



Monday, 24 August 15

Country Arts WA Objection on proposed Boundary Changes

Executive Officer

Office of the Electoral Distribution Commissioners

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PERTH WA 6000

boundaries@waec.wa.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

I write on behalf of the Board and membership of Country Arts WA to express our concerns on the proposed boundary changes.

As Western Australia's peak body for regional arts, Country Arts WA delivers a range of arts development and performing arts touring programs on behalf of the State and Federal Governments. This includes funding for arts projects, support for key regional arts organisations, Aboriginal and youth specific projects as well as an extensive professional performing arts touring program.

Working closely with regional Western Australian communities, Country Arts WA develops and facilitates long-term community arts development initiatives and plays a vital role advocacy role for the regional arts and community development sectors.

We work across and in all nine regions and with a scope so vast, we focus in on one region to build capacity and resources. Our current focus region is the Goldfields-Esperance Region and the proposed boundary changes have us very concerned for some of our stakeholders in this region, especially our Aboriginal stakeholders.

In the summary of the commissioner's findings it states that the outcome is that the number of regional seats has been reduced by one to 16 and the number of seats in the metropolitan area has been increased by one to 43.

As part of their deliberations the Commissioners have recommended the abolition of the seat of Eyre, and its electors being moved into either the seat of Kalgoorlie or what was previously known as Wagin, now to be called Roe. This includes the splitting of the Shire of Esperance with the town and most of its localities going into Roe, but some eastern localities being moved into the seat of Kalgoorlie along with the Shires of Dundas and Coolgardie. Parts of Boulder previously in Eyre will move into the seat of Kalgoorlie.

The recommendation also involves the Shires of Leonora (including Leinster) and Ngaanyatjarra and part of the Shire of Laverton moving into North West Central – making the seat over 900,000 km².

Concerns

The proposed changes to the electoral boundaries are dramatic and the logic is hard to fathom in relation to the representation of the people of the Goldfields-Esperance region.

To quote the report:

"In developing their proposals, the Commissioners are required to weigh up a range of relevant factors set out in section 16I:

- community of interest
- land use patterns
- means of communication, means of travel and distance from the capital
- physical features
- existing local government boundaries
- the trend of demographic changes."

The changes proposed by the Commissioners seem to fly in the face of many of these factors, especially community of interest and means of communication, means of travel and distance from the capital.

To separate the Shires of Leonora, Ngaanyatjarra and most of Laverton from its base in Kalgoorlie and force them to seek representation from Carnarvon, with which they have virtually no communication or link of any kind defies logic. The same could be said for separating the eastern end of the Shire Esperance from its local town.

The Commissioners noted:

"Those who live in places far removed from metropolitan centres have disadvantages that are not encountered by their city counterparts when they seek to engage in the democratic process (at each of the three levels of government) as a means of ensuring the provision of adequate services in the areas in which they live. That having been said, improvements in modern communication methods may alleviate some of these disadvantages."

However, modern communication methods are invariably not available in these remote locations and there are people who live there who do not have the technology, literacy or sophistication to be able to effectively access this means of communication. This is exacerbated by the steady and insidious withdrawal of government services from regional towns and even major cities like Kalgoorlie-Boulder. For this reason it is all the more important to have physical access to a parliamentary representative.

The other consideration in relation to electorates of the proposed size of North West Central is that it is virtually physically impossible for an elected representative to effectively cover the area. It will entail extremely long road trips, very expensive charter flights and extended periods away from home. This means that the electors do not get value for money and there are very concerning occupational health and safety concerns for the Member of Parliament.

Country Arts WA has been working in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands for the past 7 years with Aboriginal elders and young people in developing employment and music career pathways through a program called Sand Tracks. Many of the people in the NG lands have cultural and family ties all the way from NG Lands through to Leonora, Laverton and Kalgoorlie-Boulder and have developed a strong relationship with their local member for Kalgoorlie-Boulder – Wendy Duncan.

Relationships that are built on trust and over many years.

Our most recent trip to the NG Lands was with Wendy Duncan in June this year, where we visited 7 of the communities, to reassure them that their communities would not be closed and to explore new models of sustainability and social enterprise. These communities and the people in them were reliving the traumas of the Stolen Generation thinking that their children would be taken away again. Wendy was able to reassure them and to speak honestly and opening of the challenges faced by state government. She spoke plainly and also with great respect. The Elders do trust her and are prepared to work collaboratively with Wendy. They have built up trust with their member of parliament, trust that has been built up over many years. She has earned their respect.

It appears that with a stroke of a pen, this representation and this trust and knowledge of these communities has been wiped away. This will take years to rebuild and will affect all service providers in the region. The new member for the seat of Roe with seat of over 900,000 km², will not be able to build these kind of relationships quickly and frankly these communities do not have the luxury of time on their hands.

It is also interesting to note that with the changed population in the state of Western Australia, there was not a dramatic change in the proportion of population between city and country.

The Commissioners observed:

"The statistics demonstrate that since the 2011 distribution the number of enrolled electors in the country regions has increased by about 21,000. While the corresponding increase in the metropolitan regions is about 82,000, the number of country electors, as a proportion of total enrolments across the whole State, has declined only marginally."

If there is little change in the proportion of population between the city and regional, it is hard to understand why the Commissioners see fit to abolish one regional seat.

The electoral act allows for some variability, especially if seats become extremely large and yet the Commissioners appear to have gone to considerable lengths to avoid drawing up seats which have a Large District Allowance.

The variation allowed is explained by the Commissioners below:

"Except as set out in the next paragraph, the number of electors in each district must be between minus 10 per cent and plus 10 per cent of the average district enrolment (ADE). The percentage by which the total number of electors in a district differs from the ADE is called the 'variation from average district enrolment' (VFADE)."

Districts that have a geographical area of 100,000 square kilometres or more 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 the sum of the electors actually enrolled and the LDA is between minus 20 per cent and plus 10 per cent of the ADE."

The Commissioners also argue in the report that the City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder should be reunited under one representative. However, as it is a substantial regional city, there are advantages for the people to have two representatives to share the load and perhaps have pathways of influence into different parts of the Parliament.

In conclusion

Regional people require regional representation. We believe there should be consideration given to fairer and more practical representation for people in the regions. Consideration should be given to expanding the number of representatives in the Legislative Assembly or quarantining a certain number of seats to regional areas.

These are the regions that generate a vast proportion of the State and the nation's wealth and should be given a stronger voice in Parliament.

We also think that the Commissioner has not given enough emphasis to Cultural considerations for the people in the NG lands, Leonora, Laverton and Kalgoorlie-Boulder.

If these changes do go through we urge the Commissioner to ensure that the Premier and/or the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal ensures that large electorates not only be allowed two offices but sufficient staff to effectively operate them and staff with specialised skills.

Yours sincerely,

Jessica Machin
CEO
Country Arts WA