

ACT Democrats submission on the ACT Legislative Assembly Electoral Boundaries Redistribution 2000

Preferred Position

The ACT Democrats support the basic concepts of the current "Hare-Clark" electoral system, and the recommendations of the 1998 "Review of the Governance of the Australian Capital Territory" in relation to electoral matters.

Our preference is for the ACT to now have three electorates returning seven members each to the Legislative Assembly. There is significant justification for this position in the 1998 Review and we are disappointed that this review did not receive the Legislative Assembly support it deserved.

We understand that our preferred option would require legislative change outside of this redistribution process, so we have stated our preference and will continue on to address the redistribution requirements.

Redistribution criteria

There are two constraints on the drawing of electorate boundaries, which we paraphrase as; the "number of electors" constraint and the "community of interests" constraint, which at times can lead to conflicting desires in the drawing of the boundaries. The "number of electors" constraint is clearly defined and needs to be precisely followed. The "community of interests" constraint is more a matter of finding an acceptable compromise.

The ACT Democrats believe that the first of the "community of interests" criteria as presented in the submission guidelines (duly consider the community of interests within each proposed electorate, including economic, social and regional interests) is of much greater concern than the others, and that the set of criteria need to be applied in such a way as to not create any unnecessary instability of the electoral process, or public concern or confusion.

This position leads us to the view that any proposal (retaining two five member and one seven member electorates) that results in the central electorate not remaining the seven member electorate would be disadvantageous to public confidence in the political process. Voters have expectations based on the current electorate sizes and boundaries and any change should affect as few voters as possible. There have been a number of media articles and letters to editors that have already identified a level of concern and confusion over the possibility of Belconnen becoming the major part of a new seven member electorate and the effect that such a change may have on the composition of the Legislative Assembly.

Our proposal

That the Tuggeranong based electorate retain its existing boundaries and name (Brindabella). That the Belconnen based electorate remain a five member electorate (called Ginninderra) and include all of Gungahlin, but lose the suburbs of Cook, Aranda, Bruce and Kaleen. That the remainder of Canberra be a seven member electorate (called Molonglo). Molonglo would thus lose Gungahlin and gain Cook, Aranda, Bruce and Kaleen. The deviations from quota for

electorates are:- October 1999, Ginninderra -3.83%, Molonglo +2.78%, Brindabella (unchanged) -0.06%, and for October 2001, Ginninderra -1.83%, Molonglo +1.96%, Brindabella (unchanged) -0.91%.

Justification

As mentioned earlier, we prefer the size and names of the electorates to maintain their current geographic layout as closely as possible. This proposal fits the "number of electors" criteria well, and will continue to do so even with a significant population growth resulting from the establishment of the proposed new suburb of Lawson.

The inclusion of the four Belconnen suburbs into Molonglo, while not being ideal, is no more of an anomaly than the precedent set by the inclusion of Chifley, Pearce and Torrens in Brindabella. The age of establishment of these four Belconnen suburbs and their proximity to Civic results in them having quite similar demographics to their nearest neighbours in the north-west of Molonglo (Turner, O'Connor, Lyneham) while, for the same reasons, the Gungahlin suburbs have demographics that are more similar to the "outer" Belconnen suburbs than to the older north Canberra suburbs.

We believe that this proposal complies as well as is practicable with the "community of interests" criteria, while maintaining the public expectations of the current electorate sizes and boundaries and thus minimising concern or confusion.

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