

225 Ob

From: Electoral Boundaries Review Mailbox
Sent: Tuesday, 22 August 2023 11:02 AM
To: [Redacted]
Subject: Ob 225 - FW: Objection to proposed boundaries - The Nationals WA
Attachments: The Nationals WA - Objection to proposed boundaries 230818.pdf

From: Douglas Rodgers <[Redacted]>
Sent: Monday, 21 August 2023 4:14 PM
To: Electoral Boundaries Review Mailbox <boundaries@waec.wa.gov.au>
Subject: Objection to proposed boundaries - The Nationals WA

[External Email] This email was sent from outside the organisation. Be cautious, particularly with links and attachments.
All SPAM emails must be reported using the instructions on the intranet.

Good afternoon,
Please find attached objection to proposed boundaries from The Nationals WA.
Sincerely,
Douglas Rodgers

Douglas Rodgers
State Director
The Nationals WA
PO Box 1418, West Perth WA 6872
Ph: [Redacted] E: [Redacted]



The Information contained in this e-mail, any attachments and related communications is confidential information only for the use of the intended reader of this message is not the intended forward recipient you are hereby notified that any dissemination, distribution or copying of this communication is prohibited. If you have received this communication in error, please notify us immediately by e-mail at the originating address. Thank you.

Acknowledgement of Country: The Western Australian Electoral Commission acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands on which our electoral activities take place. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

| | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| W.A.E.C. RECORDS | |
| FILE No. | <u>DST 0152</u> |
| DATE: | 21 AUG 2023 |
| ACTION BY: | _____ |

Mr Douglas J.D. Rodgers
State Director
The Nationals WA
1 Graylands Road
Claremont WA 6056

Western Australian Distribution Commissioners

Electoral Boundaries WA
GPO Box F316
Perth WA 6841
Via email: boundaries@waec.wa.gov.au

2023 ELECTORAL BOUNDARY REVIEW: COMMENT ON BOUNDARY SUGGESTIONS

Dear Commissioners,

The Nationals WA has reviewed the electoral boundaries you propose for the 2025 State Election and provide the following objections to aid your final deliberations.

We reaffirm our suggestion to Commissioners, which demonstrates both the need and the method to maintain fair and equitable Legislative Assembly representation for all West Australians. Regional, rural, and remote communities will be further disadvantaged by losing further parliamentary representation in favour of increasing the representation enjoyed by those in the Metropolitan area. Commissioners were presented with extensive evidence in earlier rounds of this process to show this was unnecessary and it is disappointing this reality was not used as a basis for the proposed boundaries.

We note that scores of suggestions and comments from across the state supporting the retention of all sixteen regional seats and it is disappointing to see these voices not considered with the concern they deserve. In order to maintain public confidence in such important processes, it is vital that institutions consider all submissions from the impacted public with respect.

The following document sets out the objections The Nationals WA holds for the electoral boundaries proposed and sets out solutions to these. It also sets out a series of concerns The Nationals WA holds with the underlying data and methodology undertaken to draw the boundaries proposed.

This final objections period is an opportunity for Commissioners' to consider sensible suggestions from the public with the diligence they have been prepared.

We trust Commissioners' are committed to delivering a final set of boundaries that reflect the balance of contributions made by West Australians across the state and look forward to their final determination.

Democratic Equity

The Nationals WA thank Commissioners for acknowledging that the Electoral Act 1907 favours retaining a distinction between metropolitan and non-metropolitan electoral districts. We note that a similar division has been continued for some of the larger regional cities including Mandurah, Bunbury and Geraldton.

OBJECTIONS TO PROPOSED ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES – THE NATIONALS WA

Commissioners should review the boundaries of electoral districts approaching the maximum variance to ADE. However the reduction from sixteen regional seats to fifteen is not a requirement of the Act and is unjustified when considered against any of the requirements of Section 16I.

The Act specifically allows for minor variances in electorate population, with a larger variance to be considered in electorates with large district allowances, which we believe were included in the Act to specifically address equity and the factors described in Section 16I. Under the proposed changes, and the latest enrolment data from June 2025, Kalgoorlie and Kimberley already have the most electors (inclusive of LDA) of all 59 seats. This is described further below.

Specific Objections to Electoral Boundaries

Notwithstanding our objection to a loss of regional representation, The Nationals WA offers the following objections to specific boundary proposals.

In keeping with the Electoral Act 1907, The Nationals WA objects to the division of local government boundaries where possible, to maintain connection between communities of common interest, and to deliver sustainable electoral boundaries.

We ask that these objections be considered concurrently as they have been designed.

Shire of Northampton

The Nationals WA objects to the proposed division of the Shire of Northampton between Geraldton and Mid West districts.

The community of Kalbarri shares no community of interest with the other communities within the Mid West district and shares very much with the Northampton and Geraldton communities.

