

Proportional Representation Society of Australia - ACT Branch.txt
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Sent: Thursday, 8 March 2007 1:55 AM
To: Elections
Subject: electoral boundaries should remain unchanged

7 March 2007

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Dear Redistribution Committee Members

On behalf of the Proportional Representation Society of Australia (Australian Capital Territory Branch), I am pleased to attach a submission that there should be no change to the existing electoral boundaries.

We also urge the Committee to recommend that in future the redistribution process should be capable of being simplified in instances as clear-cut as the current one.

Yours sincerely

Bogey Musidlak

Convenor

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PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA (AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY BRANCH)

LEAVE THE BOUNDARIES UNCHANGED AND EXPEND AS LITTLE EFFORT AS POSSIBLE ON REDISTRIBUTION PROCESSES OF THIS KIND

The Proportional Representation Society of Australia (Australian Capital Territory Branch) submits that there should be no change to the existing electoral boundaries, and, in view of the current boundaries simply not having been an issue in recent times, urges the Redistribution Committee to resist any last-moment proposals for change.

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.

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”.

All other 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.

The current boundaries satisfy all the relevant criteria and should be retained

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. As these patterns are essentially unchanged since the last redistribution, it would be very disturbing to voters to find major changes at the next election.

The Redistribution Committee is also required to give due consideration to the boundaries of existing electorates in making its proposed distribution. In the current circumstances, where population shifts other than in parts of Molonglo have been fairly minor, the inclusion of this criterion reinforces the evident intention to promote stability of electoral boundaries, and to discourage any thought of a substantial redrawing of boundaries. The departures from the quota in August 2006 were modest at 1.7% and 2.2% below in the five-member electorates, and 2.7% above in Molonglo, well within the 10% tolerance allowed. These discrepancies have widened very slowly since April 2003.

Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates put enrolments in Brindabella and Ginninderra at the time of the next election respectively 2.9% and 3.2% below the territory quota, and place Molonglo, with expected growth again very strong in several inner-city suburbs, 4.4% above, still well within the allowed 5% tolerance either way. In these circumstances, no changes of significance are warranted, and the ACT Branch urges the Redistribution Committee to wind up the current proceedings as quickly as possible.

Time to simplify clear-cut redistribution proceedings

The ACT Branch believes that, beyond retaining unchanged boundaries and reaffirming the sound principles espoused and articulated plainly by earlier Redistribution Committees, the Committee should take the initiative and suggest to the Assembly that our redistribution process be simplified by allowing an immediate final determination whenever actual and projected enrolments fall within the respective statutory tolerances and there has not been public clamour for major alteration to the boundaries.

When change is neither required nor called for, absolutely nothing is to be gained from mimicking superfluous elements of an elaborate process originally designed around the extensive inter-party argy-bargy associated with federal redistributions of single-member electorates.