



**The ACT Greens
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To the
Redistribution Committee
ACT Electoral Commission
PO Box 272
Civic Square
ACT 2608

Re: Comments on proposed redistribution of ACT electoral boundaries

Submission on behalf of the ACT Greens.

Introduction

In our previous Submission, we considered four basic possibilities by which the ACT could be sub-divided:

1. Making Ginninderra a 7-Member electorate and Molonglo a 5-Member electorate by shifting Gungahlin and Weston Creek from Molonglo to Ginninderra.
2. Retaining Ginninderra as a 5-Member electorate, but shifting Nicholls from Molonglo to Ginninderra.
3. Retaining Ginninderra as a 5-Member electorate, but shifting Nicholls and Palmerston from Molonglo to Ginninderra.
4. Retaining Ginninderra as a 5-Member electorate, but shifting some North Canberra suburbs from Molonglo to Ginninderra and Hall from Ginninderra to Molonglo.

Of these options, we regarded Option 3 as the worst option, and we are pleased that it, at least, has been dismissed. However, the Redistribution Committee chose to recommend Option 2, which was the second-worst option in our assessment. In our comments here, we, therefore, restrict ourselves to commenting on the adopted option 2 and two alternatives, our Options 1 and 4.

Making Ginninderra the 7-Member electorate

Our preferred option was to make Ginninderra the 7-Member electorate, which was the only available option that would not have necessitated the subdivision of one of the clearly recognised communities of interest in the ACT. We value the protection of communities of interest very highly and, therefore, preferred the one option that would have protected that value.

This is particularly important in the case of Gungahlin. Gungahlin is a newly emerging entity within the ACT, with its developing new identity and its own specific problems that are unique to newly developed areas, such as transport problems and the establishment of a new town centre. It is developing its own identity, but is struggling to have its needs recognised against competing resource needs from the more-established parts of the ACT. Gungahlin's position would be clearly weakened by having nearly one quarter of its population base shifted to another electorate. It would, therefore, be preferable that it should not be split into two sub-units.

We showed in our previous submission that numerically, it would work out very well to turn Ginninderra into a 7-Member electorate by shifting all Gungahlin and Weston Creek suburbs from Molonglo to Ginninderra. Both Ginninderra and Molonglo would be well within the +/-5% requirement of the target quota, and Gungahlin, Belconnen, Weston Creek as well as North and South Canberra and Woden (minus Pearce, Torrens and Chifley) could all have their territorial integrity and community of interest protected.

We note that the Weston Creek Community Council in their submission argued against this proposal. We can appreciate the sentiment expressed in that submission: Weston Creek clearly has greater affinity with Woden and South Canberra than with Belconnen or Gungahlin. Nonetheless, we regard the most important community aspect that needs to be protected to be that of the integrity of the small community level, in this case that of the Weston Creek community. As the integrity of that community was not to have been violated by any of the proposed changes, we feel that the degree of problem that would be experienced by the residents of Weston Creek through being co-located with Belconnen and Gungahlin would be significantly less than that experienced by either Gungahlin or North Canberra if those areas would have been internally divided by one of the proposed changes.

Boundary lines have to be drawn somewhere and it would be better to draw them around towns rather than through them. Weston Creek is currently part of Molonglo, much of which is physically distant from Weston Creek, such as North Canberra and Gungahlin. Adding Weston Creek to Ginninderra may have some downside in terms of losing the connection to Woden, but Weston Creek does have significant similarities to Belconnen in terms of demographics and age of settlement. Weston Creek is currently in the same electorate as Gungahlin so that any perceived lack of connection between Weston Creek and Gungahlin would thereby be no different than the current situation.

The most significant reason against a change from the current arrangements lies in the importance of continuity. We recognise the problem for Members in Molonglo who currently have the task of representing Constituents in Molonglo, and who may have to appeal to different voters at the next election. Similarly, voters may experience a degree of confusion by being in one electorate at one election and

another electorate at the next election. The Proportional Representation Society argued strongly for the importance of continuity of representation, and that as few voters as possible should be subject to a change of electorate through which they are represented. We recognise the seriousness of these concerns and agree that significant boundary changes must not be undertaken lightly.

Nonetheless, these important concerns must be balanced against the concerns with regards to the importance of protecting communities of interest, which are an important Green ideal to protect and, on balance, we regard the protection of communities of interest as a higher ideal than continuity of representation. We, therefore, urge the Redistribution Committee to reconsider the option of making Ginninderra the 7-Member electorate.

Shifting North Canberra suburbs to Ginninderra

If the option of making Ginninderra the 7-Member electorate is not adopted then the other option of shifting some North Canberra suburbs to Ginninderra should be seriously considered. We have shown previously that this could be accomplished by shifting the suburbs that are located to the West of Northbourne Avenue (Lyneham, O'Connor, Turner) and shifting Hall to Molonglo to be co-located with Gungahlin.

We noted that the Redistribution Committee did not specifically discuss this Option and do not know on what grounds it might have been dismissed. The option of shifting only one or two of these suburbs, which has been canvassed by the Redistribution Committee, clearly would split this sub-group within North Canberra and would be undesirable.

The advantage of shifting these three suburbs would be that they are immediately adjacent to Belconnen and constitute a recognised sub-group within North Canberra. Like the Option of moving Nicholls out of Molonglo, this Option would entail the same problem of splitting a recognised community of interest in Canberra. Moving these suburbs would, therefore also not be ideal but it must be compared against the disadvantages entailed in shifting Nicholls away from the other Gungahlin suburbs.

Both Nicholls and the three North Canberra suburbs have an affinity to Belconnen as being located in close proximity and having considerable linkages through shopping, schooling and some employment. Their stronger links in both cases are, however, with the bulk of their primary centres, Gungahlin and North Canberra.

Nicholls, however, forms no recognised sub-group within Gungahlin, at least no more than any other single suburbs would. The three North Canberra suburbs, on the other hand, do constitute a recognised sub-group within North Canberra that had, for example, been recognised in the inaugural sub-division of North Canberra for LAPACs. The primary 'community' for residents of these three North Canberra suburbs consists of these suburbs themselves rather than the wider whole of North Canberra. For Nicholls, on the other hand, the primary 'community' would be the whole of Gungahlin.

A proposed shift of either Nicholls or the three North Canberra suburbs would be bad for either of the affected communities. However, on balance, the effect would appear to be more detrimental for the Nicholls community, and we, therefore, recommend that a shift of the North Canberra suburbs would be preferable to a shift of Nicholls.

Overall recommendation

1. We wish to restate our previous recommendation that our preferred position would be making Ginninderra the 7-Member electorate (by combining Gungahlin, Belconnen and Weston Creek) as that is the only Option that would protect established communities. We recognise that this would come at the cost of a loss of continuity for affected voters.
2. If only a smaller shift of suburbs is to be considered in the interest of continuity, we consider that shifting 3 North Canberra electorates to Ginninderra and Hall to Molonglo would be preferable to shifting Nicholls as that would have marginally less detrimental effects on the respective communities.

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