



Australian Democrats (WA Division) Comments on Electoral Boundary Submissions

Introduction

The Australian Democrats (WA Division) (“the Democrats”) welcome the opportunity to provide further comment on the written suggestions for the 2007 electoral redistribution. By 4 May 2007 a significant number of written submissions had been lodged with the Office of the Electoral Distribution Commissioners, and these submissions included many good suggestions for how the redistribution could be carried out. It is encouraging to see an increased number of organizations and individuals take an interest in what is an important part of the democratic process.

The Democrats wish to comment further on some of the suggestions made for the redistribution process. It is recognized at the outset that no one party or individual possesses a monopoly on good ideas or proposals, and there are a variety of ways the electoral boundaries can be drawn that would meet the requirements of the *Electoral Act 1907* (“the Act”).

Having had time to further examine our proposed boundaries the Democrats would also like to suggest a small number of changes and/or corrections to our original submission, to better reflect its intention, and to ensure that all districts are ‘within quota’. These changes are outlined in further detail below.

The Democrats are grateful for the assistance the staff at the Office of the Electoral Distribution Commissioners have provided in enabling us to transfer our proposed ideas and boundaries into meaningful maps that will assist with the redistribution process. We acknowledge the significant work this particular redistribution entails, and look forward to providing whatever assistance we can for this process.

Metropolitan v Non Metropolitan Regions

The Democrats note that some submissions have proposed removing a small number of electors currently within the Perth Metropolitan area and placing them in adjoining non-metropolitan regions. The main reason behind such a move would be to apportion the voters more evenly throughout the State, given that the current metropolitan area contains enough voters for approximately 42.7 seats at the average district enrolment.

Most lower house districts will need to be overenrolled if 42 seats are to fit entirely within the current Metropolitan area. This effectively reduces the permissible range of voters that can be included in each of these districts, which in turn somewhat limits the ability of the Electoral Distribution Commissioners to create electorates that take into account natural borders, such as major roads, freeways and rivers.

Dr Charles Richardson makes a very pertinent observation that amendments made to the Act now permit some fluidity in what constitutes the metropolitan and non-metropolitan regions of the Legislative Council. This is a welcome amendment, and one that, on reflection, the Democrats believe should be utilised to ensure there is a more equitable distribution of voters across the State.

The Democrats therefore agree it would be desirable to remove a small proportion of voters from the current metropolitan area, which would enable greater flexibility in the design of electorates. It is envisaged that this would be restricted to voters living on the outskirts of Perth, in areas that are essentially semi-rural in nature.

The currently metropolitan boundary does not reflect any sharp distinction between urban and non-urban areas, and is more an historic reference for planning purposes than anything else. Parts of the Peel Region in the South West are densely populated and far more urbanized than some outlying areas of the current metropolitan area.

The Democrats agree that removing the Shire of Serpentine-Jarrahdale from the metropolitan area would be an expedient way of evening up the average number of voters between metropolitan and non-metropolitan districts. Such an approach would enable these voters to be placed in a South West electorate that incorporates the northern part of the Shire of Murray. This would also be consistent with the desire of the Shire of Murray itself to be included in less urbanized electorates.

This approach would also complement the Australian Democrat's original submission, where the East Metropolitan Region would otherwise contain too many electors for only 14 districts if the current metropolitan boundaries were strictly adhered to.

If the Shire of Serpentine-Jarrahdale is removed from the Perth metropolitan area the Democrats advocate the proposed seat to the far south east of Perth would more appropriately be named **Roleystone**, reflecting both the former name of this electorate and a central source of its voters.

The Democrats also propose that a small proportion of voters from the eastern fringes of the Shires of Mundaring and Swan (including the suburbs of Woorooloo, Bailup, Beechina, the Lakes, Malmalling, Goorie, and part of Chidlow) be removed from the Perth Metropolitan area and placed in the proposed seat we have notionally called Merredin-Avon. These areas generally lie to the east of the Darling Escarpment, and have a non-urban identity.

Further comment on individual regions is included below.

