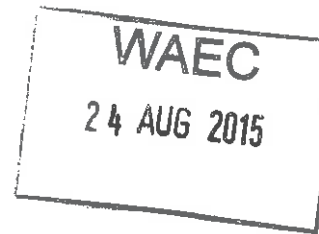


Monday, 24 August 2015



Electoral Distribution Commissioners
GPO Box F316
PERTH WA 6841

Dear Commissioners,

The Nationals WA – Comments on the 2015 Proposed Boundaries and Reasons by District and Region, Western Australia

The Nationals WA has reviewed the proposed electoral boundary changes in the above document released by the Office of the Electoral Commissioners in July 2015.

The Nationals WA appreciate the complexity of the task before the Commissioners. However, we are extremely disappointed that the Commissioners have proposed to abolish an electoral district in the Mining and Pastoral Region and we strongly object to this proposal. The analysis which The Nationals WA provided to the Commissioners in our submission in April 2015 indicated that only minor adjustments to the boundaries of Electoral Districts would be required to ensure that the Average District Enrolment (ADE) for each electorate remained within the permissible limits under the Electoral Act, thereby allowing the Commissioners to ensure that electors in regional WA were able to be represented at current levels.

In our April submission, The Nationals WA acknowledged that adjustments to electoral districts' boundaries in the metropolitan region/s would be challenging but according to the available ADE information, an even distribution of electors within the metropolitan region/s could still be achieved within the permissible limits while allowing the numbers of electoral districts in Regional WA to stand. Noting that about 90% of the district boundaries will be altered through the adjustments being proposed in the metropolitan area in the 2015 report, The Nationals WA believes that these detailed adjustments should have been directed towards balancing electors in metropolitan districts without reducing regional representation. This appears to have definitely been an option given the extent of the metropolitan boundary adjustments now proposed.

The Commissioners comment that the proposed boundary changes "will be a closer fit with a strict, literal application of the so-called 'one vote one value' principle (which is not to say that the current position offends the principle)." However, when comparisons are made between metropolitan districts and country districts in reference to community of interest, distance and communication, it is clear that the strict application of 'one vote, one value' is likely to decrease the value of a regional constituent's participation in the parliamentary process.

The proposed new boundaries reduce the ADE in the metropolitan regions from +5.39% to +2.94%. Both ADE indicators are within the permissible limits, but this minor improvement comes at the expense of a regional district. It is The Nationals WA contention that provisions in the Electoral Act to provide a Large District Allowance(LDA) and for an additional 10% variance under the ADE levels reflects an expectation and acceptance that Mining and Pastoral Districts require special

consideration to enable effective representation. The abolition of a seat from the Mining and Pastoral region is contrary to this outcome.

The Commissioners' report acknowledged the issues raised by The Nationals WA regarding "the tyranny of distance" and the inherent difficulty for a Member of Parliament(MP) to effectively represent constituents over such vast land areas. Alleviating this disadvantage though "improvements to modern communication methods" as suggested by the Commissioners is not likely to be a sufficient or effective strategy, given the issues which still exist associated with communication services in regional WA. This will particularly be the case in the Mining and Pastoral region where the North West Central District will have an increase by 39% to 910,010 sq. km; more than double that of the proposed three other Districts.

In The Nationals WA's April submission, we detailed the intrinsic community of interest represented within the current electoral boundaries. The proposed boundaries will significantly change the representation of these communities, in most cases increasing the distance constituents and MP's will need to travel to engage with each other.

In some cases, it is impossible to communicate important issues by phone or other modern communication methods. Constituents will expect to engage with their MP in person and in their local community so they can demonstrate first hand the challenges and issues that they wish the State Government to address.

Frequent visiting of particular communities is important, especially in remote indigenous communities where culturally, trust and respect needs to be developed over time. For example, industry and State Government services are provided to the Goldfields and Ngaanyatjarra Lands from the City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder as there are strong intrinsic links between these communities. However, under the proposed boundaries, these communities will now be part of the largest district in WA, that stretches from the coast to the eastern border of WA. It is difficult to imagine how the constituents of these communities will receive the same level of effective representation.

In addition, the Commissioners are recommending a 57 %(!) increase in the area of the Central Wheatbelt District to 97,669 sq. km; i.e. only 2,331sq. km short of being eligible for a LDA. This will be an especially difficult area for an MP to service given the many small towns and communities proposed to be included within the District's new boundaries. The same is true for the proposed new District of Roe. However, Commissioners appear to have acknowledged the issue of distance and their desire to avoid LDA issues when configuring the boundaries of the District settling on an area of 77,939 sq. km. In The Nationals WA's view, the community of interest test is problematic in the new proposed boundaries, particularly in the eastern part of the proposed districts which are more effectively represented by the current Kalgoorlie and Eyre Districts which embody strong community of interest.

The Nationals WA also submits that district names should reflect geographical locations. Given the vast areas involved, we believe names like Pilbara, Kimberley, Moore and Central Wheatbelt are appropriate. Similarly, we believe the constituents of the proposed Malloy District will have more historical and personal affinity to the Warren-Blackwood or even Blackwood-Stirling name. Accordingly, The Nationals WA do not support this name change.

In summary, The Nationals WA urge the Commissioners to reconsider these proposed boundary changes that takes away an electoral district in regional WA and suggests that the Commissioners refer to our April submission as a guide to ensuring regional West Australian's representation remains intact.

Sincerely,



Jamie Forsyth
State Director

