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**From:** Thomson.MLC, Neil <Neil.Thomson.MLC@mp.wa.gov.au>  
**Sent:** Monday, 1 May 2023 4:31 PM  
**To:** Electoral Boundaries Review Mailbox  
**Subject:** Submission of Hon Neil Thomson to Boundary Review

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To the Western Australian Electoral Commission  
Submission of Hon Neil Thomson MLC  
1 May 2023

I write to make a brief submission on the review of electoral boundaries currently being undertaken by the Western Australian Electoral Commission.

Firstly, I write to endorse the submission made by the WA Division of the Liberal Party and ask the Commission implements recommendations made on specific boundary adjustments – meaning there would be no net reduction in the number of regional seats which are represented in the Legislative Assembly.

The WA Liberal's approach would provide a workable interim solution to known demographic changes while exercising natural justice while unknown changes are properly assessed. It is clear that demographic trends have not favoured the regions to the point where a single member now represents an area of more than 800,000 km<sup>2</sup> in North West Central and seats like the Kimberley are more difficult to match with logical common interests. Both of these seats are an amalgam of more than two seats in the not-so-distant past. This places considerable burden on regional members and results in a less than perfect level of representation of regional people – regardless of party affiliation of the regional member.

Regional lower house seats are becoming so geographically dispersed and so culturally diverse that further amalgamation would effectively mean large cohorts of those regions could become less representable. It saddens me to say so, but this situation has been compounded by recent changes to Upper House rules, taking effect in 2025.

Notwithstanding the above, an issue which should be the focus of the Commission is the lower voter enrolment in regional and remote seats. This is directly relevant to the Commission's consideration of lower house seats and directly impacted by the efforts of the Commission which is responsible for voter registration.

I am concerned that if the Commission chooses to ignore this issue, it will simply result in further alienation of the electoral system by a larger proportion of regional people. The evidence is available noting the Australian Bureau of Statistics population numbers correlate most poorly with the enrolment numbers in remote seats.

The Commission has as part of its duty, an obligation to ensure adult Australians of the age of 18 years and older are registered on the electoral roll. It is my sad conclusion that the Commission has (for many of the reasons, including remoteness) been unable to ensure as larger proportion of the adult community is enrolled in the regions, and I expect this proportion is trending upwards as citizens living in the bush become more disenfranchised by decisions of the Commission.

It is therefore vital that any decision to abolish seats in the regions is only taken after the Commission has properly satisfied itself that the same proportion of people are enrolled to vote as they are in the metropolitan region and that it has done everything reasonably within its power to ensure adults are enrolled. Without such assurance, the

Commission is in no position to properly undertake its duty under its legislation – in my opinion – and specifically conclude to abolish regional seats.

Given this situation, I believe the Commission should act in accordance with the precautionary principle and only make minor adjustments to boundaries to reflect known demographic changes without taking excessive measures (including abolition of regional seats) that do not properly take into consideration lower regional enrolment rates.

I reiterate my support to the recommendations of the WA Division of the Liberal Party.

Hon Neil Thomson MLC  
Member of Mining and Pastoral Region  
Shadow Minister for Planning, Environment, Lands and Heritage  
[neil.thomson@mp.wa.gov.au](mailto:neil.thomson@mp.wa.gov.au)