Mining and Pastoral

The Democrats note the support of both the Shire of Ravensthorpe and the Shire of Esperance to be included in the Mining and Pastoral Region. Both shires have succinctly outlined the communities of interest and the historical nexus they share with the Goldfields region.

The submission of the Nationals provides extensive reasoning behind the proposal to include the Ravensthorpe and Esperance shires in the Mining and Pastoral Region, including the economic, cultural, geographic and historical links these shires share with the Goldfields. The Nationals have also conducted forums in these regions to assuage the views of local electors.

In preparing its submission the Australian Democrats did not have the benefit of knowing whether the Esperance and Ravensthorpe Shires were in favour of being included in the Mining and Pastoral Region, or whether other parties would advocate such a proposal. The Australian Democrats were particularly pleased to note the support of these shires for such a move, and believe that strong consideration should be given to this proposal. Such a move would be consistent with the criteria established in section 16I of the Act, given the Esperance and Ravensthorpe shires share a community of interest with the Goldfields, and the Mining and Pastoral Region as whole would still very much consist of land that is “primarily for mining and pastoral purposes.”

The boundaries proposed by the Australian Democrats would also distribute the land area and voters quite evenly throughout the Mining and Pastoral Region, ensuring that fair electoral boundaries with a community of interest are created, and that a minimum number of local government authorities would be split. Under the Democrat’s proposed boundaries no seat would have less than 13,800, or more than 16,300, actual electors, while no electorate would be as large in size as the current seat of Murchison-Eyre.¹

¹ Note: The Australian Democrats submission inadvertently included the Shire of Meekatharra in both the proposed seats of Eyre and Murchison. It was intended that the Shire of Meekatharra be wholly included in the proposed seat of Murchison. It was also intended that the proposed seat of Murchison include the western part of the Shire of Roebourne (excluding the towns of Wickham and Roebourne – which form part of the proposed seat of Pilbara). The reference to the “Hope Downs Nichol Mine project” should be a reference to the “Ravensthorpe Nickel Mine”, a project with the potential to bring significant economic benefits to the region.

The Democrats acknowledge that community of interest matters are an important element in the redistribution process, however other issues must also be considered. Additional resources have been granted to Members representing large electorates in recent years, and the creation of an electorate with as little as 3,700 actual voters would be a substantial mal-apportionment far greater than anything that has existed for many years. It would be difficult to justify a 400 to 500 percent vote weighting being giving to a single electorate in a system where most seats have to fit within 10 per cent of the average district enrolment.

The seats in the Mining and Pastoral Region can be drawn in such a way as to distribute the large area allowance in an equitable manner, ensuring a sufficient number of voters are contained in each electorate. The Democrats support such an approach being taken.

Agricultural

The Australian Democrats note suggestions that some areas currently within the South West Region could be placed within the Agricultural Region, and visa versa. The Australian Labor Party advocates its proposed seats of Warren and Albany be included within the Agricultural Region, while the Liberal Party's submission proposes that its seat of Albany be included in the Agricultural Region.

Inevitably this requires a consideration of what constitutes the South West Region and the Agricultural Region under the Act. Section 16H of the Act now defines the South West Region as including "*coastal and forest areas in the south-west of the State*". While there are certain areas that must inevitably be included in the South West Region, it is less clear for other areas (including the great southern). As such, there does appear to be some flexibility in where the boundary between the regions is drawn, and the Democrats agree that moving some voters from the South West to Agricultural would provide an opportunity to 'even up' the voter base within each of the non-metropolitan regions.

The Democrats considered the legislative criteria contained in section 16H of the Act when assigning its proposed seats to the South West. It was noted that our proposed seat of Warren-Blackwood contains both coastal areas and a substantial body of forest, and as such, it would appear it would need to be included in the South West. However, the Australian Democrats' proposed seat of Albany consists entirely of the City of Albany itself (as do many submissions), which is an area that does not contain a substantial amount of forest. As such, there would appear to be some discretion as to whether this electorate should be included in the South West or Agricultural region.

For consistency with the current approach, the Australian Democrats have included the seat of Albany in the South West Region. However, the Australian Democrats would have no objection to an Albany electorate being included in the Agricultural Region.

