

Fact Sheet 3: The Electoral Distribution Commissioners' Preliminary Observations on the 2015 Review of Electoral Boundaries

Introduction

The last State general election was held on 9 March 2013 and under the fixed term provisions of the *Electoral Act 1907* (the Act) the next election is due to be held on the second Saturday in March 2017.

The Act requires that Western Australia's electoral region and district boundaries be reviewed as soon as practicable after the date (defined in the Act as 'relevant day') that is two years after a general election. In this instance the relevant day is 9 March 2015. The Commissioners have decided that the review process should commence on 30 March 2015.

This paper is issued pursuant to powers vested in the Commissioners by s 16F(7) of the Act. It contains the Commissioners' preliminary observations to assist members of the public to understand the review and to prepare suggestions and comments that are relevant to the issues that are likely to arise in the course of the review. However, nothing in this paper should be taken as an indication that the Commissioners have made determinations or formed views that go beyond identifying the issues that are raised. Nor is it intended to limit the right of members of the public to make submissions and comments on any matter that is relevant to the Commissioners' functions under the Act.

This paper should be read in conjunction with the several Fact Sheets that are available on the Electoral Boundaries WA website at www.boundaries.wa.gov.au

Dividing the State - Some General Comments

Districts, regions and average district enrolments

Sections 16C and 16D of the Act provide that the State shall be divided into 59 electoral districts in six electoral regions. Each electoral district returns one member to the Legislative Assembly. Each region returns six members to serve in the Legislative Council.

Section 16G contains a concept that is critical to the determination of district boundaries; namely, 'the average district enrolment' (ADE). It is determined by dividing the total number of electors in the State on the relevant day by the total number of districts.

The effect of section 16G(2) is that, subject to an exception, the boundaries must be set so that the number of electors in each district (as at 9 March 2015) is between minus 10% and plus 10% of the ADE. The exception is for districts that have a geographical area of 100,000 square kilometres or more. These districts are subject to a 'large district allowance' (LDA), calculated by multiplying the number of square kilometres in the district by a factor of 1.5%. In these districts,

the boundaries must be set so that sum of the electors actually enrolled and the LDA is between minus 20% and plus 10% of the ADE.

The percentage by which the total number of electors in a district differs from the ADE is called 'variation from average district enrolment' (VFADE).

Section 16H contains a general description of the six electoral regions as follows:

- (a) three contiguous regions (together generally co-extensive with the metropolitan area of Perth) called the North Metropolitan Region (an area generally to the north of the Swan River), the South Metropolitan Region (an area generally to the south of the Swan River) and the East Metropolitan Region (an area that includes the hills and foothills of the Darling Escarpment)
- (b) the Mining and Pastoral Region, consisting of complete and contiguous districts that together form an area that is remote from Perth and in which the land use is primarily for mining and pastoral purposes
- (c) the Agricultural Region, consisting of complete and contiguous districts that together form an area that is generally south, or south and west, of and adjacent to the Mining and Pastoral Region and in which the land use is primarily for agricultural purposes
- (d) the South West Region (being a region that includes coastal and forest areas in the south-west of the State), consisting of complete and contiguous districts.

Section 16H provides an element of flexibility in defining the extent of the three metropolitan regions because it says they should 'together form an area that is *generally coextensive* with the metropolitan area of Perth'. The phrase 'metropolitan area of Perth' is the subject of a complex description in Schedule 3 of the *Metropolitan Region Town Planning Scheme Act 1959* (WA) (since repealed but appearing in identical form in the *Planning and Development Act 2005* (WA) Sch 3) and imported into the Act by s 16H(2). It can be described generally as the areas:

- (a) to the south of the southern boundaries of the Shires of Chittering and Toodyay
- (b) to the west of the western boundaries of the Town of Northam and the Shires of York, Beverley and Wandering
- (c) to the north of the northern boundaries of the Shire of Murray and the City of Mandurah.

