

398 Ob

From: Electoral Boundaries Review Mailbox
Sent: Friday, 25 August 2023 1:31 PM
To:
Subject: 398 Ob

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From: Sean Fletcher <ceo@victoriaplains.wa.gov.au>
Sent: Friday, 18 August 2023 4:08 PM
To: Electoral Boundaries Review Mailbox <boundaries@waec.wa.gov.au>
Cc: Marie Freeman <marie.freeman@victoriaplains.wa.gov.au>
Subject: Objection to Proposed Changes to WA Electoral Boundaries - 2023 Electoral Boundary Review

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Dear Commissioners

Thank you for the opportunity for the Shire of Victoria Plains to provide further comment regarding the proposed changes to the WA electoral boundaries.

As such, we object to the electoral boundaries you have proposed for the Legislative Assembly.

The decision to replace another regional electorate with a metropolitan one is both alarming and disheartening. This move serves to further diminish the influence of regional Western Australia, a voice already restrained by government policy and crucially needed as regional communities confront various challenges. This suggested reconfiguration seems to undervalue the essential need to preserve shared community interests. It overlooks countless expressions from regular Western Australians advocating for the retention of 16 regional seats. Disappointingly, it also dismisses thoughtfully crafted proposals that present a clear case for preserving the current level of regional representation in compliance with the Electoral Act.

Regional electorates, which already cover larger areas, demand regional MLAs to navigate greater distances, represent more diverse communities, and judiciously distribute their funding allocations across more expansive areas. The merging of regional seats risks voter exclusion due to the increase in already sizable constituencies. It also threatens to centralise power in metropolitan areas, causing an imbalance in representation where urban concerns overshadow regional interests. The proposed boundaries disregard the need to preserve the unity of our communities and dismiss public advocacy for the continued existence of the current 16 regional seats. This move signals the continuation of a worrying trend that has stripped regional voters of 18 crucial upper house representatives. Since the 1987 redistribution, 12 lower house seats have been stripped from regional WA. These considerations necessitate a rethink of these boundary alterations to secure fair representation for all Western Australians.

Of the many changes proposed, we object most strongly for the following reasons:

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1. The partitioning of regional shires across Western Australia - such as Victoria Plains - for the mere transfer of a few hundred votes between electorates threatens to rupture tightly knit regional communities who depend on shared essential services. These communities, which often operate as interconnected units, may face significant disruption due to such electoral adjustments. It is of utmost importance that regional local councils remain undivided, ensuring their ability to continue serving their constituents effectively. Electoral considerations should not override the necessity of maintaining the unity and integrity of these regional communities for a modest shift in votes.

As per the submission put forward during the comments phase of the Review, Victoria Plains as a district needs harmony regarding the seven communities that makes up its fabric. As a whole, we understand the natural affiliations and communities of interest, land use patterns and physical features and means of communication. The greater district serves as the hub or axis point not just to its seven neighbouring districts, but also the significant throughput or pathway to and from other parts of the State. The freight task (Aglime route, Wheatbelt Secondary Freight Network, Northam, Muchea Hub, Agriculture, Mining, General Freight and so on), as we said previously, is not to be “sneezed” at and with this, the district of Victoria Plains is finding itself very quickly in the situation where it is becoming part of the hinterland that is Gingin, Chittering, Toodyay and Dandaragan. The Seat of Moore in general deals with the State’s key transport throughput and it makes sense that it is retained as is in this regard. We need one representative that understands this, not a district split in two where that understanding between two representatives may be at odds with what is required and requires the duplication of effort to ensure consistent outcomes for the district’s future.

2. Further to the above, the abolition of the Moore electorate and the abolition of the North West Central electorate and creation of a new Mid-west electorate separates areas with a strong community of interest such as Exmouth and Carnarvon from each other.
3. While the Moore electorate maintained connection between communities of interest in a large electorate, the new Mid-West electorate lumps together such a vast variety of communities, it is difficult to see where Commissioners found commonality. The proposed seat would span from Muchea on the outskirts of Perth to just a few kilometres south of Newman in the north. More than 1,000km from top to tail and no large population centre within its boundaries. This is a remarkably difficult electorate for any local member to service and all but impossible for any local member to be held to account by their constituents.
4. Under the proposed boundary changes, residents of the Shire of Chapman Valley and Mullewa would be included in the electorate of Geraldton, there being no degree of commonality with respect to land use patterns.
5. The dividing of the Shire of Northampton between Mid-West and Geraldton electorates - the communities within this Local Government Area have been divided since the previous redistribution and suffered the challenge of working with two separate Members of Parliament who represent vast areas.
6. The creation of a new Oakford electorate. As is clear in the data released by the Commission, there is no justification for the creation of a new electorate within the metropolitan area as the metropolitan area is already well within acceptable limits of representation.

The Shire and I stand with thousands of regional West Australians expressing their disappointment at this redistribution, viewing it as a regrettable lost chance. We urge you to re-evaluate your proposal, ensuring the preservation of the 16 regional seats.

Kind Regards,

Sean Fletcher
Chief Executive Officer



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