Democrat's Proposed Boundaries

Having had time to further examine our proposed boundaries, the Democrats realise that several seats were not 'within quota' and need to be re-aligned.

The Democrats believe its proposed seat of Roe-Wagin would be better served if it included the shires of Brookton and Pingelly (currently in the proposed seat of Merredin-Avon). This creates a more even northern boundary line and allows the voters in the Agricultural Region to be distributed more evenly between districts. Roe-Wagin would then contain 21,292 electors, consisting of all voters in the shires of Williams, Boyup Brook, Jerramungup, Kent, Gnowangerup, Lake Grace, Kulin, Dumbleyung, Katanning, Tambellup, Broomehill, Woodanilling, Wagin, West Arthur, Boddington, Kojonup, Corrigin, Kondinin, Wandering, Cuballing, Wickepin, Brookton, Pingelly, and the Shire and Town of Narrogin.

As well as losing the Shires of Brookton and Pingelly, the proposed seat of Merredin-Avon would be better served if the Shire and Town of Northam were included within it, and the Shires of Morawa, Mullewa, Chapman Valley, Northampton, Dalwallinu and Perenjori were excised and included in the seat of Moore. To create a more equitable distribution of voters whilst still maintaining communities of interest, the Australian Democrats also propose this seat include a small number of voters from the eastern fringes of the Shires of Mundaring and Swan, as described earlier.

The proposed seat of Merredin-Avon would then contain 21,210 electors, and would incorporate all voters within the Shires of York, Beverley, Bruce Rock, Narembeen, Kellerberrin, Quairading, Merredin, Tammin, Wyalkatchem, Cunderdin, Dowerin, Goomalling, Trayning, Wongan-Ballidu, Mukinbudin, Koorda, Westonia, Mt Marshall, Nungarin and the Shire and Town of Northam.

In turn the proposed seat of Moore would contain 21,424 electors, consisting of all voters in the Shires of Irwin, Chittering, Gingin, Dandaragan, Carnamah, Coorow, Three Springs, Mingenew, Toodyay, Victoria Plains, Moora, Morawa, Mullewa, Chapman Valley, Dalwallinu, Perenjori and Northampton (excluding that portion of Northampton currently within the Mining and Pastoral Region).

South West

The Democrats agree with Dr Charles Richardson's suggestion that the Shire of Serpentine-Jarrahdale be removed from the metropolitan area and placed in an adjoining Region. The Democrats advocate this could be achieved by joining the Shire of Serpentine-Jarrahdale with the northern part of the Shire of Murray and the northern part of the City of Mandurah, leaving the remaining parts of the City of Mandurah to form the seat of Mandurah itself. The southern part of the Shire of Murray would continue to form part of the proposed seat of Collie-Wellington, as described in the Democrat's original submission.

The Democrats note that many submissions (including its own) suggested the seat of Vasse contains all of the Shire of Busselton and the northern part of the Shire of Augusta-Margaret River (as far south as Margaret River itself). This appears to be a sensible approach to designing an electorate with Busselton as its core.

The Democrats also note that a number of submissions suggested a seat of Bunbury include the whole of the City of Bunbury itself, plus a small number of additional voters. The Democrats submission is similar to this, although it designated the whole of the City of Bunbury as one electorate - which is within the allowable deviation from the quota, albeit on the lower side.

It is also acknowledged that the Shire of Boddington could be included in the South West Region, depending on how the boundaries are drawn.

North Metropolitan

Given the distribution of voters throughout the metropolitan area, there is no single road or dividing line that can easily separate the East Metropolitan Region and North Metropolitan Region. A number of written suggestions (including that of the Democrats) recommended using Wanneroo Road as the dividing line for at least part of these regions. The Democrat's approach is a staggered one, with the dividing line gradually shifting westward from Alexander Drive, to Wanneroo Road and then eventually to the Mitchell Freeway.² However, there are certainly other approaches that can be taken, some of which involve using less roads but with a sharper shift westward at some point of the boundary.

