

16 Araba Place
Aranda ACT 2614

The Redistribution Committee
Po Box 272
Civic Square ACT 2608

Dear Committee members,

Thank you for making submissions to the 2003 electoral redistribution process available for public comment. I support the recommendation of the ACT Division of The Liberal Party and the ACT Branch of the Proportional Representation Society of Australia that the current boundaries should not be changed at this time. I am concerned that

- it is not possible to redistribute the Ginninderra electorate without impacting on outcomes in the next ACT election because of the involvement of different interest groups within the Ginninderra electorate in the highly political Gungahlin Drive Extension debate (GDE); and
- any change that divides the Belconnen district across more than one electorate would destroy the Belconnen community of interest.

I endorse the principle of continuity of boundaries and maintain that continuity is crucial when there is interaction between electoral boundaries and a politically sensitive matter in progress.

The Redistribution Committee should be aware that Members for Ginninderra took their stand on the government's initial GDE proposal with an acute awareness of the electoral boundaries at the time. It became clear during the 2002 public consultation that non-government Members, while sympathetic to concerns about design safety, performance and cost, did not want to be seen as 'spoilers' to large numbers of voters in the Gungahlin suburbs of the Ginninderra electorate. Effectively this left people in south-east Belconnen (SE Belconnen), also in the Ginninderra electorate, without political representation despite the fact that they had much to lose. Due to the significance of this issue in the local community, it is crucial that the ACT goes to the next election on the same grounds that dictated politicians' responses throughout the planning process.

The ACT Democrats proposal to move the SE Belconnen to the Molonglo electorate would offer considerable political advantage to that party, based on the stand it took during public consultation on the Gungahlin Drive Extension (GDE). The government campaigned on the GDE at the 2001 election, and the political process unfolded with due regard to the current boundaries. There remains dissent in the suburb of O'Connor (Save the Ridge group), however the government responded to the concerns of residents in Aranda. Merging these two suburbs into one electorate could cancel out the two effects. This would deny voters in all areas the opportunity to make a fair assessment of their political representatives when they vote at the next ACT Legislative Assembly election.

I do not support any change to electoral boundaries that represent a known risk of impacting on election results. Sensitivities to the Gungahlin Drive Extension within the Ginninderra and Molonglo districts suggest that any changes to these electorates within this term of the Legislative Assembly pose a high risk of biasing the 2004 election results.

The ACT Democrats have made a detailed submission, selectively citing statistics from the 2001 ABS Census of Population and Housing. In the attachment to this letter, I address a number of statements in that submission using a wider range of results from the census and knowledge of

the local area. I hope that you will take these facts into account in considering material contained in the submission.

Yours sincerely,

Cathy Hales

9 June 2003

ATTACHMENT

Detailed response to points in the submission of the Australian Democrats (ACT Division) to the ACT Legislative Assembly Electoral Boundaries Redistribution 2003.

Key points

- While I support the idea of uniting the area of Gungahlin into one electorate, I strongly object to achieving this by dividing established Belconnen area communities of interest as proposed by the ACT Division of the Australian Democrats.
- Communities of interest are not founded on demographics alone and to a large extent relate to the use of services and facilities. People in SE Belconnen suburbs of Aranda, Bruce, Cook, Macquarie, Weetangera and Hawker rely mostly on schools, shopping centres and community facilities in the Belconnen area, not in north Canberra.
- Transport, and more specifically, Gungahlin Drive Extension, is an important issue that separates SE Belconnen from Molonglo communities of interest. The implementation phase of this project will have a significant impact on the entire Belconnen district as it traverses Belconnen Way and requires a major upgrade to Glenloch Interchange. Over the next few years, it is imperative that the Belconnen community has united political representation on this issue.
- The age structure of the resident population of SE Belconnen is making a transition in a different direction to that of the Molonglo district.

Introduction

Electoral boundaries should reflect communities of interest. Three submissions oppose the division of Gungahlin into two electorates on the basis that this divides a community of interest (G. Darnell, ACT Democrats, Gungahlin Community Council). The Democrats submission proposes that inner Belconnen suburbs are more demographically alike inner north Canberra and on that basis, the submission argues for SE Belconnen to be moved to the Molonglo electorate. There are two problems with this argument:

- Communities of interest are not founded on demographics alone and to a large extent relate to the use of services and facilities. People in SE Belconnen suburbs of Aranda, Bruce, Cook, Macquarie, Weetangera and Hawker rely mostly on schools, shopping centres and community facilities in the Belconnen area.

- While there are similarities in the sociodemographics of Belconnen and north Canberra, there are also marked differences not highlighted in the submission.

These points are expanded in turn below.

Belconnen communities of interest

Education

Aranda Primary School with an enrolment of 400 children at the 2003 ACT schools census, ranks third highest of 20 Belconnen primary schools in terms of total enrolments; Weetangera Primary ranks sixth; and Hawker Primary ranks ninth. Canberra High School in Macquarie has the highest enrolments of any government high school in Belconnen. These and other schools in SE Belconnen are attracting families with school-aged children into the area. High out of area enrolments in inner Belconnen schools draw primarily from Belconnen suburbs, not from Canberra's inner north.

