

Submission – Electoral Boundaries in Western Australia 2025

North West Central

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Proposed Electoral Boundary Changes

This submission analyses the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) census data for 2021, which currently stands as the most recent and reliable population data available. The demographic data is then compared with the electoral data from two notable events, namely the 2021 General State Election and the 2022 North West Central By-Election, as recorded by the Western Australian Electoral Commission. Such a comparison provides valuable insights into the demographics of the voting population and their potential impact on these elections.

It is proposed that the seat be known simply as “Central”. This is to reflect its geographic position, which is almost precisely in the geographic centre of Western Australia. The proposal is that existing boundaries be altered to encompass the entire Local Government Area of the Shire of Northampton.

The Shire of Northampton currently straddles both North West Central and the adjacent southern electorate of Moore. Statistics could not be found to quantify electoral numbers in each electorate as Local Government Areas provided by the ABS reflect the population of the entire Shire. However, Western Australian Electoral Commission enrolment statistics reveal the ward of Kalbarri to have a population 1034 electors.¹ Therefore the expansion of the Central (previously North West Central) boundary will have the effect of increasing the Central Electorate by 1121 electors and reducing Moore by the same number.

Currently Moore is just outside on the permissible limit with 26 976 electors or 11.36 per cent variance. That will reduce the population of Moore by 1121 to 25 855 and increase the variance to 15 per cent. Currently Central is well outside the permissible limit with 23 926 (including a Large District Allowance (LDA) of 12 275) or 23.45 per cent variance. That will increase the population of Central by 1228 to 25 154 (including an increase in the LDA to 12 382).

The proposed change in boundary would result in both electorates remaining beyond the permissible limit. However, in view of the fact that the Moore electorate currently lacks a Large District Allowance and the variance would increase by a mere 3.64 per cent, the Central electorate would experience a decrease in variance from -23.45 per cent to -17.34 per cent. In light of the myriad of other relevant factors, it is suggested that this modest boundary adjustment would significantly enhance the equality of voter influence, without unduly impacting the equity of voter impact within the vast, yet sparsely populated electorate.

The name change is also moderate, but more correctly reflects the geographic positioning of the electorate. As the electorate extends from the coast of Western Australia to its eastern borders reference to north and west become equally irrelevant.

¹ Western Australian Electoral Commission ‘2023 Enrolment Stats by LGA at 13 March 2023.pdf’ <<https://www.boundaries.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/2023%20Enrolment%20Stats%20by%20LGA%20at%2013%20March%202023.pdf>>.

(a) Community of Interest

Community interests as outlined in the 2019 Electoral distribution remain consistent and no new industries have emerged in that time, nor have any existing ones ceased. However, interest has been shown in emerging renewable energy projects and supporting mining ventures for RE focussed electrical generation, use and storage such as hydrogen production by Province Resources Limited using wind powered electricity generation around Carnarvon, and rare earth mineral mining by Hastings Technology Metals Limited in the upper Gascoyne. While very much in the early development stages, these projects are likely to promote significant migration to the region.

The community consists of the residents of the area known generally as the Murchison, Gascoyne and Ashburton in the lower North West of Western Australia. The area consists of farming, pastoral, fishing and mining industries and their supporting services. With the exception of Exmouth and Paraburdoo and Tom Price the towns in the regions have been settled since the 1880s. The focus is on primary industry from Salt and Iron Ore mining in the north to grain farming in the south with the pastoral and fishing industries in the hinterland and along the coast.

The area has a sizable Aboriginal population, in addition to the descendants of Colonial Europeans, and European and Asian migrants, who were drawn to the region's flourishing agricultural and mining industries. Indeed, this is a highly multicultural community, whose members are bound together by the ruggedness and remoteness of the environment in which they reside.

(b) Land Use Patterns

Land use patterns have not altered substantially in the previous four years. The southern section of the region consists of wheat and sheep farming on undulating pasture at the northern edge of Western Australia's agricultural region known as the 'wheat belt'. It is directly south and bounded by the 'rabbit proof fence'. The pastoral region of the Murchison boundaries that farming land from light mallee scrub in the west to hard gibber plain in the east. Mixed mining exists in association with the pastoral industry in the south east from Yalgoo and Mt Magnet to Meekatharra, and east to the sparsely populated areas of Western Australian, Northern Territory and South Australian.