Save for the general statements in s 16H, the Act does not prescribe where the boundaries between the six electoral regions are to be set nor does it prescribe how many districts are to be located in each region. However, it does specify that each of the three metropolitan regions ought to have approximately the same number of districts and an electoral district must be wholly situated within the boundaries of an electoral region.

Matters to be considered in a division

Throughout the review process, elector numbers are critical because, regardless of all other considerations, enrolments in a district cannot be outside the upper or lower permissible limits specified in s 16G(2) and (3).

However, section 16l specifies a number of other matters to which the Commissioners must give due consideration in dividing the State into regions and districts, namely:

- (a) community of interest
- (b) land use patterns
- (c) means of communication, means of travel and distance from the capital
- (d) physical features
- (e) existing boundaries of regions and districts
- (f) existing local government boundaries
- (g) the trend of demographic changes.

'Community of interest' has been described in a paper 'Electoral Regulation Research Network/Democratic Audit Australia, Joint Working Paper Series, 2013 Redivision of Victorian Electoral Boundaries' (November 2013) by Paul Thornton-Smith as:

"... characteristics that bind the community together and distinguish it from other communities. Community of interest can be seen as people's subjective identification with places or territory, that can be matched to objective geographic areas."

The concepts of land use patterns and physical features do not need much explanation. Means of communication, travel and distance from the capital relate to the difficulties posed by the size of Western Australia and, bearing in mind that reality, the need to make it as easy as possible for electors to interact with their elected representatives.

The requirement that the Commissioners consider existing boundaries of regions and districts is recognition of the desirability of stability in electoral units. But, like all other considerations, stability cannot override the statutory tolerance limits.

Schedule 2.1 clause 5 of the *Local Government Act 1995 (WA)* requires those setting local government boundaries to have regard to (among other things) communities of interest. It can be assumed, therefore, that the inclusion of 'existing local government boundaries' in s 16l of the *Electoral Act 1907* was designed, at least in part, as an aid to identifying communities of interest in the electoral setting. Of course, the Commissioners are not bound by determinations made by other bodies and must reach their own conclusions about communities of interest and other relevant factors.

The need to take into consideration trends of demographic change does not require the Commissioners to estimate changes in enrolments between the date of the 2015 review and the date on which the next election is scheduled to occur, as is the case in some other jurisdictions. Rather, it reflects the desire for stability by taking into account changes of population in the past and likely changes in the future to minimise, where possible, the likelihood of large scale changes in the next review. This explains why, for example, it is preferable to have newer developing areas with a low (or even negative) VFADE but older more established areas with higher variations from the average.

All of this requires the Commissioners to balance sometimes competing interests and to do so bearing in mind the need to keep each district within the tolerance range required by the Act.

Not all factors can be accommodated or applied in exactly the same way in deliberations concerning individual regions or districts.

Altering boundaries – the domino effect

It should also be noted that a boundary adjustment in one district is likely to have consequences not just on an adjoining district that is directly affected but on other surrounding districts. For example, if a boundary adjustment is required because the elector numbers in district 'A' are outside the upper or lower permissible limits, it will often be the case that the problem with district 'A' cannot be addressed simply by excising a portion of it and adding that portion to adjoining district 'B' (or vice-versa) without causing difficulties for the elector numbers in district 'B' and, as a consequence, for other districts adjoining district 'B' and with a flow-on effect to other districts in the same region.

Possible Approaches to the Division of the State

In the observations paper published during the 2011 distribution the Commissioners identified three broad approaches:

- Minimal change - making only those adjustments that are absolutely necessary in order to bring districts that are outside the upper or lower limits back within the permitted tolerance range
- Incremental change - adjusting boundaries of districts that are outside the upper or lower limits and of those that are close to the relevant limit with consequent changes to other districts
- Fundamental change - adjustments aimed at reducing the disparity in elector numbers on a more far-reaching scale across the State.

Attached to this paper are two maps that together show each of the 59 districts and, by colour coding, indicate whether (as at 9 March 2015) the district was outside the permissible range (red), within 25% of the limit (orange) or reasonably within the statutory tolerance levels (yellow). Appendix 1 is a map of the three metropolitan regions, while Appendix 2 contains similar details for the three country regions.