School enrolments in SE Belconnen suburbs reflect suburban regeneration in the area and communities of interest that take in greater-Belconnen not just individual suburbs. Schools provide a focal point for families and lay the foundations of communities of interest that prevail throughout the life cycle. The communities of interest established through schools in SE Belconnen are Belconnen communities. Education policy is a priority consideration for many voters. It is essential that core school communities have the same elected representatives.

Community centres

Likewise, shopping centres and community facilities such as churches, swimming pools and scout halls bring people in local communities together. By-and-large, people who live in the suburbs of SE Belconnen use mostly facilities in the Belconnen area. They routinely shop at Belconnen, Jamison and Kippax shopping centres, not at Dickson, for example. Hence, residents of Aranda, Bruce, Cook, Macquarie, Weetangera and Hawker are impacted most by planning and service provision in the Belconnen area and they need the same political representation as the majority of other users of those services.

Transport

The Democrats suggest that in matters of transport, inner Belconnen suburbs are more closely aligned with the Molonglo electorate. There are several problems with the argument that is presented. Firstly, the following statement is highly contentious:

“A further point is that people who share common transport routes are more likely to share common transport concerns. This proposed redistribution places SE Belconnen in Molonglo. Many of these SE Belconnen commuters share the western approach to the City via Parkes Way with commuters from Weston Creek and parts of Woden. Equally, Gungahlin traffic shares major road connections with areas of Belconnen, particularly Ginninderra Drive, the Barton Highway, Northbourne Avenue and the proposed Gungahlin Drive Extension.”

Transport, and more specifically, Gungahlin Drive Extension, is an important issue that separates SE Belconnen from Molonglo communities of interest. The implementation phase of this project will have a significant impact on the entire Belconnen district as it traverses Belconnen Way and requires a major upgrade to Glenloch Interchange. Over the next few

years, it is imperative that the Belconnen community has united political representation on this issue.

SE Belconnen commuters access Parkes Way via Haydon Drive, Belconnen Way and Caswell Drive. This route is shared with traffic that originates in Gungahlin, hence the need for Gungahlin Drive extension. To suggest that commuters who live in SE Belconnen more commonly share transport routes with commuters from Molonglo than with Gungahlin is sheer nonsense. Few people who live in Molonglo would commute to work via Caswell Drive, Haydon Drive, William Hovell Drive and William Slim Drive. Gungahlin Drive extension will cut straight through routes used everyday by commuters who live in SE Belconnen. The management of this project is of great concern to both Gungahlin and Belconnen commuters. It will have an enormous impact on the entire Belconnen district, but is unlikely to affect people living in the Molonglo electorate. It is in the interest of Belconnen and Gungahlin that construction of the new road proceed as smoothly as possible. In this regard, all of Belconnen, particularly SE Belconnen, is united with Gungahlin in one community of interest.

Table 4 of the submission shows that the transport profile of south-east Belconnen residents is no more similar to Molonglo than it is to the rest of Ginninderra.

The 'near suburbs of Belconnen' in the statement

"under the previous "zonal" bus fare system for ACTION (now abolished), the near suburbs of Belconnen were included in the central zone, whereas Gungahlin suburbs were grouped with west Belconnen in the north zone"

actually refer to Aranda, Bruce, Cook and Macquarie but not Weetangera and Hawker. Under the old zonal bus fare system, Weetangera and Hawker were serviced by the same routes as outer west Belconnen. It was not generally possible to catch a bus from these two suburbs to the city without going via Belconnen interchange. So, bus services there were quite distinct from those in the Molonglo district.

Sociodemographic profiles

The Democrats' submission contends that SE Belconnen suburbs should be added to the Molonglo electorate on the basis that it has a similar sociodemographic profile. Specifically, it states "The 'middle ring' of suburbs – Woden, Weston Creek and inner Belconnen are experiencing ageing populations and declining numbers of children".

In reality, the 2003 schools census results show that rising enrolments in SE Belconnen schools are offsetting the effects of suburban ageing. Established, well-resourced schools like Aranda Primary, Weetangera Primary and Canberra High attract families to an area and are instrumental in suburb regeneration. This is occurring throughout SE Belconnen. There is very little medium to high-density housing in SE Belconnen compared to inner north Canberra, where there has been a burgeoning of apartment-style accommodation. Many older residents in inner Belconnen suburbs are selling their large bush blocks to move to a style of accommodation more suited to their stage of life. In their place are moving families with children. In contrast, residential development in inner north Canberra is attracting singles and professional couples without children. Thus, the age structure of resident population of SE Belconnen is making a transition in a different direction to that of the Molonglo district.

While there are some demographic likenesses, there are also some marked differences. Using Aranda and O'Connor as examples of the contrast between inner Belconnen and inner north Canberra suburbs, the 2001 ABS census of population and housing reveals that:

- 46.5% of Aranda households are couple families with children, compared to only 35.9% of families in O'Connor;
- 7.4% of households in Aranda are lone person households versus 13.0% of households in O'Connor; and
- 5.6% of people in Aranda cycle or walk to work versus 15.5% of people in O'Connor, whereas commuting by car is more common in Aranda (68.3%) than in O'Connor (54.9%).

In summary, the Democrats submission is fairly selective in which statistics it quotes.