To the north, the Iron Ore mines and town centres of Tom Price, Paraburdoo, and Pannawonica abut subtropical pastoral areas that were formerly sheep stations, but have since been converted to beef cattle production. Along the coastline, the communities of Onslow, Exmouth, Carnarvon, Denham, and Kalbarri are engaged in various fishing activities. The region is widely known as the fruit bowl of Western Australia, and Carnarvon in particular has a large irrigated horticultural industry. Tourism is a key industry throughout the region and forms an important form of income to all shires.

(c) Means of Communication, Means of Travel and Distance from the Capital

Arguably, recent changes to schedule air service providers have resulted in a lesser service to Carnarvon, Denham and Kalbarri. However, generally communication means are consistent with the 2019 review. It must be noted that is no longer any interconnecting air service within the electorate from Carnarvon, save for a modest service to Monkey Mia.

Apart from private charter there are no commercial air services connecting the townships within the region. A commercial air service connects the coastal communities of Kalbarri, Denham, Carnarvon and Exmouth. Paraburdoo also services Tom Price but connecting flights must be routed through Perth. Servicing the region via commercial aircraft is not a viable option.

However, the region has reasonable road connection services, whilst most internal roadways are suitable for 4WD access, particularly the remote Aboriginal communities and pastoral properties. All major towns have all weather highways connecting them via the North West Coastal and Great Northern Highways. The Butchers' track can be used as direct access from the coast to Mt Magnet and Yalgoo weather permitting in the south and a sealed highway connects Tom Price to Onslow in the north. Sealed access connects Mt Magnet to Geraldton if the Butchers' track is inaccessible. A sealed road access now exists between Carnarvon and the Gascoyne Junction.

Daily mail services exist to all major towns and weekly mail runs service the remote pastoral, mining and Aboriginal camps and communities. The entire region is covered by reasonable telephone and fair internet networks.

(d) Physical Features

The major physical features are the Murchison River in the South to the Ashburton River in the north, with the Gascoyne River in the central area rising from just west of Meekatharra to Carnarvon on the coast. The southern end of the Hamersley Range dominates the north and large sections of desert land predominate from the stony plains of the east to coastal scrub from Exmouth to Denham. The electorate includes the two major gulfs of Exmouth and Shark Bay which are so vital to our fishing and tourism industries. The Ningaloo reef bounds the coastline from just north of Carnarvon to the top of North West Cape.

(e) Existing Boundaries of Districts

Amendments to the Electoral Act have abolished the requirement to maintain lower house electorates within upper house regions therefore the extension to encompass the entire LGA of Northampton is not prevented by that previous limitation.

(f) Existing Local Government Boundaries

The incorporation of entire local authority boundaries of Ashburton, Carnarvon, Cue, Exmouth, Meekatharra, Mt Magnet, Murchison, Ngaanyat Jarra, Northampton, Sandstone, Shark Bay, Upper Gascoyne, Wiluna and Yalgoo encourages consistent and uniform communication between local governments of similar social, economic and environmental conditions (they are all sparsely populated, in remote localities and share similar concerns and needs) and State parliamentary representation.

(h) Actual elector numbers in districts with a Large District Allowance

Electoral Commission Data available from the results of the 2021 State General Election and the North West Central By-election 2022 is considered in the calculation below.

The results for 2021 show 10 993 electors on the role, of whom 8 108 voted (73.76%); and the results for 2022 show 11 189 electors on the role, of whom 5 335 voted (47.68%). The area is shown as 820 591 km² for both elections.

The Large District Allowance is therefore $1.5\% \times 820\,591 = 12\,309$ LDA

The actual number of registered electors for 2022 is 11 189. Therefore, the numbers of electors including the LDA is 12 309 plus 11 189 = 23 498.

Given that the average District Enrolment for the whole of Western Australia is 30 432³ electors and the permissible limit range is between 27 389 and 33 475⁴ electors, that is 3 891 electors or 22.78 per cent lower than average the permissible range.

Further, table 1 indicates a significant under-enrolment of voters in the LGAs and therefore the entire electorate.

