

W.A.E.C. RECORDS
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WAEC
24 APR 2007

The Secretary
Office of the Electoral Distribution Commissioners
Level 11, 111 St Georges Terrace
PERTH WA 6000

9 Filmer Place
LEEMING WA
6149

RE: Request for submissions on the 2007 State Electoral Redistribution

I write in response to your request for initial submissions on the pending redistribution of Western Australian (WA) electoral boundaries. I am simply a member of the community, with a deep interest in our democracy, and a passion for electoral processes to be both fair, and seen to be fair.

In that context I welcomed the removal of non metropolitan weighting that exists in the current electoral system, although, whilst I know the Commissioners don't create the legislation, the existence of an effective gerrymander in 5 seats in remote WA is equally obnoxious to me – nonetheless I realize they are the rules you are having to work with.

In this process I only wish to make the following comments:

1. wherever possible I would request you to create Legislative Assembly seats that are not "safe" seats for any particular political party, as I think the strength of our democracy depends on having elected members who can't take their electorate for granted – sadly in the past few decades we have seen too many examples of WA Parliamentarians taking their electorate for granted, essentially because they can't lose. Generally in this event governance loses out because Elected Members feel they only have to represent one form of views or philosophy.

2. the boundaries of seats should be logical to the voters, by which I mean significant natural or human made features should be used as boundaries – for example rivers, major roads, railway lines etc are good boundaries in my view. The only exception to that is where they split small communities in rural areas – in which case keeping a community in one electoral district should take precedence, and the 10% tolerance should assist here.

I am no great supporter of local government boundaries being used because too many of them are designed around long lost cadastral boundaries – but that is another issue. A quick look at the current boundaries indicates some of them would fit my definition of illogical.

3. the naming of seats interests me . There is some logic in naming seats after regional cities where the City and the seat are generally synonomous, but some rural/remote seats are so big that naming them after one town or centre makes no sense eg the current Greenough, Capel, Wagin and others are confusing to my mind. In the metropolitan area, where seats generally include multiple suburbs there is I think a great logic in getting away from names that confuse people who don't live in the suburb their seat is named after.

I would like to see the Commissioners develop a naming strategy if one doesn't exist now, where to my mind the criteria could include the following:

a) using the name of a town or city where it is largely the same as the seat eg Bunbury, Rockingham etc would probably be examples

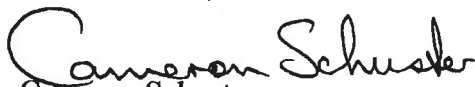
b) using significant geographic or natural features where they are closely related to the entire seat eg Stirling may be a good name for whatever the current Albany/Stirling turn into, and Darling Range strikes me as a useful name from the current crop

c) using the names of significant Western Australians, in much the same way as the Federal seats are already named in part. There are many such people who could be honoured, including indigenous people from pre European days – if asked I could list Court, Curtin, almost any ex Premier who hasn't been in jail, Roe (as exists now), Hasluck, O'Connor (CY!), Beazley, from the political sphere, and there are a multitude from many fields of private and public endeavour. You could in my view even run a public competition for citizens to nominate people to have seats named after them, with the only proviso that the inevitable duplicate naming of Federal and State seats with the same name should be allowed only if they don't overlap.

This might be a way of encouraging some real participation in our electoral processes.

I trust these comments are of some value to you in your work, and I will be happy to amplify them as required. I look forward to your draft boundaries being published, and maybe even a competition to name seats – if it happened you might even be surprised by the level of interest. Above all please carry out your task without fear or favour, because it is important to this great State of ours.

Yours sincerely,


Cameron Schuster

19th April 2007