The size and spread of the districts outside permissible limits is such that, particularly in the three metropolitan regions, implementing a minimal change approach would be difficult to say the least.

It seems unlikely that adoption of an incremental change model will result in only a small number of districts being subject to boundary adjustments. The domino effect would come into operation and it may be that the boundaries of a number of districts have to be changed. If an incremental approach were to be adopted, the Commissioners would attempt to keep the adjustments (of both district and regional boundaries) to modest levels, but even though specific changes may be modest, the cumulative effect could still have an impact on a significant number of electors.

Fundamental change means, as the name implies, wide ranging changes to district and regional boundaries in order to reduce some of the more extreme differences in enrolment numbers in electoral units. A possible consequence of fundamental change would be to reduce the number of districts in one or more regions with a corresponding increase in the number of districts in others.

The realities of the numerical landscape are such that whether an incremental or fundamental change approach is adopted, the electoral map reflecting the results of 2015 distribution is likely to be quite different from the one that applies at present.

Electoral Districts Outside Permissible Limits

As at the relevant day there were 1,470,451 enrolled electors across the 59 districts. When the LDAs for the five districts in the Mining and Pastoral Region are added, the total number increases to 1,504,700. Based on the number of electors (before taking into account LDAs) the ADE is 24,923.

For the purposes of the review, VFADEs have been calculated to two decimal places with conventional mathematical rounding, that is, symmetric arithmetic rounding.

There are 12 districts that are outside the permitted tolerance levels, ten of which are currently considered part of the metropolitan area. They are set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1 – Districts outside permitted VFADE tolerance, as at 9 March 2015

District	Region	VFADE
Wagin	Agricultural	-12.49%
North West Central	Mining and Pastoral	-22.03%
Darling Range	East Metropolitan	+23.80%
Swan Hills	East Metropolitan	+11.91%
West Swan	East Metropolitan	+17.48%
Butler	North Metropolitan	+33.58%
Girrawheen	North Metropolitan	+14.35%
Perth	North Metropolitan	+11.40%
Cockburn	South Metropolitan	+11.34%
Kwinana	South Metropolitan	+24.98%
Southern River	South Metropolitan	+12.37%
Warnbro	South Metropolitan	+23.50%

It follows that, in respect of each of these districts, boundary adjustments must be made so as to satisfy s 16G(2) and (3) of the Act.

In addition, there are five districts listed in Table 2 below that are within 25 per cent of the upper or lower permitted limits and which may also require attention. The selection of 25 percent is arbitrary but is designed to identify districts in which the trend of demographic change (which is always relevant) may have additional significance.

Table 2 – Districts within 25% of permitted VFADE tolerance, as at 9 March 2015

District	Region	VFADE
Central Wheatbelt	Agricultural	-10.00%
Kalgoorlie	Mining and Pastoral	-16.42%
Belmont	East Metropolitan	-8.22%
Wanneroo	North Metropolitan	+9.69%
Fremantle	South Metropolitan	+8.58%

The Metropolitan Regions

The Act directs that the three metropolitan regions, when viewed as a whole, should be *generally co-extensive* with the metropolitan area of Perth. There is, therefore, some flexibility to adjust the outer perimeter of the metropolitan regions along different lines.

The Commissioners note that the 'northern' boundary of the metropolitan area abuts the 'southern' boundary of Agricultural and the demarcation line follows the southern boundaries of the Shires of Chittering and Toodyay. Those areas are predominantly agricultural – not urban or suburban.

The same can be said for the 'eastern' boundary of the metropolitan area, which abuts part of the 'western' boundary of Agricultural. The demarcation line runs through the Darling Scarp and follows the western borders of the Town of Northam and the Shires of York, Beverley and Wandering, again, predominantly agricultural.

As mentioned above, one of the criteria to which the Commissioners must give consideration is community of interest. Given the demarcation between country and urban areas, a question arises as to the feasibility of any adjustments to the metropolitan boundaries in the north and east.

