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This submission argues that the following words from the act allow Commissioners to bring to the attention of the public any matters they deem significant to the appropriateness of electoral boundary setting: *Any additional details and explanatory information that the Commissioners think appropriate may be included on or published with the map (Part 2A [16f{3}])*. It seems clear these words were intended to allow the Commissioners to tell the public about things they deem important.

The fact that information may be on maps or separate can be interpreted as either meaning that the matters should be map related but can overflow onto other pages, or, that matters not directly location related may be included. I argue that the public good would in the absence of any superior argument determine which interpretation should prevail. Given it's hard to conceive of a public good served by silencing Commissioners on any matter they think fit to alert the public to, so it follows that any matter related to electoral boundaries in general may be addressed in information published with maps.

The essence of the task the Commissioners are addressing is to create location related electorates free from any bias the party in government might have towards boundaries that might suit itself at the expense of their opposition. Therefore, if a demographic shift occurred, such that location became much less of a predictor of the way citizens vote Commissioners might report this to the community, possibly to explain why other factors provided for in the act had greater influence on deciding on a boundary. Equally, if some matter related to the publishing of maps for public comment concerned the Commissioners, then this too would also be an appropriate issue to be addressed on pages published with maps.

It seems to me that inviting public comment on maps is pretty much an anachronism. Indeed, at a stretch the Commissioners could be accused of playing a form of party politics when it invites public submissions on a re-distribution. This could be argued because the Commissioners are following a poorly examined public service practice of presenting our system of government as fundamentally sound regardless of counter evidence. The argument supporting this would say that the hidden truth is that public disengagement has caused political parties to all but ceased to exist as instruments of broadly based community values and yet they wield huge power in the system of government we have. This argument would, if established, threaten the most fundamental competence the Commission is required to have, namely independence from party influence.

Against this proposition it would probably be argued that asking for opinions can never be false, a façade or misleading. A more cautious respondent might add that even if asking for opinions was indeed all those things, this would do no harm because no partisan advantage would be achieved. This submission argues that harm is done if, in the process of calling for public submissions the Commission communicates a false view to the community that there is some significant number of citizens sufficiently skilled and able to dedicate the time necessary to bring views that are important to achieving the public good in relation to electoral boundaries.

The problem with communicating an implication that an adequacy of such citizens exists, is that it hides the importance of evidence that it does not. This evidence is crucial to the welfare of our electoral system and the Commission is the only source of independent insight into it. The Commission thus has a significant additional responsibility to the people. The significance of this is more apparent when a parallel problem of an inadequacy in numbers of motivated citizens that seek to join political parties is considered.

Our political system has evolved for many decades pretty much under the sole influence of the dominant political parties. It would therefore be a big problem if parties fell into the control of a small and thus easily controlled number of people, and, there was no counter force made up from civically minded independent people. This circumstance might be deemed demonstrated if we accept the view that there are insufficient independent citizens to usefully answer the Commission's call for submissions. Indeed, the Commission could easily confirm this by examining previous submissions on redistributions and counting those that were not party motivated or promoting a party position and yet included information that added to the public good in any way whatsoever. The community at large would doubtless predict that as a proportion of the population the Commission receives very few such submissions and the overwhelming evidence from sociology and political science predicts exactly this.

The question is then, what might the Commissioners do? The Commissioners are free to make public statements. However, given one or other of the major parties always controls Parliament, saying that they are collectively incompetent at representing the people could be not only a courageous career move, but also arguably contemptuous of Parliament and thus punishable. The Commission can nevertheless safely communicate concern without committing contempt, but they would first need to be at least as convinced of the need as it is claimed here, an average citizen or informed social scientist is.

The Commission is the only publicly funded source of information on the performance of the State's electoral system. It is explicitly designed to stand between parties as an independent and act in the public interest. If by dint of the privileged access to information it determines that political parties have collectively ceased being adequately representative or are no longer subject to effective internal scrutiny, then it should say so because this affects the placement of boundaries, but much more importantly it compromises the quality of governance.

There are many balances to make in a redistribution. Perhaps the simplest is that if boundaries are drawn with a two-party dichotomy in mind, clearly they can foster more close contests or less. How the community interest is served by either option is moot, all the more so if apparently nobody much cares. The community might not much care because dominant political parties have bit by bit entrenched themselves to a degree that makes any opposition futile. The key balances are crucial to the effectiveness of governance and they are hence crucial to the welfare of the State, so ignoring evidence of widespread sense of futility towards rectifying faults is a serious matter. There could of course be many reasons, but if there is a reasonable chance that the community has indeed largely determined that seeking something better is futile, then Commissioners might reasonably react to this - because it affects the setting of boundaries.

Futility might not be the problem but rather indifference fueled by either satisfaction or lassitude. Trying to decide an accurate balance of these two would be tricky, but it suggests the question, should we seek out the cause of problems with electoral systems? Perhaps the only valid measure is outcomes. Perhaps the Commission should only consider expressing concern outside its black letter law purpose when governance shows evidence of some breakdown that warrants unusual attention. Thus we would look for

some judgment by our learned servants of the public about whether decisions made as part of governance suggest our civilization is at a point of ascendancy, decay or stability. Big picture stuff, just as well elite minds are available for the task.

Personally I think there does seem to be a convergence of global and local matters that suggests an expression of some concern is warranted. Populism certainly has made deliberation in Parliament more rare in the last half century, despite a great increase in the complexity of governance issues that might suggest searching deliberation would be more sought after. Conversely, the same period has seen a great decrease in political party memberships and the level of engagement by citizens with politics generally. Elegant systemic solutions that offer considerable promise of improvement to the most widely accepted problems areas of governance are available. If the contest for political power could be put aside long enough for them to be assessed, a great good might eventuate.

Perhaps the bottom line is what is at risk? Is it likely that the Electoral Distribution Commissioners would be hauled before Parliament to answer charges of contempt? Will the until-now-invisible dissidents who crave better governance seize on any expression of concern and rise up in rebellion? Surely the more likely outcome is that unless something truly outrageous is said, any concern expressed is at far greater risk of being ignored. But if circumstances do soon become dire, how would history judge it if at this time the only public body permitted to look into the secrets of party memberships and the system as a whole, chose not to even mention evidence of decay?

Hopefully somewhere in the world a sovereign state will eventually find the will to examine better ways of arranging the contest for power under democratic principles. The alternative is probably war because the flaws in most democracies do give the dogma and extremism that characterizes populist reaction to confronting circumstances great influence. If better ways are to be found, and I don't think we need look very hard to find some attractive ones, there is no reason why Western Australia should not be where it happens. Indeed, a small well educated, wealth and remote democracy is probably the ideal place to explore the possibility of giving rationality and reason a greater role in governance.

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