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Redistribution Commission

Dear Commissioners,

Comments on State Redistribution Submissions

I have provided a series of comments on some of the submissions made to you.

Western Australian has a long and colourful history in electoral development. The other states of Australia have similar histories involving malapportionment, appointed members, single and multi-member electorates and proportional representation. I am originally from South Australia and the Committee would be aware of the history of malapportionment there and more recently a regular occurrence of governments with minority elector support.

I have always been of the view that elector numbers in various electorates should be as far as practical equal. I have also advocated top up members when in the case of South Australia the electoral system throws up an anomalous result of a government with minority elector support.

If—

If Western Australia did not have prescribed electoral regions which shape its Legislative Council, or the recent history of the creators of this system with large area 'nominal electors', the course of my submission would be very different to what I am about to write.

History and Observations

The current electoral regime was created by the then Labor State Government with the backing of the Greens Party. At the time as an observer interstate I was rather surprised by the proposal put forward. But that is history. I note that now the same two parties that created this system now wish to change the regions in a way that removes the perceived contemporary disadvantage to them, noting that the original arrangements were contrived as they were considered by the same parties to bestow an advantage on them at that time.

I make the following observations about the current boundaries:

- Firstly, yes there is an imbalance in elector numbers across electorates, but this is not that pronounced;
- Secondly, the elector shortfall in the Mining and Pastoral Region is more specifically in North West Central and this can be remedied by a small transfer from the Pilbara;
- Thirdly, the transfer of one district from the remotest regions won't really redress the significant malapportionment created by the Labor and Greens Party, in the Legislative Assembly or Legislative Council (in particular) nor will it redress the imbalance created by 'nominal electors'.

Reality

Until the electoral law of Western Australia is modified the current law (introduced by the Labor and Greens Parties) is met by the current distribution of districts between the regions, and there is actually no reasonable basis for abolishing one remote area district at all.

I note the discussion in particular of the Labor Party about the suitability/approval of the current configuration of the metropolitan area and also the South West Region. Given the current arrangements they are the principal architects of, I find myself in agreement with their broad comments here.

Conclusion

The current balance of 42 metropolitan and 17 rural and regional districts is a reasonable product of the system created by the two parties that are now criticising it. I personally would prefer a system that is more equal in elector numbers in both chambers of the parliament, but that is not the system that the now two critical parties created.

I wish the committee well in its deliberations.

Martin Gordon

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