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Office of the Electoral Distribution Commissioners
GPO Box F316
PERTH WA 6841

Attention: Mr Warwick Gately

Dear Warwick

NEW WESTERN AUSTRALIAN ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES

I refer to your correspondence dated 30 March 2007, in which you advised that the Western Australian Electoral Distribution Commissioners have confirmed that an electoral distribution review process will be conducted in 2007 in order to determine new electoral boundaries in Western Australia in preparation for the next State General Election, due in early 2009.

Council, at its Forum of 1 May 2007, requested that a submission be lodged in relation to this matter as per your invitation. Council has previously made submissions in relation to the "One Vote-One Value" principles being embraced by the State Labor Government and wishes to restate a previously voiced position regarding this matter.

In 2002, Council discussed the "One Vote-One Value" issue at length and lodged a comprehensive submission with the Western Australian Electoral Commission. A number of salient arguments were raised in opposing the introduction of the "One Vote-One Value" electoral methodology. Council's opposition was based on the fact that successful communities are created through a raft of variables other than numbers of residents and ratepayers or, in this case, numbers of electors.

For the record, the Shire of Gingin has undertaken four Reviews of its Wards and Representation in the past decade. In conducting each Review, Council has had regard for the relevant determining factors as prescribed in Clause 8 of Schedule 2.2 of the Local Government Act 1995, namely:

- Community of interests;
- Physical and topographic features;
- Demographic trends;
- Economic factors; and
- The ratio of Councillors to electors in the various Wards.

In assessing your correspondence, it would appear that the primary focus in relation to the new "distribution process" will relate to elector enrolment ratios. This approach would essentially replicate the manner in which the Local Government Advisory Board wishes for Local Governments to undertake Ward reviews.

In your correspondence you acknowledge that the Commissioners are required to consider a number of other matters in determining electoral boundaries including factors similar to those assessed in relation to Ward Reviews however, it would appear that enrolment distribution will be your primary determining factor.

Council is of the firm belief that each of the specified criteria namely:

- Communities of interest;
- Land use patterns;
- Means of communication and distance from the capital;
- Physical features;
- Existing boundaries of regions and districts;
- Existing local government boundaries; and
- The trend of demographic changes.

are equally important, and have clearly been accepted by Parliament as critical issues which impact on State Government service delivery. Any proposal that focuses on a "One Vote-One Value" electoral distribution scenario is deemed by Council to be a retrograde step, insofar as it will fail to respond to the differing expectations of a diverse taxpayer base, in a Region which is experiencing significant environmental, social and economic challenges.

A Review which relies on the principle of "One Vote – One Value" is considered a superficial approach to governance given that it will effectively overlook the raft of challenging issues currently impacting on Local Government Authorities, particularly country Councils in close proximity to the Perth metropolitan area, of which the Shire of Gingin is one. Council is hopeful that the Office of the Electoral Distribution Commissioners will be impartial and will apply equal weighting to all matters required to be considered when determining the preferred electoral boundary model for the State.

As you would appreciate, the Shire of Gingin has a significant absentee ownership in its coastal towns particularly during the winter months, but has a thriving and increasingly diversified agricultural sector, with growing populations producing greater economic returns to both local businesses, and the State. Given the Shire of Gingin's proximity to the Perth Metropolitan Area and the increasing development pressures being experienced in relation to the Shire's coastal sector, it had become apparent that the Shire's broader "community of interest" is with the coastal Local Governments to both the north and south. Further, with the advent of the rapid northern expansion of the Perth Metropolitan Area, an increasing business/commerce affinity is being established between the various communities within the Shire and many Perth-based businesses. The Shire of Gingin has little in common within the Wheatbelt region of the State, a fact that needs to be taken into consideration by the Commissioners in determining a preferred electoral boundary model.

The permanent resident populations within the Shire ensure economic and social sustainability insofar as they provide the critical mass necessary to create strong communities which are both economically viable, and socially mature. Sustainable communities require opportunities whereby people can be born, educated, employed and comfortable in their retirement, and it is the resident population of country Shires which make a major contribution to achieving this outcome.

It is without doubt that a number of Local Government Authorities with diverse economic, social and environmental opportunities and constraints would value being considered independently of the "One Vote – One Value" principle. By focusing on the "One Vote – One Value" principle, it appears to Council that the State Government is resorting to a "formula base" for determining electoral boundaries as opposed to utilising a "functional community" basis for this determination. It is accepted that, from the perspective of the Office of the Electoral Distribution Commissioners, such an approach is likely to make the task of assessing electoral boundaries relatively easy.

With this said, however, such an approach, whilst having the potential to produce simplified outcomes, is not considered responsible given its failure to adequately assess the other critical factors which underpin community development. The simple application of "One Vote – One Value" principles to reviews of electoral boundaries could have the potential to produce an unworkable electoral structure which has no regard for communities of interest. The concept of placing priority weighting on average district enrolment figures is deemed highly inappropriate and Council urges the Commissioners to have equal and due regard for the other specified factors.

Council trusts that the Office of the Electoral Distribution Commissioners and, more specifically, the Parliament of Western Australia, recognise and acknowledge the inappropriateness of applying the principles of "One Vote – One Value" as the primary means of initiating electoral reform within the State of Western Australia.

The Shire looks forward with interest as to how your Office finally determines electoral boundaries, having regard for all of the factors which must be considered in arriving at a final decision. The Shire of Gingin and the Local Government Advisory Board have recently been through a challenging process in relation to the Shire's latest Ward Review and in the absence of defined weightings being applied to the various "factors", a myriad of arguments and counter-arguments can be raised in response to any particular proposal.

Council appreciates the opportunity it has been given to provide input into this critical electoral reform review.

Should you have any queries regarding any aspect of this submission, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



SIMON D FRASER
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

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