If a change is required to the overall boundary of the metropolitan area, the southern boundary appears to be less problematic in that areas on either side of the southern boundary appear to share greater communities of interest than areas either side of the north or east parts of the metropolitan area. In considering a possible extension of the southern boundary, a relevant question might be how far the shared community of interest actually extends, given the spread of high density development well beyond the existing southern boundary. A question may arise whether, notwithstanding the 'country–metropolitan divide', there are community of interest and other relevant considerations that would justify fundamental change to the metropolitan boundary.

Whatever happens to the outer perimeter of the three metropolitan regions the Commissioners will have to decide whether the boundaries separating those regions remain appropriate. The Swan River is an obvious physical feature and seems to provide a logical point to differentiate between North Metropolitan and South Metropolitan. There may be greater scope to adjust the internal boundaries between East Metropolitan on the one hand and North Metropolitan and South Metropolitan on the other. This will depend on individual adjustments between district boundaries and there is no particular issue that the Commissioners believe warrants mention in this paper.

The discussion of the country regions, set out below, raises as one possibility a reduction in the number of country districts with a corresponding increase in districts in the metropolitan area. Were this to occur, the Commissioners would then have to consider where any additional districts should be created.

The map in Appendix 1 illustrates the difficulty associated with adjustment to boundaries of districts in the metropolitan regions. Each district in the outer ring abutting the perimeter of the metropolitan area (Butler, Swan Hills, Darling Range and Warnbro) is outside permissible limits. Many of those districts are relatively large in geographical size and contain areas that are likely to be developed for housing in future years. It is not easy at this stage to posit specific options for boundary adjustments in the metropolitan regions. Much will depend on whether changes are made that shift the boundaries of a metropolitan region away from the outer perimeter of the metropolitan area (as defined) and whether the current allocation of districts between country and metropolitan regions is maintained or altered.

Five of the other 'problem' districts (Girrawheen, West Swan, Southern River, Kwinana and Cockburn) are contiguous with the 'outer ring' districts, thus limiting options for boundary adjustments, and they too are likely to see further housing development within their confines. The district of Perth is also outside the permissible limits but it is surrounded by electoral units with enrolments that are in more comfortable territory.

Two of the three districts that are within 25% of the maximum VFADE (Fremantle and Wanneroo) are contiguous to districts that are outside the legislated limits.

The following tables outline the current position in the metropolitan regions.

Table 3 – Enrolment in the North Metropolitan Region, as at 9 March 2015

District	No. of electors	VFADE
Balcatta	25,592	2.68%
Butler	33,293	33.58%
Carine	24,640	-1.14%
Churchlands	26,528	6.44%
Cottesloe	25,651	2.92%
Girrawheen	28,499	14.35%
Hillarys	24,619	-1.22%
Joondalup	24,143	-3.13%
Kingsley	24,865	-0.23%
Nedlands	25,107	0.74%
Ocean Reef	26,276	5.43%
Perth	27,764	11.40%
Scarborough	25,534	2.45%
Wanneroo	27,339	9.69%
Total	369,850	+6.00%(average)

Table 4 – Enrolment in the East Metropolitan Region, as at 9 March 2015

District	No. of electors	VFADE
Armadale	25,808	3.55%
Bassendean	25,337	1.66%
Belmont	22,875	-8.22%
Darling Range	30,854	23.80%
Forrestfield	26,506	6.35%
Gosnells	25,334	1.65%
Kalamunda	24,104	-3.29%
Maylands	25,841	3.68%
Midland	24,995	0.29%
Mirrabooka	26,376	5.83%
Morley	24,539	-1.54%
Mount Lawley	25,943	4.09%
Swan Hills	27,890	11.91%
West Swan	29,279	17.48%
Total	365,681	+4.80% (average)

