

W A E C

24 AUG 2015

Dear Commissioners,

Thank you for allowing this process to take place publicly. Though few members of the public take advantage of the opportunity to comment and advise, that we can do so at all is a sign of a healthy and functioning democratic system.

I do not have the expertise to comment at length on the proposed boundary changes, other than to say that the obvious difficulties in a) removing a seat from the regions and b) adding a seat to the southern corridor and not the northern corridor seem to be quite likely to result in the restriction of 59 seats. It was good to hear that there is a proposal to extend this to 63 seats, and I believe this will make life easier for all involved at the next redistribution.

Instead, I wish to object to the proposal to change the names of seats away from the names of suburbs, in favour of naming electorates after worthy individuals. This may have strictly been an internal decision, but I couldn't help noting that this very issue had been brought up during the 2011 objections by a Mr Dominic Cuscuna, and I believe this is probably part of the reason for the proposal. I will address his concerns first.

Mr Cuscuna rightly points out the absurdity of having part of a suburb cut out of an electorate that shares its name. But doesn't this simply mean that the Commission should avoid as much as possible dividing suburbs between electorates? It is true that some suburbs are far larger than others, but a name can hold a great deal of information and value within it. People are going to expect that their suburb belongs entirely to one electorate, regardless of the size of the suburb. While I assume that the Commission uses statistical areas for the purposes of population, statistical areas are just that - numbers. They cannot account for the concept of belonging to a particular suburb. I do wonder, again, if this problem will be eased by increasing the number of seats, and, potentially, with a slowing of the growth of the population.

Mr Cuscuna's second concern was that it is confusing for residents of neighbouring suburbs to vote in a district named after only one suburb in the area. I think this is under-estimating the people of Western Australia. If you live in Willetton, the concept of voting in a district called Riverton is not going to be particularly taxing, certainly no more than voting for a district with an unfamiliar name.

This brings me to the Commission's stated reasons for beginning this shift in naming conventions. The primary reason given is that stability is being affected by the population shifts Perth has been undergoing over the past decade. The assumption here is that the population will continue to grow at the same rate for the foreseeable future, which is by no means guaranteed. But even if we assume it does grow at such a rate, what kind of stability is brought by a non-suburban name being applied to a district? If seats continue to change at the same rate, suburbs will still be moving out of one district and into another at a fairly rapid rate. The people living in these suburbs will still have to get used to a new name for their district. It may provide stability for sitting MPs, because they will be able to keep their pens and calendars with 'Member for x' written on them, but that hardly seems important.

The problem, again, seems to be that the Commission is being forced to shuffle 59 seats around. The addition of one seat in the southern corridor seems to have completely changed

the map in a way which is not ideal. Were there more seats to play with, the boundaries would be less likely to require such changes. Given the proposal to add more seats, which would bring with them more stability, it seems unnecessary to bring about these name changes in the name of stability (which they would not actually provide anyway).

This raises the question of what the point of a name actually is. As I stated earlier, names can hold a great deal of information and value within them. If I say I live in East Fremantle, then I consider myself a part of that community. It is unlikely that I will only remain in that suburb in my day to day life, so I would consider the surrounding suburbs to be a part of my community. Therefore, if I consider my suburb and its neighbours to be a community, I would expect my electoral district to represent that community. To name districts after one of these suburbs is therefore entirely logical. I will be able to recognise that district as being mine by virtue of its closeness to where I live. Furthermore, MPs tend to make an effort to place their office within the suburb their district is named after, which makes life easier for us - the people they serve.

The policy of choosing the new names under this policy appears to me to have two flaws. The first is that of the names that have (and haven't) been picked, and the second is in what these names mean and the value that they hold.

The Commission has clearly tried hard to find names which are of some kind of value historically, but which many in the community will have little to no recognition of, presumably so that these people achieve wider recognition. I am not sure it is the place of electoral districts to be in the role of advocacy, though it is a nice thought. I appreciate also that the Commission has tried to choose names which have some connection with the area which, as should be clear by now, I believe is the single most important part of district names. Unfortunately, history does not always quite work in the way we wish, and some of these names appear to be well out of left-field. For example, I don't believe travelling through the Swan Hills area regularly is a good reason to name the electorate Salvado. If any electorate was to be named after him (something I'm not sure the man himself would necessarily have wanted), surely it would be Moore. It is good that Murdoch (the suburb) would be in Murdoch (the district), lest we have a situation like at the federal level, where neither Cannington nor the City of Canning are in the electorate of Canning. But this is not guaranteed for the future, and would be especially confusing should the suburb leave the district. It is also clear that a number of the proposed names have very little to do with the area their name is being given to, which is a mis-step.

The Commission has been wise to avoid political names. As the AEC will one day find out, the concept of simply naming electorates after former Prime Ministers will run into difficulty when there are more Prime Ministers than there are seats left to be named. At this point, the AEC will have to either scrap the policy, or decide which Prime Ministers are not important enough to have an electorate named in their honour. This kind of value judgement is, more broadly, something that the Commission will also be unable to avoid in the future if it continues down this path. Once all the electorates have been filled out, what then? It can't be assumed that there will always be new electorates to name, as it is unlikely the Legislative Assembly will always grow. If an electorate becomes unviable due to a lack of population, will the electorate that replaces it elsewhere in the state carry the same name? Or will that person no longer be regarded as of enough worth to have an electorate named

after them? Furthermore, if one name is replaced with another in the *same* electorate, not only is it suggesting that the new person is of more worth than the old, it also produces the exact same 'instability' that the current use of suburban names causes! I do not believe these kind of value judgements are what the Commission should be spending their time and energy on. This is only compounded by the non-use of names of our greatest apolitical people (such as O'Connor and Stirling), which, while done for valid reasons, makes the names being used seem like a second-tier of importance.

For these reasons, I believe the old policy of naming districts after suburbs should be kept. I hope that you will consider these suggestions and take them on board. While the idea behind the new policy is nice in theory, in practice (as is often the case with nice theories) it does not add up, and seems entirely unnecessary.