The Democrats note the suggestion of the Australian Labor Party to include the seats of Nedlands and Cottesloe in the South Metropolitan Region. While it is true the Act specifies the North Metropolitan Region be a region that is "*generally to the north of the Swan River*", and the South Metropolitan Region be a region that is "*generally to the South of the Swan River*", it would be a somewhat unusual departure from current practice to place electorates extending as far north as City Beach in the South Metropolitan Region.

The Democrats believe it would be better to use any flexibility the Act permits with regard to the Swan River in the eastern part of the metropolitan area, where the river is considerably narrower and does not create such a barrier between suburbs. It is therefore recommended that Cottesloe and Nedlands remain in the North Metropolitan Region.

² In the Australian Democrat's original submission the dividing line between East Metropolitan and North Metropolitan was described as moving west along Reid Highway to "**Princess Road**", where it then travels south to Ravenswood Drive. The reference to Princess Road should in fact be a reference to "**Stroughton**" Road.

A number of submissions also recommended the creation of a new seat in the central northern suburbs, between what is currently Carine and Churchlands. Such an approach would appear sensible, given the need to fit 14 seats within a narrower band of suburbs in the northern suburbs. The Democrats have proposed a seat of Scarborough that is consistent with such an approach.³

East Metropolitan

The Democrats support the removal of a small number of voters from the Shires of Mundaring and Swan, and all voters from the Shire of Serpentine-Jarrahdale, from the East Metropolitan Region as a means of evening up the number of voters in all districts throughout the State.

The boundary of the East Metropolitan Region is perhaps the most difficult to determine, given that it has to shift westward from its current position at some point north of the river, and some parts of what is currently East Metropolitan need to move into the South Metropolitan Region. Inevitably there are a variety of ways this can be done, and many valid recommendations have been made.

The Democrats have been able to further refine our submission, so that the seats it described in general terms can be reproduced in an indicative map.⁴ Our submission recommends 14 seats for the East Metropolitan region, namely –

- Perth
- Yokine
- Maylands
- Morley
- Ballajura
- Bassendean
- Midland
- Belmont
- Swan Hills
- Darling Range
- Kenwick
- Southern River
- Armadale
- Roleystone (previously referred to as Serpentine-Jarrahdale).

³ The Democrats original submission contained several seats that were not “within quota”, and required minor modifications. This included moving the northern boundary of the seat of Scarborough slightly south; including a small number of additional voters from Duncraig in the seat Carine; and extending the seat of Marangaroo north to include the suburb of Hocking. Revised boundaries have been provided the Electoral Distribution Commissioners.

⁴ A small change was required to the boundary dividing the Democrat’s proposed seat of Yokine and Morley to ensure both seats remain within quota. Additionally, the seat of Ballajura was amended to include all of Whiteman Park.

South Metropolitan

In our original submission the Democrats mentioned a new seat of Canning Vale be created in the South Metropolitan region, but it did not elaborate on the boundaries. A more detailed map of our proposed seat of Canning Vale has been prepared for the Electoral Distribution Commissioners, which is centred on the suburb of Canning Vale itself (which contains a substantial number of voters) and suburbs below Canning Vale to the east of the Kwinana Freeway. Other submissions have also recommended a seat of Canning Vale be established, with different variations as to the exact boundaries. Such a seat would appear to be a practical addition to the South Metropolitan Region.

The Democrats acknowledge that a seat centred on Thornlie could also be included in South Metropolitan, to even up the number of districts in each Region. This would be useful if the Electoral Commissioners decide not to remove any voters in the Shire of Serpentine-Jarrahdale from the metropolitan area, which would likely require the South Metropolitan Region to extend northwards.

The Democrats have also made several minor amendments to our suggested seats of Como and Victoria Park, to ensure that all seats remain within quota.⁵ These amendments resulted in the entire suburb of South Perth being retained in the one electorate, enabling the name of the seat to remain as South Perth rather than Como.

⁵ This involved placing the suburb of Kensington in the seat of Victoria Park; including the entire suburb of South Perth in the one electorate; and running the dividing line between the electorates down Jarrah Road instead of Kent Street. As all of South Perth is now included in the one seat, the Democrats have proposed retaining the name South Perth for this electorate.