

Hello

Please find attached a submission from the ACT Branch of the Proportional Representation Society of Australia arguing that in the current redistribution process Palmerston and Crace should be transferred from Molonglo to Ginninderra.

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Convenor

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PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA (AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY BRANCH)

MOVE PALMERSTON AND CRACE FROM MOLONGLO TO GINNINDERRA

The Proportional Representation Society of Australia (Australian Capital Territory Branch) submits that, while continuing rapid growth in Molonglo necessitates change to the existing electoral boundaries, the transfer of both Palmerston and Crace from Molonglo to Ginninderra would satisfy legislative requirements about enrolments at the time of the next election as well as maximising utility for electors including prospects of boundary stability in 2016.

An expectation of stable boundaries under Hare-Clark

The appreciation by voters of a high level of stability in electoral arrangements goes back to the start of the campaign for our voter-empowering Hare-Clark system. Expectations of stable boundaries were repeatedly placed before the people when we were deciding the nature of our future electoral system. For example, in the 1991 pamphlet **How to make your vote really count**, the Hare-Clark Campaign Committee prominently contrasted *stable boundaries* under Hare-Clark with *frequent boundary changes* under single-member electorates.

In the official case for the Proportional Representation (Hare-Clark) System sent to voters in 1992, the following comments were made in relation to *stability* (bold type face has been introduced to emphasise the key words in the current context).

A voting system should also provide *stability*: a government with broad support should not be 'held to ransom' by parties with a very small share of the primary vote, **nor should voters face constantly-changing electoral boundaries.**

Under the ACT version of Hare-Clark, a quota of at least 12.5% of the vote will be needed to win a seat; this will exclude parties with very little popular support.
Boundaries will seldom change.

Following implementation of the Hare-Clark system, to date the expectations of Hare-Clark supporters have been met. The ACT Branch of the Proportional Representation Society of Australia (ACT Branch) has been a strong supporter of minimising changes to ACT electoral boundaries, so long as the boundaries still provide for broadly equal representation:

- in 1996 we were among the organisations submitting that there should be no change at all as a result of that review;
- in 2000, along with the Liberal and Labor Parties, we suggested moving the suburb of Nicholls from Molonglo to Ginninderra in order to deal with the projected imbalances at the time of the 2001 general elections if the previous boundaries had remained the same, and noted that the best-available population projections at the time indicated no change would be needed in 2004;
- in 2003, we argued for no change and suggested that the Committee recommend fast-tracking be possible when current and projected populations fall within statutory tolerance limits and there has been no public agitation for boundary changes prior to the call for submissions;

- in 2007, we argued that, based on publicly-available information, there was no need for any change to electoral boundaries and urged fast-tracking of redistribution processes in such circumstances.

The ACT Branch is pleased that an earlier Redistribution Committee stated explicitly of its proposed transfer of Nicholls that “this is the minimum change necessary to ensure that each electorate is within the required statistical tolerance” and observed as a more general principle that “change should affect as few electors as possible”.

Most Redistribution Committees since the first set of boundaries came up for review in 1996 have adopted a similar approach. The ACT Branch continues to be heartened that voters’ interests are being placed at the forefront of how the Hare-Clark system operates here, and that flawed proposals calling for extensive change have been duly examined but have received relatively short shrift in the past.

While the current boundaries do not satisfy all the relevant criteria, only minor adjustments are necessary

Australian Bureau of Statistics projections put enrolments in Ginninderra and Molonglo slightly beyond the statutory deviations allowed from the territory quota on the next election day, while those in Brindabella are comfortably within the available allowance.

In these circumstances there should be no change to Brindabella’s boundaries, while the necessary changes elsewhere can be and most appropriately should be effected by minor adjustments. Moving Palmerston from Molonglo to Ginninderra would result in Ginninderra being almost precisely at quota in October 2012 based on ABS projections and Molonglo being just 2.5% above, and therefore satisfy the key statutory requirement.

Under the Electoral Act, three criteria relating to proposed electorates that must be given due consideration by the Redistribution Committee are economic, social and regional community of interests, means of communication and travel, and physical features and area. These criteria are clearly intended to help identify natural communities and groupings of suburbs, taking account of the physical and social geography of the ACT.

In these circumstances, while moving just Palmerston would address the imbalance in enrolments, the question arises of whether Crace should be moved also even though it is expected to have very few voters in October 2012.

The Proportional Representation Society of Australia (Australian Capital Territory Branch) believes that better boundaries for electors would arise if this step were taken now as Nicholls, Palmerston and Crace form a more natural standalone unit geographically than would just Nicholls and Palmerston. Future growth in Crace could then result in boundary stability being a possible option when the next redistribution is undertaken as Ginninderra would have an area in which rapid population increases were occurring and receiving attention from at least some of its MLAs.

While projections that far ahead are necessarily speculative because of significant events that could occur in the intervening period, the Redistribution Committee might give thought to including some particulars of that nature under various plausible assumptions to further strengthen the case for also shifting Crace to Ginninderra before it is strictly necessary to do

so. Increasing the likelihood of continuity of representation within more stable boundaries as expansion within the suburb occurred would from the perspective of electors be agreeable grounds for including Crace in fairly minor adjustments to boundaries to be made on this occasion.