

# COMMENTS ON SUGGESTIONS FOR 2023 WESTERN AUSTRALIAN STATE REDISTRIBUTION

Dear Committee Members,

Please find my Comments on Suggestions for the 2023 Western Australian state redistribution.

I hope these Suggestions will help you in your deliberations.

If you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Dr Mark Mulcair

# COMMENTS ON SUGGESTIONS FOR 2023 WESTERN AUSTRALIAN STATE REDISTRIBUTION

## GENERAL COMMENTS

Suggestions for the whole state were received from all three major parties, plus a number of individual submitters such as myself. There were also a significant number of submissions from local councils and similar organisations, mostly dealing with individual Districts or general comments about rural representation.

I will make some general comments about the major submissions, before discussing the proposals by region.

### *Submission from the ALP*

As a general comment, I feel Labor's submission suffers from not having any detailed figures, or even much in the way of detailed descriptions of their changes.

At a high level, Labor's proposal has some similarities to mine; they propose a new Ellenbrook District and abolish a seat in rural WA. Labor's proposals in regional WA are similar to my own, so I have no problems with their general arrangements outside of Perth.

However, their submission runs into serious problems with their proposed seat of Eastern Hills.

From what I can gather, their proposed Eastern Hills would be an extremely long and narrow District, stretching from Chittering in the north almost as far as the Bunbury hinterland in the south. This would take in parts of the Wheatbelt, Darling Range communities, the suburbs east of Armadale, and part of the Peel District. There does not seem to be any strong community of interest between these areas, apart from the fact that most of them are broadly semi-rural. The seat would in fact lie across major communication lines rather than along them, splitting communities off from their natural hubs and communities of interest.

Labor does not really give much explanation of justification for this District. From my own experience, I understand that sometimes there is a need to create "leftovers" or "bits and pieces" seats where there is no alternative, but other submissions have shown that there are plenty of better ways to draw Districts in this area.

Further south, their proposed Byford is more coherent, but still suffers flow-on effects from Eastern Hills and its impact on other seats. A number of other Districts also seem to be negatively impacted by Eastern Hills; for example, Moore is forced to push into urban Perth to make up numbers.

In all, I don't support Labor's arrangement throughout this area. If the Committee is going to create an 'Ellenbrook' based seat, I would recommend either my own or one of the independent arrangements instead.

### ***Submission from the Liberal Party***

As they have done at the last several redistributions, the Liberals go for an 'incremental change' model. This approach does succeed in retaining all of the existing rural seats, but fails to really address the long-term demographic changes outside of Perth, and results in continued inequality between Districts.

Almost all of the Liberals' proposed rural Districts outside the south-west would be set towards the bottom of tolerance, in an area where growth has been relatively slow. Even with Large District Allowances and the greater 20% tolerance, some Districts only barely make it within quota, and there is still the issue of some seats having a large number of LDAs relative to real people. This has been a persistent problem in some of the remote seats, and has prevented real growth from being able to take place.

In contrast, many seats in the south-west are set to the higher end of tolerance even with predicted strong growth. Again, this is not something that is sustainable even in the short term.

The Liberals' main change in rural WA is to transfer Collie to an inland District. This was something I explored myself, but in the end I feel that transferring some rural south-western shires (and abolishing a rural seat) are better ways to balance the numbers in rural WA.

In metropolitan Perth, the Liberals do not create a new Ellenbrook seat, and therefore leave surrounding Districts like West Swan and Swan Hills as hybrid "bits and pieces" seats without a clear focus. Since the Perth seats all need to be set at the higher level of tolerance, there is less room to tidy up existing poor boundaries, or make adjustments to unite suburbs or improve community of interest.

While I understand the desire to retain rural seats, the Liberals' submission demonstrates that it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain the existing pattern of Districts in a coherent way.

### ***Submission from the National Party***

The Nationals propose an even more extreme incremental change model, with an even more extreme outcome. It seems the absolute bare minimum of change has been made to bring the seats to the very fringes of tolerance.

Every single District in the fast-growing south-west would be set at least 7-8% above tolerance, whereas 6 seats in the more stagnant interior would be set more than 10% under tolerance. This is completely unsustainable and would result in severe enrolment disparity by the next redistribution cycle.

I do not support retaining all existing rural seats, but if the Committee does decide to go down this pathway, the Liberal proposal is at least slightly more balanced than this one.

### ***Submissions from independent individuals***

It is pleasing to see a number of Suggestions from independent people like myself, and Redistribution Committees can certainly benefit from submissions that do not have a political agenda.

Unfortunately, many of the independent submissions are presented in formats that are a bit difficult to read and follow. For example, Mr Proud's submission consists of hundreds of pages of SA1 figures, which is not very practical to read through and understand.

I do note that at a high level, Mr Dixon and Mr Comer have similar proposals to my own; creating a new Ellenbrook seat, moving District in the eastern suburbs generally southwards, and abolishing a seat in north-western WA. While there may be differences in some of the specifics, I think the Committee should take serious note of the fact that multiple independent people have come up with a particular arrangement.