Table 5 – Enrolment in the South Metropolitan Region, as at 9 March 2015

District	No. of electors	VFADE
Alfred Cove	24,717	-0.83%
Bateman	23,307	-6.48%
Cannington	24,199	-2.90%
Cockburn	27,750	11.34%
Fremantle	27,062	8.58%
Jandakot	25,827	3.63%
Kwinana	31,149	24.98%
Riverton	24,144	-3.13%
Rockingham	25,322	1.60%
South Perth	24,663	-1.04%
Southern River	28,006	12.37%
Victoria Park	26,248	5.32%
Warnboro	30,780	23.50%
Willagee	24,467	-1.83%
Total	367,641	+5.37% (average)

It is not easy at this stage to posit specific options for boundary adjustments in the metropolitan regions. Much will depend on whether changes are made that shift the boundaries of a metropolitan region away from the outer perimeter of the metropolitan area (as defined) and whether the current allocation of districts between country and metropolitan regions is maintained or altered.

The Country Regions

The Commissioners will have to decide whether the present allocation of 17 districts in the three country regions and 42 in the three metropolitan regions should be maintained.

The numbers of districts, electors without LDA, electors including LDA and the average VFADE for districts in each of the six regions is set out in Table 6.

Table 6 – Number of districts and enrolments by Region

Region	Districts	No. of electors	Total with LDA	Average electors per district	VFADE Average
Agricultural	4	91,339	91,339	22,835	-8.38%
Mining and Pastoral	5	74,734	108,983	21,797	-12.54%
South West	8	201,206	201,206	25,151	+0.91%
East Metropolitan	14	365,681	365,681	26,120	+4.80%
North Metropolitan	14	369,850	369,850	26,418	+6.00%
South Metropolitan	14	367,641	367,641	26,260	+5.37%

Before the introduction of the so-called 'one vote one value' legislation (*Electoral Amendment and Repeal Act 2006*) there were 57 districts, of which 23 were located in the country and 34 in the metropolitan regions. That legislation increased the number of districts to 59. The first distribution after those legislative changes occurred in 2007. In that review the total number of districts in the three country regions was reduced to 17 and the number in the metropolitan regions increased to 42.

That allocation between country and metropolitan regions was maintained in the 2011 distribution. The Commissioners have no power to increase or reduce the number of districts above or below 59; that could only be done by legislation.

Since the 2007 distribution the total number of electors (without LDA) in both the metropolitan and country regions has been increasing and the ratio of country electors to those in metropolitan regions has declined only marginally. The relevant numbers are set out in Table 7 below. The figures are those applying at the 'relevant day' for the 2007, 2011 and 2015 distributions, respectively.

Table 7 – Ratio of country electors, 2007-2011

Date	No. of electors	Metropolitan	Country	Country ratio
2007	1,259,665	935,539	324,126	25.73%
2011	1,367,532	1,021,503	346,029	25.30%
2015	1,470,451	1,103,172	367,279	24.98%

However, the arithmetic increase in elector numbers has been greater in the metropolitan regions than in country regions and it follows that the disparity in the average VFADEs in the two zones has been increasing. This is illustrated in Table 8 below. Unlike Table 7, the various numbers in Table 8 for the country regions includes LDA.

Table 8 – Average VFADE in metropolitan and country areas, 2007-2011

Date	State ADE	Country Total with LDA	Country ADE	Average Country VFADE	Metropolitan Total	Metropolitan ADE	Average Metropolitan VFADE
2007	21,350	358,335	21,079	-1.27%	935,539	22,275	+4.33%
2011	23,179	380,278	22,369	-3.49%	1,021,503	24,321	+4.93%
2015	24,923	401,528	23,619	-5.23%	1,103,172	26,266	+5.39%

With regard to country regions, the first question the Commissioners will have to consider is whether this apparent disparity has yet reached a stage where a reduction in the number of country districts (and corresponding increase in the number of metropolitan seats) is justified.

If a change is considered justified it will be necessary to consider, in turn, whether to proceed with a fundamental change (for example abolish a whole district in one of the country regions) or adopt a more incremental approach (that is, give effect to a number of less major boundary adjustments spread over a large number of districts).

