

Fact Sheet 1: Electoral Boundaries and Democracy

Why reviews of electoral boundaries are necessary

State Parliament is made up of 59 Legislative Assembly (Lower House) electorates with one representative each and six Legislative Council (Upper House) electorates with six representatives each. To see the current electorates go to

www.boundaries.wa.gov.au/boundaries/current

To preserve the democratic principle of 'one vote, one value' each electorate should ideally contain approximately equal numbers of enrolled electors in the metropolitan area. This principle is reflected in a legislative requirement that electoral districts should not vary by more than 10% above or below the Average District Enrolment (ADE). The exception to this is in remote areas where the legislation recognises that to meet the ADE it would be necessary to create districts that are so large in area that effective representation would be extremely difficult.

To view the special formula that applies in those cases, see

www.boundaries.wa.gov.au/electoral-boundaries/electoral-enrolment-statistics.

Over time, the number of electors in each district is bound to change as populations grow or decline. Even where the number of electors in a given district increases, the rate of growth in other districts may be more marked. For this reason, Western Australian electoral law requires a distribution or division of state electoral boundaries to take place as soon as practicable after the date that is two years after a State General Election. The 2015 distribution will redraw the State electoral boundaries to ensure that the number of enrolled electors for each electorate remain within the statutory limits.

Who carries out reviews?

Three Electoral Distribution Commissioners (EDCs) are appointed:

- a former Supreme Court judge (the Chair)
- the Western Australian Electoral Commissioner
- the Western Australian Government Statistician.

All are independent and impartial officeholders who are not responsible to any Minister or to the Government of the day. They become jointly responsible for conducting the next review of Western Australia's electoral boundaries. The EDCs meet frequently to consider various electoral boundary options, taking account of public submissions. The Commissioners are supported by the Office of the Electoral Distribution Commissioners which comprises of a small team of temporary staff appointed for the period of the review.

What should be considered in a boundary review?

Equality of numbers

The overriding consideration in any distribution is elector numbers – under the new boundaries the total enrolment in each district must not vary by $\pm 10\%$ above the State average (or by $+10\%$ to -20% in remote districts under the special formula). Enrolment figures are calculated as of 9 March 2015. An Average District Enrolment is calculated by dividing the total number of electors by the total number of districts.

In addition to consideration of the numbers of electors, the EDCs may also take into consideration:

- community of interest
- land use patterns
- means of communication; means of travel and distance from Perth
- physical features
- existing boundaries of regions and districts
- existing local government boundaries
- the trend of demographic changes.

The EDCs will only take these factors into account to the extent that the enrolment numbers allow.

Other matters to be considered?

In addition to the above, the legislation requires that the revised boundaries should reflect that:

- the region known as North Metropolitan is generally north of the Swan River
- the South Metropolitan region is generally south of the Swan River
- the East Metropolitan region includes the hills and foothills of the Darling Escarpment
- each metropolitan region contains approximately the same number of districts
- the three metropolitan regions together generally equate to the metropolitan area
- the Mining and Pastoral region is an area remote from Perth and whose land is mainly used for mining and pastoralism
- the Agricultural region is an area south, or southwest of, and adjacent to, the Mining and Pastoral region and whose land is used mainly for agriculture
- the South West region includes coastal and forest areas in the south west of the state.

What won't change?

The distribution will not alter the number of electorates or the number of elected members (59 Legislative Assembly districts represented by one member each; 6 Legislative Council regions represented by six members each).

The new boundaries will not take effect until the next State General Election due in March 2017. Until then existing districts and regions continue to be represented by their current Member(s). Any by-election that occurs in the interim would be decided under the existing boundaries.