Enrolment data shows that having Shire of Northampton united in Geraldton district will maintain acceptable FVADE for both Geraldton and Mid West electorates

The Shire of Northampton should be included in the Geraldton electoral district as a whole.

Shire of Plantagenet

The Shire of Plantagenet should be maintained as a whole and remain within the Warren-Blackwood electorate.

Commissioners' proposal to remove the Shire of Plantagenet from the Warren-Blackwood electorate, splitting it between the electorates of Roe and Albany ignores the Electoral Act's requirements to maintain local government boundaries where possible, to maintain connection between communities of common interest, and to deliver sustainable electoral boundaries.

The existing boundaries of the Albany electoral district are well within the VFADE requirements set out by the Act and the Regional Australia Institute 'Regional Movers Index' identifies Albany as one of the nation's growth hot spots. This makes an increase to the footprint of the Albany electorate unnecessary and unjustified. By including sections of the Plantagenet LGA, Commissioners are ensuring that this electorate will once again require redistribution in the next boundary review.

Shire of Plantagenet shares closer community and economic links with others in Warren-Blackwood than it does with the Albany community. Such an arrangement stands to foster stronger collaboration and more effective representation of shared interests.

OBJECTIONS TO PROPOSED ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES – THE NATIONALS WA

Shire of Victoria Plains

The Nationals WA objects to the Shire of Victoria Plains being split between the new electorate of Mid West and Central Wheatbelt. This change would see communities of close commonality, like New Norcia and Calingiri, divided against good sense.

The Shire of Victoria Plains should be kept within a single electorate. While splitting the Shire has little impact on the Average District Enrolment of the adjacent electorates, it will have a significant impact on this community's access to representation at a state level.

Dividing the Shire of Victoria Plains fails to recognise communities of interest, land use patterns, means of communication travel and the existing boundaries which exist in the area. Section 16I of the Act requires the Commissioners to give due consideration to these factors.

Shire of Kondinin

The Nationals WA objects to the proposal to have Shire of Kondinin moved out of Central Wheatbelt and into the electorate of Roe.

This decision is unnecessary given that Roe already covers enough land to achieve the Large District Allowance and therefore is already within the allowable variation from the Average District Enrolment. This unnecessarily adds another 7,376 km² to Roe potentially marginalising regional communities as fewer regional Members of Parliament are required to represent larger areas and additional communities.

Communities within the Shire of Kondinin hold close commonalities and relationship with their fellow Central Wheatbelt communities to the North, with Merredin their primary service centre. The transport network and local history means they share very little commonality with the Roe communities to the South and are not well placed in that electorate.

Moving the Shire of Kondinin into Roe fails to recognise communities of interest, land use patterns, means of communication, travel and unnecessarily contradicts the status quo. Section 16I of the Act requires the Commissioners to give due consideration to these factors.

Central Wheatbelt electorate

The Nationals WA objects to the Commissioners' proposed boundaries of the Central Wheatbelt electorate. The boundaries proposed remove Central Wheatbelt's Large District Allowance (LDA) status without meaningfully improving the serviceability of the electorate. The Commissioners' proposal would make Central Wheatbelt the largest electorate without LDA status by some 76,580 km² (that margin is roughly 12 times the land area of the Perth Metropolitan area). Attribution of LDA has ramifications beyond the impact on elector numbers for setting boundaries, and loss of this status would see a dramatic further reduction in servicing of this region. At a time when regional West Australians are losing upper and lower house seats, this seems an unnecessarily cruel mistake to foist upon these rural communities.

The Nationals WA suggests that accepting the boundary objections above would ensure Central Wheatbelt maintained its LDA status without dramatically affecting Commissioners' boundaries proposal.

OBJECTIONS TO PROPOSED ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES – THE NATIONALS WA

Gascoyne Region

The Nationals WA objects to the division of the Gascoyne region between the proposed Pilbara and Mid West electorates.

This region has been held together within a single electorate (of various names) for the history of the Legislative Assembly. While this area may not be defined by a local government area, the communities between Shark Bay and Exmouth and inland to the disparate communities of the Upper Gascoyne, share a unique biome, land use patterns, and communities of interest. The Gascoyne holds its own identity and place within the WA landscape. The Gascoyne's unique nature is reflected in the structures of various government and non-government organisations and agencies and in WA's electoral history.

This region forms the core justification for the maintenance of the North West Central electorate, which is able to collate the shared interests across the Gascoyne, Murchison, and desert lands of the interior. The same will not be possible with a Mid West electorate spanning from the rural outskirts of Perth to the desolate pastoral lands of the Upper Gascoyne and Murchison.

The Nationals WA object to the splitting of the Gascoyne region and suggest the maintenance of the North West Central electorate is the best manner to ensure this unique region has its representation maintained.