Regardless of whether the approach is incremental or fundamental, consideration might also need to be given to changing the current proportion of districts allocated to each region. Tables 9, 10 and 11 illustrate the enrolment numbers in the three country regions.

Table 9 – Enrolment in the Agricultural Region, as at 9 March 2015

District	No. of electors	VFADE
Central Wheatbelt	22,431	-10.00%
Geraldton	23,205	-6.89%
Moore	23,894	-4.12%
Wagin	21,809	-12.49%
Total	91,339	-8.38% (average)

Table 10 – Enrolment in the Mining and Pastoral Region, as at 9 March 2015

District	No. of electors	Total with LDA	VFADE
Eyre	17,224	21,657	-13.10%
Kalgoorlie	13,216	20,830	-16.42%
Kimberley	16,868	23,159	-7.08%
North West Central	9,584	19,432	-22.03%
Pilbara	17,842	23,905	-4.08%
Total	74,734	108,983	-12.54% (average)

Table 11 – Enrolment in the South West Region, as at 9 March 2015

District	No. of electors	VFADE
Albany	24,302	-2.49%
Bunbury	23,901	-4.10%
Collie-Preston	24,509	-1.66%
Dawesville	26,507	6.36%
Mandurah	25,298	1.51%
Murray-Wellington	25,295	1.49%
Vasse	25,003	0.32%
Warren-Blackwood	26,391	5.89%
Total	201,206	+0.91% (average)

While the South West indicates relatively stable voter populations since the 2011 distribution, the domino effect (mentioned earlier) could nevertheless have some impact on that region.

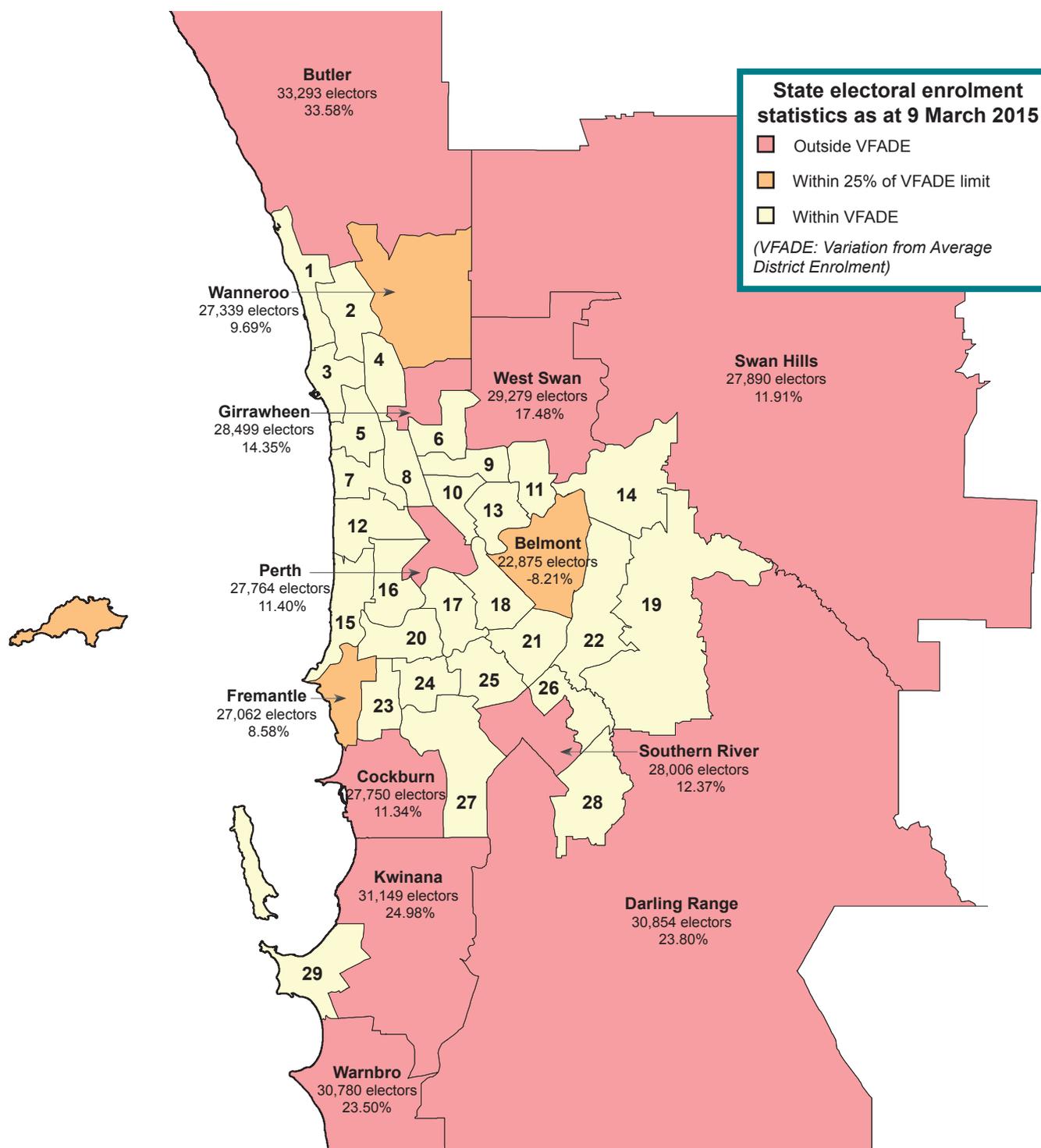
A possible approach to adjusting boundaries of districts within Agricultural with low elector numbers would be to identify and include government authorities that are in a contiguous district and which adjoin the district in question.