Mr Dixon's proposal also has some similarities, although he proposes a much more radical arrangement in northern Perth. Given that some significant changes may be needed in the outer suburbs and rural WA, I think it makes more sense to leave the relatively stable parts of inner Perth mostly unchanged.

### ***Submissions from local councils and organisations***

Many of the other submissions are from local councils, similar organisations, or even individuals, and the general thrust has been the representation of rural people. There is a strong push to retain all rural seats and to undertake minimal change. In this sense, they are essentially advocating for something similar to what the Liberals and Nationals have proposed.

I have sympathy for rural representation, especially in some of the geographically enormous Districts. However the reality of numbers demonstrates that many of these areas are in relative population decline compared to Perth and the coastal south-west. The Liberal and especially Nationals submissions demonstrate this (albeit unintentionally); the only way they can retain all existing rural seats is by creating a significant enrolment inequality.

While I do abolish an existing rural seat, I do note that my proposed 'Serpentine – Jarrahdale' would be significantly semi-rural in nature, taking in less-developed areas between Perth and Mandurah. So there is at least some balance there in retaining a voice for rural and semi-rural people outside of Perth.

My proposals do cause some significant changes to North West Central, but my remaining rural seats all expand slightly within their existing boundaries. So these seats, at least, would remain mostly intact and with relatively small increases in area and population.

Finally, I note that some submissions argue for things that outside the scope of the redistribution. In particular, there is a strong push for the Committee to:

- Ignore or over-ride the existing tolerance and LDA limitations, allowing rural seats to be drawn smaller and with fewer real people
- Set rural seats well below tolerance as either a compensation or a ‘payback’ for the Labor government abolishing the Upper House Regions.

The first example is not something the Committee has any control over, so these proposals cannot be considered. The second is possible in theory, but in my opinion this would involve the Committee in partisan politics, which would set a very dangerous precedent.

In both cases, these proposals should be put to the parliament for consideration. It is not really appropriate to demand the Committee ignore the legislation in this way, and involve themselves in party affairs.

## **NORTHERN WA, GOLDFIELDS AND WHEATBELT**

All submissions agree that the best way to top up the District of Kimberley is to transfer all or most of the Shire of East Pilbara.

With the exception of the Liberals and Nationals, there seems general agreement to condense the existing three Districts of Pilbara, North West Central, and Moore into two. I personally still think 'Moore' is the best name to abolish, given it is a duplication of a federal name and is not as descriptive as the other two.

There also seems general broad agreement to transfer Ngannytjarriku LGA to Kalgoorlie, for Geraldton to expand slightly into surrounding territory, and for Roe to expand north/westwards to into either Central Wheatbelt or Warren – Blackwood.

As noted above, the submissions from the Liberal and National parties highlight the main problem of trying to maintain the same number of Districts in this area. Almost every one of their proposed seats is set to the very bottom of quota, even when including the Large District Allowance and extra 20% tolerance. Their submission also retains configurations of seats such as North West Central with a large number of LDAs, making actual growth impossible. This is not sustainable even in the short term.

A couple of Suggestions propose more significant changes to Kalgoorlie and Roe, such as adjusting the Kalgoorlie/Roe boundary or placing Collie into Roe. I don't think this is necessary; Kalgoorlie does not need major adjustment, and Roe can much more logically gain some southern Wheatbelt LGAs.

Transferring Collie to an inland seat was something I considered, but I feel that moving some south-western rural Shires are a better way to balance numbers in this part of WA.

## **SOUTH WESTERN WA**

There seems universal agreement for Vasse to shed the remainder of Augusta – Margaret River, and for the District of Bunbury to remain mostly unchanged. The independent submissions also generally agree that Dawesville should be transferred to Murray – Wellington, with an adjustment around Dudley Park or Coodanup to bring Mandurah back within tolerance.

It seems most submissions have had difficulty in trying to unite Australind and Leschenault in a single seat, so it looks like the current split may need to be accepted for the time being.

As noted above, I do not think Collie needs to be removed to an inland District at this time. Previous redistributions have emphasised Collie's strong links with Bunbury and the coast, rather than with the shires to its east.

## **SOUTHERN COASTAL PERTH**

Almost all submissions propose similar changes for the coastal Districts between the Swan River and Mandurah. There is general agreement that:

- All of Baldivis should be included in the District of that name.
- The Kwinana District should include all of the suburbs immediately surrounding Kwinana Town Centre, and shed Cockburn LGA territory to other seats.
- Cockburn and Willagee should move southwards, with the northern parts of the Willagee District topping up either Bicton or Bateman (or both)
- Fremantle should remain relatively unchanged.

These are all logical changes. It makes enormous sense to use the open space between Kwinana and Cockburn LGAs as a clear District boundary, and to unite such relatively self-contained areas as Baldivis and Kwinana in a single seat.

