

From: Shane Marsh
Sent: Thursday, 4 August 2011 6:03 PM
To: Elections
Subject: Submission re Molonglo boundaries
Attachments: Submission2toAEC.doc

Miss Shane Marsh

ACT Electoral Commissioner
Australian Capital Territory Electoral Commission

Dear Sir,

Objection to proposed changes to ACT Legislative Assembly electoral boundaries

I object to the current proposal to move the suburbs of Lyneham, O'Connor and Turner from the electorate of Molonglo to the electorate of Ginninderra.

Section 36 of the ACT Electoral ACT 1992 states that:

*In making a redistribution of electorates, the augmented commission shall
(c) duly consider—*

(i) the community of interests within each proposed electorate, including economic, social and regional interests; and

(ii) the means of communication and travel within each proposed electorate; and

(iii) the physical features and area of each proposed electorate; and

(iv) the boundaries of existing electorates; and

(v) the boundaries of divisions and sections fixed under the Districts Act 2002.

These criteria are plainly intended to help identify **natural communities and groupings of suburbs**, taking account of the physical and social geography of the ACT. The inner-north area of Canberra, i.e. Civic, Campbell, Reid, Ainslie, Braddon, Dickson, Hackett, Acton, Turner, O'Connor and Lyneham, has long been considered to constitute a natural community and grouping of suburbs:

- **Physically**, the inner-north suburbs form a natural group, lying within the geographic basin between Black Mountain, Mount Pleasant, Mount Ainslie, Mount Majura and Lake Burley Griffin. They share a common waterway, Sullivan's Creek, currently being improved by wetlands in O'Connor, Dickson and Lyneham;
- **Historically**, the inner-north suburbs were among the first built in the city of Canberra, sharing health services, education facilities, transport and shopping centres. Children from these suburbs attend schools such as Dickson College, and Lyneham and Campbell High; residents shop in Civic and Dickson; readers use Civic and Dickson libraries; political party branches include residents of a mixture of suburbs rather than only one or two. In recent years, most of these suburbs have undergone some degree of urban renewal, sharing common issues of asbestos removal, multi-storey development and urban in-fill;
- **Demographically**, analysis would almost certainly reveal that residents of Turner, Lyneham, O'Connor have more in common with other residents of Molonglo than they do with residents of Ginninderra, reinforcing the view that their "natural community" lies in Molonglo, not Ginninderra. I strongly suggest that the Commissioner conducts such an analysis as part of a rigorous examination of what the term "community of interests" within each proposed electorate, including economic, social and regional interests" means. I consider that the change proposed will lead to much confusion, especially among older residents of Lyneham, O'Connor and Turner, of which there are many who have lived in the Molonglo electorate since the inception of self-government in 1992;

- In terms of **local political concerns**, there are natural alliances between O'Connor and Braddon, Lyneham and Dickson, Turner and Reid, and Acton and Civic. Residents in these areas share concerns about inner-city infill, traffic and transport arrangements, and health and education provision. Northbourne Avenue serves as the common spine of these suburbs, rather than as a division. Residents share common bike paths and bus routes that cross-cross Northbourne Avenue, rather than staying on one side or the other; they use the Civic cinemas rather than travelling to Belconnen; they swim in Dickson and Civic pools, more often than those at Belconnen or the AIS; they walk around Lake Burley Griffin or up Mount Ainslie rather than Lake Ginninderra; and they shop in Dickson and Civic rather than Belconnen or Gungahlin;
- In terms of **local institutional arrangements**, the inner north's status as a natural community is long established. For example, health workers treat the inner-north as one area and the North Canberra Community Council title speaks for itself. Dickson College's recent fight to stay open serving the community of students from the feeder schools of Lyneham and Campbell High Schools is one example of the inner-north community's common purpose in political decision-making;
- **Socially**, the term "inner north" is known to almost everyone in Canberra; that surely says something. Splitting the suburbs of Lyneham, O'Connor and Turner from the other inner-north suburbs would be artificially dividing what almost all Canberrans know as the inner north. While I am sure the ACT Electoral Commissioner is impartial in his judgement, it is hard not to suspect political motivations could be influencing the outcome of this proposal;
- I suggest that the citizens of Nicholls, Palmerston and Crace have far more in common with the residents of the much newer suburbs of Belconnen, in the electorate of Ginninderra, than do the citizens of Lyneham, Turner and O'Connor;
- In addition, voters have an expectation of a high level of **stability in electoral arrangements**, which originated with the campaign for the Hare-Clark system. Stable boundaries were repeatedly mentioned as a reassurance to the people when deciding the nature of the 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 the Hare-Clark system with the frequent boundary changes of 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:

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.

It is highly likely that population growth in the Gungahlin area will force further redistributions in the not too distant future. Therefore it is incumbent on the Commission to minimise the extent of the current proposed change, with its inherent confusion and possible reversals for subsequent elections.

I am not a member of any political party. I regard myself as a resident of the inner-north with much more in common with my Ainslie neighbours than the residents of Belconnen or Gungahlin.

Yours sincerely,

Shane Marsh