Historically, district boundaries in Mining and Pastoral have been drawn on what is basically a horizontal (rather than vertical) axis. It is difficult to envisage a more vertically oriented division than that which applies at present.

Conclusion

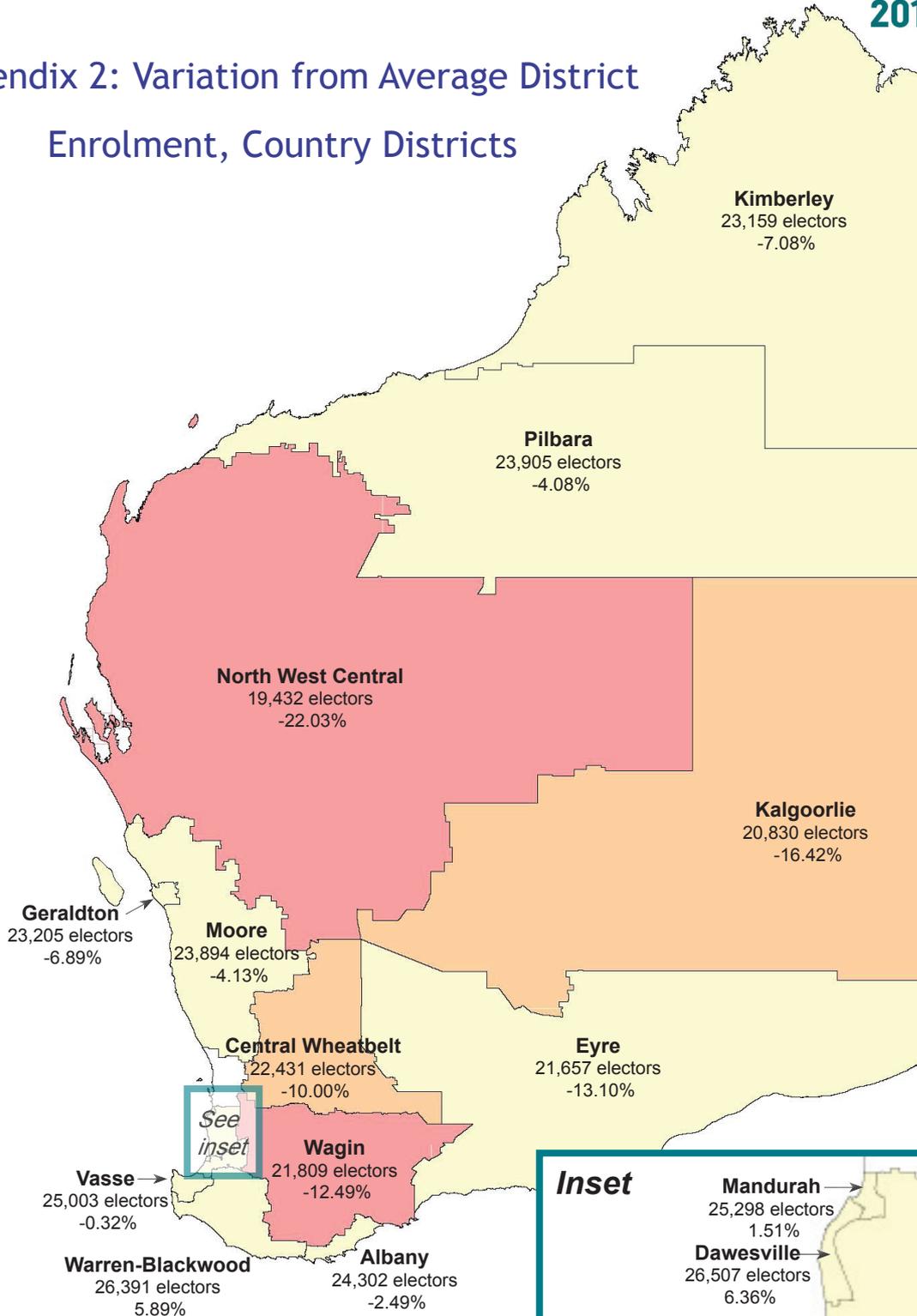
As stated at the outset, the Commissioners have not formed any view on the direction the distribution should take other than to highlight some of the key issues which will need to be addressed. The Commissioners welcome public input on any of the issues raised in this paper or on any other matters of interest to the community.

