

Response to Western Australia's Proposed Electoral Boundaries Changes

I write in response to the June 2011 release of Western Australia's proposed electoral boundaries.

My particular objection focuses on the Legislative Council boundaries, especially the decision to move the seat of Mandurah from the South West to the South Metropolitan Region and the continued presence of the seat of Albany in the South West instead of the Agricultural Region.

Notwithstanding the long-term unsustainability of the present allocation of Legislative Council seats between the Perth metropolitan area and the remainder of Western Australia, I believe that the decisions on the seats of Mandurah and Albany need to be reconsidered.

The move to include the seat of Mandurah in the Perth metropolitan area will see a significant increase in the rural weightage, resulting in a half of the Legislative Council elected by only 23.8% of the State's voters. This disparity has altered dramatically since the 1989 introduction of proportional representation, when 26.5% of enrolments in WA were non-metropolitan.

During this period, 1989 to 2008, the rural weightage has increased from 2.78 to 3.21 to one.

The seat of Mandurah moving to the South Metropolitan Region should be reviewed with these figures in mind.

The return of the seat of Mandurah to the South West Region then adds weight for the relocation of the seat of Albany to the Agricultural Region. This would create a more even Legislative Assembly seat breakdown of six, five and five seats in the country Legislative Council regions. It is also interesting to note that currently (2008 figures) in the Agricultural Region, 11.9% of voters have elected 33.3% of the Legislative Council.

That figure would change dramatically and be much fairer with a significant reduction in size of the South West Region.

There is support at the local south coast level, from people involved in local government and regional development, for Albany to be included in the Agricultural Region.

Many of the people I've spoken to about this matter have pointed out the community of interest and functional commonality of the Albany area with that of the Great Southern. They also regard Albany as a Regional Centre for the Agricultural Region rather than the more disconnected South West Region. A comment made by a former Area Consultative Chair (Great Southern), was that Albany and the South Coast have little, if anything, to do with the west coast apart from tourists using the South West Highway.

I believe these local perspectives require serious consideration when setting new boundaries.

The fact that the redistribution report advocates the seat of Wagin moving to the southern border of the Shire of Plantagenet is, I believe, an acknowledgement of the seat of Albany's position as a rural/regional port and service centre in the Great Southern.

Whilst I understand the difficulties faced in setting new electoral boundaries, I believe that the changes I have brought to your attention warrant consideration for the particular reasons I have outlined.

Yours sincerely

Hon M.F. Benson-Lidholm JP MLC
MEMBER FOR AGRICULTURAL REGION
11 July 2011