No matter what the Committee decides for other parts of Perth, they should be able to implement at least these changes to better balance the numbers and improve community of interest in this area.

## **NORTH WESTERN PERTH**

With the exception of Mr Close's submission that radically redraws the inner north, there is general agreement that Districts south of Reid Highway require only minimal change. While some of Mr Close's proposals have merit from a community of interest point of view, I think the amount of change is simply too great in this area, and will likely arouse considerable objection.

Again with the exception of Mr Close (and to a lesser extent the ALP), most submissions support the Districts of Butler, Burns Beach, and Joondalup moving northwards, making greater use of the open space between Wanneroo and Joondalup LGAs for part of the boundary. One again, some of Mr Close's proposals have merit, but probably just require too much overall change.

Labor's proposal to move the northern part of Butler into Moore has been rejected at previous redistributions and should be rejected again. There is a significant amount of open space between northern Wanneroo and the southern parts of Moore, with fairly limited connection between them. Suburban development is also pulling this area's focus southwards into Wanneroo, not northwards into the Wheatbelt.

Most submissions agree that Gnangara is a logical place for Wanneroo to shed electors, and also support transferring Alexander Heights from Landsdale to a Ballajura or Mirrabooka based seat.

Both of these proposals make great use of open space or major roads, and should be able to be accommodated no matter what the proposed boundaries are elsewhere.

A number of submissions propose to involve Carine and Hillarys in the re-arrangement of the outer north, but I don't think this is necessary. The Committee could look at an adjustment to the Scarborough/Carine boundary to make it more regular, but I don't think there is any need to make any other changes in this part of Perth.

## **NORTH EASTERN PERTH**

With the exception of the Liberals and Nationals, all suggestions propose the creation of an Ellenbrook seat. I think that such a seat should contain, as much as possible, all of the Akeley, Henley Brook, and The Vines suburbs. This represents a fairly self-contained areas that has enough electors and forms a very strong community of interest.

The independent submissions all agree to varying extents that the existing West Swan should be pushed towards the west and south, and that Swan Hills should move south to incorporate more of Mundaring Shire, with a consequent general southward movement of Forrestfield and/or Kalamunda. This allows Ellenbrook and the former West Swan to be completely 'urban' seats, with Swan Hills and Kalamunda being clearly 'Hills' based Districts. I think this is a much better approach than creating several hybrid urban/rural seats.

Most submissions propose that the existing West Swan be consolidated around Ballajura, but Mr Comer's proposal to join Ballajura with Girrawheen (with West Swan instead taking in the Beechboro/Lockridge area) is an interesting alternative. One advantage of this arrangement is that it would make greater use of the open space immediately east of Ballajura as a clear boundary between the two seats. The main drawback with this proposal though, is that some significant changes are then made in the inner east, which are not really needed as this area is close to quota.

As I have already noted above, Labor's proposed 'Eastern Hills' District is a very incoherent seat that does not have a strong focus, and causes flow-on issues to surrounding Districts. I would strongly oppose this type of arrangement, and just naturally move the Hills-based Districts in a southwards direction instead.

## **SOUTH-EASTERN PERTH**

There are some differences here, depending on how the various submissions construct Districts in other parts of Perth. There seems to be a general broad attempt to expand South Perth and Victoria Park within their existing boundaries, to unite Gosnells in a single District, and try to achieve the split of Canning Vale in a neater fashion. The independent submissions (including my own) all propose that Forrestfield and Kalamunda move southwards to a greater or lesser extent, making use of the Canning River and open space in this area. I think again, these are changes that the Committee should be able to achieve no matter what they decide elsewhere.



Labor's proposed Byford is a reasonably coherent District for the most part, although it has a messy split through the suburbs west of Armadale. In my own suggestions, I experimented with creating a new Byford-based seat, but kept running into this same problem. I think there are better ways to balance the numbers in Armadale (outlined in other submissions) than how Labor has tried to do it.

Mr Comer, and to a lesser extent the Liberal Party, propose realigning the existing Thornlie and Southern River into north-south Districts rather than east-west ones. This is a worthwhile alternative to my arrangement if the Committee feels that Gosnells fits better with Thornlie than with Southern River.

Unfortunately, it seems that Canning Vale is very difficult to unite in a single seat without major changes elsewhere. I personally feel Canning Vale fits better with suburbs to the south, rather than north or west, so would agree with Jandakot giving up its part of this area. It should be possible to divide Canning Vale between Districts based on Thornlie or Gosnells.

I note that Mr Dixon and Labor propose something similar to my own suggestion in joining Serpentine-Jarrahdale with the northern part of Murray Shire. Again, Labor's proposal for Eastern Hills means that their arrangement here is messier than Mr Dixon's or my own; it would seem sensible to me to unite Serpentine-Jarrahdale LGA in a single seat if at all possible.