

From: Electoral Boundaries Review Mailbox
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To: s
Subject: 231 Ob FW: WALGA | Objection to Proposed Boundaries
Attachments: 2023 Objection to Proposed Boundaries (ID 656125).pdf

From: Kathy Robertson <...@walga.asn.au>
Sent: Monday, 21 August 2023 10:23 AM
To: Electoral Boundaries Review Mailbox <boundaries@waec.wa.gov.au>
Subject: WALGA | Objection to Proposed Boundaries

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Good morning

Please find **attached** an objection to the Commissioners' proposed boundaries for the 2025 State General Election on behalf of the WA Local Government Association (WALGA) and its Members.

If you have any queries about the objection or require more information, please refer to the contact details on page 2 of the document.

Kind regards

Kathy Robertson | Executive Officer Governance | WALGA
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www.walga.asn.au | www.youeveryday.com.au

WALGA acknowledges the continuing connection of Aboriginal people to Country, culture and community. We embrace the vast Aboriginal cultural diversity throughout Western Australia, including Boorloo (Perth), on the land of the Whadjuk Noongar People, where WALGA is located and we acknowledge and pay respect to Elders past and present.

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Objection

**Proposed Boundaries
for the 2025 State General
Election**

August 2023



About WALGA

The Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA or 'the Association') is the peak organisation for Local Government in Western Australia. The Association is an independent, membership-based group representing and supporting the work and interests of 137 mainland Local Governments in Western Australia, plus the Indian Ocean Territories of Christmas Island and Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

The Association provides an essential voice for more than 1,200 Elected Members, more than 22,000 Local Government employees, and the 2.6 million constituents that they serve and represent. The Association also provides professional advice and offers services that provide financial benefits to Local Governments.

Contacts

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Overview

WALGA and its Members object to the proposal to reduce the number of non-metropolitan districts by one as the reduction in political representation will negatively impact rural and regional communities.

Basis of Objection

Diminished political representation

As an Association representing Local Government across the breadth of the vast state of Western Australia, WALGA recognises the importance of political representation. With demographic and other forces pulling people and resources away from some regions towards the metropolitan area, political representation becomes increasingly important.

The Commissioners' proposal to reduce the number of non-metropolitan districts by one, will significantly reduce the political representation of regional communities. This reduction in representation is compounded by the 2021 change to the Legislative Council regions to create a whole of state electorate. WALGA also made a submission at the time of the 2021 review opposing the 'one vote, one value' reform on the basis that the voice of regional, rural, and remote communities would be overwhelmed by the relative number of voters in metropolitan Perth and more populous towns.

The perspective of many regional communities is that, without sufficient political representation, their concerns will be “out of sight, out of mind”, swamped by the sheer weight of voters in metropolitan Perth and large regional centres. Regional communities need effective representation to ensure that the unique needs and challenges of people living outside the metropolitan area are adequately addressed at a State level.

Increased pressure on regional Local Governments

As political representation of non-metropolitan communities at the State level is diminished, the political representation provided by Local Governments will become even more important. This additional responsibility will be challenging for many non-metropolitan Local Governments, already stretched beyond their current capacity and resourcing.

The service provision expectations and requirements of Local Governments have increased considerably, rarely with commensurate increases in funding and resourcing. This has led to Local Governments, particularly in rural and remote parts of Western Australia, providing services previously the responsibility of other spheres of government. Contemporary examples include the provision of primary health care; aged care; housing; and economic development. Diminished political representation, requiring Local Government to fill another gap, will further stretch capacity and resources.

The contributions of non-metropolitan regions

In considering political representation it is important to acknowledge the economic contribution of non-metropolitan districts to the wealth and standard of living in Western Australia.

Regional Western Australia makes a significant contribution to the WA economy. As of July 2023, the regions accounted for 35 percent of Gross State Product. Regional WA is also a significant employer, with more than 300,000 jobs located in regional WA – around 25% of the state’s total workforce. Many of these jobs are located in the agriculture and mining industries.¹

Regional WA is home to many of the state’s key export industries, including the mining and agriculture sectors. WA is an exports-based economy, and accounts for around half of the national goods exports total each year. Goods exports currently account for 61 percent (\$247 billion) of Western Australia’s gross state product.

As the prevalence of fly-in-fly-out (FIFO) and drive-in-drive-out (DIDO) has increased, it is crucial that the permanent residents of communities that host the bulk of WA’s export industries remain politically represented. In determining the population of districts, no consideration is given to the numbers of FIFO and DIDO workers that essentially reside within regional areas, and in most cases spend more time living and working in the regions than they do in the electorate in which they are registered. If an analysis were to be done to include these numbers of FIFO and DIDO workers within the current electorate boundaries, we would see a very different picture of how our population is dispersed, particularly within the electorates of Moore and North West Central.

In light of the size of WA, and its diversity both economically and geographically, special consideration should be made when casting the net to capture population numbers.

¹ WA Economic Profile – July 2023, [Western Australia's economy and international trade \(www.wa.gov.au\)](http://www.wa.gov.au)

Matters to consider when dividing the State

The proposed amalgamation of North West Central and Moore does not give due consideration to the factors in section 16l of the *Electoral Act 1907* (WA). The proposed new Mid West district will cover an estimated 70 townsites and a broad spectrum of land use patterns, from urban fringe development, remote communities, livestock farming, broad acre cropping, and pastoral and mining operations. Factors such as community of interest and land use patterns do not seem to have been taken into account in this proposal to amalgamate urban fringes (peri urban) with regional and remote communities. It is essential that all aspects of an electorate be considered when determining boundaries, not just the number of registered voters.

Resourcing of electorate offices in the regions

Even before the proposed reduction of non-metropolitan Legislative Assembly districts, there was a need for additional resourcing in the regions to improve the capacity of State representatives to service their electorate. This is particularly true for those electorates that cover a large geographical area. Any reduction in overall regional representation will only exacerbate this problem.

Resourcing for electorate offices in the regions needs to be significantly increased to improve the capacity of representatives to engage with communities within their electorate. The ability for a State Member to effectively represent the interests of their electorate is reliant upon their ability to effectively communicate with and hear from their constituents. An increase in resources, including staff, is needed for electorate offices in non-metropolitan districts, particularly those covering vast distances.

Conclusion

WALGA acknowledges the challenges and limited scope inherent to the Commissioners' task to propose electoral boundary changes. Nevertheless, as an Association representing communities all over the state through Local Government, WALGA supports strong and effective political representation for the non-metropolitan districts to ensure that regional WA is supported to continue to generate export and employment opportunities that benefit us all.

Any further reduction in political representation at the State level will necessarily lead to an expectation that regional Local Governments will expand to fill this gap, a role that may stretch Local Governments beyond their capacity and resources.

Representation for non-metropolitan districts (especially those covering large geographical areas) also needs bolstering by increased resources for electorate offices.

WALGA's objection to the proposed boundaries are on the basis that the reduction of non-metropolitan districts will:

- 1. Further diminish political representation for regional communities;**
- 2. Increase pressure on regional Local Governments; and**
- 3. Fail to recognise the contributions of non-metropolitan districts to the WA economy.**

WALGA and its Members support increased resourcing for electorate offices in non-metropolitan districts, particularly those that cover a large geographical area, to ensure effective political representation at the State level.