Remote Western Australia Demographic Challenges

The Nationals WA believes that unusual demographic issues in regional and remote Western Australia further intensifies inequity with the reduction of rural seats. Under-enrolment in regional areas impacts this boundary review and it is incumbent on Commissioners to ensure its impact is minimised in the final determination.

Under-enrolment of indigenous Australians

We note that the AEC recorded a reduction of estimated unenrolled indigenous Western Australians from 18,518 to 9,466 between January and June 2023. However, enrolment of indigenous West Australians remains among the lowest of all States at 86.9%. The under-enrolment of indigenous West Australians is linked closely with remoteness and therefore impacts the proportional share of representation most acutely in remote electorates.

The final boundaries determination must reflect the true profile of the electorate and where "Relevant Day" data does not reflect it, new data must be employed. This may have a significant impact on the number of registered voters in the North West Central, Pilbara and Kimberly electorates. Since March 2023, electoral data shows a 10.7% increase in enrolment in the Kimberley, 5.4% increase in North West Central, 3.9% increase in the Pilbara and 2% increase in both Kalgoorlie and Geraldton electorates.

Under-enrolment in districts with a high transient and FIFO workforce

The fly-in-fly-out (FIFO) workforce in WA is estimated to be approximately 60,000 people. In the current North West Central, Kalgoorlie and Pilbara electorates, the FIFO and transient workforce is potentially larger than the number of electors in each of these districts. The transient workforce includes people who live in residential housing within these communities but maintain enrolment in their 'home' electorate (which may also be interstate). In periods of high growth, the transient and FIFO workforce also causes electors to be displaced and relocate out of electorate as housing costs become unmanageable. This housing shortage is partially expressed in the large waitlists for public housing in

these electorates, and the under-representation of retirees compared to the state average. The under-representation of retirees also relates to a historic lack of health services in these communities. These factors contribute to an effective under-enrolment and under-representation in the North West Central, Kalgoorlie, and Pilbara populations.

As is so often highlighted by the disparate outcomes experienced West Australians based on where they live, access to government in all its forms is not experienced equally by all West Australians. While The Nationals WA holds a position contrary to current electoral legislative framework, we understand the reality Commissioners are forced to operate within.

Mid West Electorate

The Nationals WA objects to the proposed creation of a large, amorphous regional electorate, to be named "Mid West".

The Commissioners concluded that transferring the most northern, eastern and south-eastern areas of North West Central and Moore to adjoining districts and then amalgamating the remaining area into a single electorate would contain a significantly more cohesive community of interest by virtue of a predominant primary production industry.

We believe this assessment is demographically simplistic, a departure from accepted positions, and incorrect. Using the prominence of primary production as the grounds for 'common interest' is a remarkably broad criterion, which would render almost any community in WA in common with any other.

Publicly available data shows that some 10.5% of West Australians are employed in primary industries (mining, agriculture, forestry, and fishing), with only modest variance between fundamentally urban (Greater Perth 7.3%) and regional (Geraldton 7.2%) populations.

Fundamentally, regional WA cannot simply be defined by what industry some people work in. This argument is not made for districts within Perth and is not a consideration of Section 16I of the act. As reported by The Gascoyne Development Commission reports that their largest industry is actually tourism, followed by Mining. The Mid West Development Commission reports that mining is their largest industry.

As a state rich in primary production, Western Australia has a strong history of recognising the difference between the agricultural (read farming) communities of the South West and Wheatbelt and the communities of the arid North and East of the state, where mining dominates meaningful production with some broadscale grazing activity also present. The impact of these different industries on the small communities that service them cannot be underestimated and the existing separation set out by the Legislative Council regions should be observed.

Unlike the existing electorates of Moore and North West Central, the proposed Mid West electorate is devoid of common land use; physical features; and distance from the Capital. The coastal and farming communities of Lancelin and Jurien Bay, for example, share nothing in common with remote mining and pastoral settlements Meekatharra or Gascoyne Junction. Despite their shared reliance on primary production (something they share with all WA), the experience of residents in each community differ so dramatically it is impossible to consider these communities to share common interest.

OBJECTIONS TO PROPOSED ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES – THE NATIONALS WA

Conclusion

The Nationals WA wishes to thank Commissioners for their consideration of the series of objections above.

We recognise that while the Electoral Act may not be perfect, it does continue to recognise the importance of electorates reflecting a shared community of interest and the vastness of regional WA.

Regional West Australians are relying on you to ensure their voice is not unnecessarily minimised.

The above document sets out a series of solutions to problems identified in Commissioner's boundaries proposal and we trust Commissioner's will consider it with the concern and respect it has been presented.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'D. Rodgers', written over a faint, illegible typed name.

Mr Douglas J.D. Rodgers
State Director, The Nationals WA