MLCs. The 2007 redistribution constituted the Agricultural Region from only 4 Assembly districts (mostly under quota) with 82,479 voters electing 6 MLCs. In contrast the South West Region had 167,871 voters also electing 6 MLCs.

Never has there been a greater imbalance between these two near metropolitan regions.

The Commissioners now propose an improved balance of 161,473 electors versus 90,725 electors between the two Regions (but principally by means of the removal of Mandurah from the South West Region).

The historic balance between the two Regions would be more properly restored if the predominantly agricultural district of Albany were included in Agricultural Region, rather than by removing the district of Mandurah from the South West Region.

Yours sincerely



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