Appendix 1: Variation from Average District Enrolment, Metropolitan Districts



1 Ocean Reef, 26,276 electors, 5.43%	11 Bassendean, 25,337 electors, 1.66%	21 Cannington, 24,199 electors, -2.90%
2 Joondalup, 24,143 electors, -3.13%	12 Churchlands, 26,528 electors, 6.44%	22 Forrestfield, 26,506 electors, 6.35%
3 Hillarys, 24,619 electors, -1.22%	13 Maylands, 25,841 electors, 3.68%	23 Willagee, 24,467 electors, -1.83%
4 Kingsley, 24,865 electors, -0.23%	14 Midland, 24,995 electors, 0.29%	24 Bateman, 23,307 electors, -6.48%
5 Carine, 24,640 electors, -1.14%	15 Cottesloe, 25,651 electors, 2.92%	25 Riverton, 24,144 electors, -3.13%
6 Mirrabooka, 26,376 electors, 5.83%	16 Nedlands, 25,107 electors, 0.74%	26 Gosnells, 25,334 electors, 1.65%
7 Scarborough, 25,534 electors, 2.45%	17 South Perth, 24,663 electors, -1.04%	27 Jandakot, 25,827 electors, 3.63%
8 Balcatta, 25,592 electors, 2.68%	18 Victoria Park, 26,248 electors, 5.32%	28 Armadale, 25,808 electors, 3.55%
9 Morley, 24,539 electors, -1.54%	19 Kalamunda, 24,104 electors, -3.29%	29 Rockingham, 25,322 electors, 1.60%
10 Mount Lawley, 25,943 electors, 4.09%	20 Alfred Cove, 24,717 electors, -0.83%	

Appendix 2: Variation from Average District Enrolment, Country Districts



State electoral enrolment statistics as at 9 March 2015

- Outside VFADE
- Within 25% of VFADE limit
- Within VFADE

(VFADE: Variation from Average District Enrolment)