2 Western Australian Electoral Commission 'Electoral Enrolment Statistics' (31 December 2022) <<https://www.elections.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/Enrolment%20Statistics%20Report%20-%20December%202022.pdf>>.

3 Western Australian Electoral Distribution Commission 'Enrolment levels as at 13 March 2023' (2023) <<https://www.boundaries.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/2023%20Enrolment%20Stats%20by%20District%20%28Amended%29%20Final.pdf>>.

4 Western Australian Electoral Distribution Commission 'The Electoral Boundary (2023) <Review>' <<https://www.boundaries.wa.gov.au/about/electoral-boundary-review>>.

Local Authority	Current Area Sq Km	Electors ⁵	Population		Ratio of electors/ population
			MyCouncil ⁶	ABS ⁷	
Ashburton	100 959	2827	13 311	7 391	21.24
Carnarvon	46 562	3152	5 184	5 251	60.80
Cue	13 585	112	140	215	80.00
Exmouth	6 956	1637	2 935	3 085	55.77
Meekatharra	100 184	305	696	1 200	43.82
Mt Magnet	13 858	213	449	653	47.44
Murchison	45 047	71	162	101	43.83
Ngaanyat Jarraku	160 378	648	1768	1358	36.65
Northampton	12 618	2 138	2 876	3 227	74.34
Sandstone	32 666	55	78	109	70.51
Shark Bay	25 630	489	960	1 031	50.94
Upper Gascoyne	57 817	103	290	170	35.52
Wiluna	181 294	152	684	535	22.22
Yalgoo	27 946	85	351	340	24.22
Central	825 500	11 987	29 884	24 666	40.11
Western Australia	2 529 880	1 716 732	n/a	2660 026	64.54

Table 1: LGA population and Ratio of Registered Electors

(Sources: Western Australian Electoral Commission; ABS; Dept of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries (MyCouncil))

In particular Table 1 also shows a considerable variation between the statistical data of the population and number of registered electors for the Shire of Ashburton. There is also a considerable variation between the data shown in MyCouncil and the ABS 2021 Census data. The ABS data is preferred in this analysis.

If the ratio of registered voters to counted population numbers was increased to the Western Australian state average of 64.54 per cent, then a further population of 3 932 would result in a population of 15 919 electors plus the LDA of 12 382 or 28 301 is within the permitted limits.

⁵ Western Australian Electoral Commission ‘Local Government Statistics 5 April 2023’ <<https://www.elections.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/Enrolment%20Statistics%20Report%20as%20at%205%20April%202023.pdf>>.

⁶ Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries ‘MyCouncil’ (2023) <<https://www.mycouncil.wa.gov.au/>>.

⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics ‘2021 Census All persons Quickstats (Local Government Areas)’ <<https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/LGA56160>>.

The proposed boundary modification is relatively modest, and aims to consolidate and align the Local Government Area boundaries with the boundaries of state electoral districts, with the goal of streamlining the voter enrolment process. Additionally, concerted efforts can be made to educate and enrol eligible voters, which will result in a positive outcome of this review.

(g) The Trend of Demographic Changes

Despite general population growth of the Western Australian population the proposed seat is relatively stable without any significant demographic changes. Rural/urban drift of the population is a significant problem for the region as well as government and professional services.

Given that this phenomenon is common to the entire region it is considered to be a significant demographic binding agent for uniform parliamentary representation. The northern towns of Karratha, Onslow, Pannawonica, Paraburdoo and Tom Price have the influence of major mining projects but the population generally faces the same social problems as does the electorate of Central.

Recommendation

This submission proposes modifications to the boundaries and nomenclature of the Legislative Assembly seat of North West Central, with a view to incorporating them into the 2023 electoral distribution. It is observed that current electoral services are satisfactorily fulfilled, with no notable shifts in land use patterns or demographic trends. Nonetheless, it has been identified that certain elector populations lie outside the prescribed limits mandated by the *Electoral Act 1907*, thus warranting the consideration of other relevant factors, in order to ensure equity and fairness, especially in the case of any special circumstances.

Figure 1 shows the proposed electorate of central incorporating the entire LGA of the Shire of Northampton.

