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

Re: Redistribution of ACT electoral boundaries

Submission on behalf of the ACT Greens.

## **Introduction**

Under the terms of the Act, a redistribution is required if the expected quota of electors at the time of the election falls outside the 95%-105% range of the target quota. According to the figures released by the Electoral Commission, the electorates of Ginninderra and Molonglo will fall outside that range, and hence some redistribution is mandated.

In this Submission, we consider four basic possibilities:

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.

Finally, we also briefly consider the case of the three Woden suburbs (Chifley, Pearce, Torrens) that are included as part of Brindabella.

## **Making Ginninderra the 7-Member electorate**

The possibility of Ginninderra becoming a 7-Member electorate highlights the basic inequity that currently exists between electorates. If an electorate only returns 5 Members, this number is too small a number to both reflect voter's preferences between the major parties and in terms of minor party or Independents' representation.

The experience in the ACT has shown that arrangements with five Members per electorate are inadequate to represent the diversity of views present in the ACT voting public.

We have re-analysed the results of the last election to assess what numbers of seats different parties might have won had there been different numbers of Members per electorate. The following outcomes would have been likely had the different electorates returned 5, 6 or 7 Members (Table 1):

**Table 1:** Likely outcome of the election with different Members per electorate.

<b>Members</b>	<b>Brindabella</b>	<b>Ginninderra</b>	<b>Molonglo</b>
<b>5:</b>	2A, 2L, O	2A, 2L, R	2A, 2L, G
<b>6:</b>	2A, 3L, O	2A, 2L, R, G	2A, 3L, G
<b>7:</b>	2A, 3L, O, G	2A, 3L, R, G	2A, 3L, G, M

A: ALP

L: Liberal Party

O: Paul Osborne

R: David Rugendyke

G: ACT Greens

M: Michael Moore

The top of the columns lists the three electorates. The rows below that show the number of candidates that are likely to have been elected for each grouping had the number of Members been the number of Members given in the first column.

Hence, with five members, both the Labor and Liberal Parties would have had two successful candidates in each of the three electorates and one from the cross-benches. This would have been despite the significantly higher voter support for the Liberal Party (37.8% on average) than the ALP (27.6%). Five-member electorates are thus not able to distinguish adequately between the major parties, thus not adequately reflecting voter sentiment. With six members, the picture starts to reflect voter sentiment more accurately, with the Liberal Party gaining two extra seats and the Greens gaining an extra one.

Canberra voters have in the past shown that a significant proportion favour representation by a Member not belonging to one of the major parties. Hence, at both elections held under Hare-Clark, the two five-Member electorates have returned two Members each from both of the major parties, with the fifth Members being either a Green or an Independent. Voters had thus not been able to clearly indicate their preference for one or the other of the major parties. The seven-Member electorate, on the other hand, has on both occasions returned different numbers of Members for the two major parties.

Based on these considerations, it appears that electorates with fewer than six Members do not adequately reflect voters' preferences with respect to both minor party or Independent representation and preference between the major parties.

It would thus always be preferable to go to 7 or more Members per electorate, with 6 Members per electorates being an acceptable alternative based on the experience with the voting pattern of the Canberra voting public. Five Member per electorate, on the other hand, has given a poor reflection of voter sentiment in Canberra, and should as far as possible be avoided in future elections.

It is also apparent that the current number of MLAs is insufficient to keep up with the work load placed upon Members. It is also difficult to have sufficient

Members in the Assembly to fill all positions of Speaker, Ministers and have enough other Members of the Government's party to work effectively on Committees.

The Petit inquiry recommended that the size of the Assembly should be linked to the population size of the ACT by adopting a ratio of 10,000 electors per elected Member. It would constitute a modest increase to the current size of the Assembly that seems justified by Canberra's population increase.

We recognise that the term of reference for the Redistribution Committee does not extend to discussing the option of an overall increase in the size of the Assembly. We are thus left with needing to distinguish between the unsatisfactory options of Ginninderra or Molonglo (in addition to Brindabella) being the 5-Member electorate and thereby being denied the opportunity to meaningfully participate in Canberra's democratic processes. As it is, only the 7-Member electorate is likely to return different numbers for the two major parties at the next election.

One might ask whether there is any *a priori* reason why it would be preferable for Ginninderra or Molonglo to be the electorate with the larger number of Members? It is difficult to think of significant reasons for one or the other of the electorates to have that distinction. It might seem 'neater' to have the central or the oldest part of the ACT being the 7-Member electorate, but clearly it would not be democratically justified to give any part of Canberra a preferential treatment over any other part of Canberra.

**Table 2:** Suburbs to shift to make Ginninderra a 7-Member electorate with their projected 1999 and 2001 enrolments.

Suburb	1999	2001
Amaroo	1200	1742
Chapman	2269	2214
Duffy	2456	2420
Fisher	2359	2294
Gungahlin	28	335
Holder	2103	2040
Mitchell	2	2
Ngunnawal	5070	5576
Nicholls	2425	3039
Palmerston	3536	3883
Rivett	2447	2407
Stirling	1541	1601
Stromlo	61	61
Warramanga	1967	1901
Weston	2531	2476
Weston Creek	14	14

**Table 3:** Numeric shifts in Ginninderra and Molonglo by shifting suburbs listed in Table 2 from Molonglo to Ginninderra.

	Ginninderra		Molonglo	
	1999	2001	1999	2001
Total	88650	91350	60572	62330
Quota	87024	89307	62160	63791
Variation	1.87%	2.29%	-2.55%	-2.29%

Numerically, it would work out very conveniently to turn Ginninderra into a 7-Member electorate by shifting all Gungahlin and Weston Creek suburbs from Molonglo to Ginninderra (Tables 2, 3). Both Ginninderra and Molonglo would be well within the +/-5% requirement of the target quota.

Should Canberra grow faster than expected, then the new growth would probably be mainly centred on those areas (Gungahlin, Bruce, Dunlop) that would be placed within the new Ginninderra. That would be unlikely to be rapid enough to cause problems by the time of the next election, but might necessitate further adjustments for the 2004 election unless the total number of Members of the

Assembly were changed before then.

The most significant reason against a change from the current arrangements probably lies in the importance of continuity. Members in Molonglo have the task of representing Constituents in Molonglo. If they lose 25% of those potential voters, Members who seeks re-election at the next election would have to represent one group of voters up to the election and then try to appeal to a significantly changed group of voters at the election.

## Nicholls to Ginninderra

The developing township of Gungahlin has a strongly developing new identity and its own specific problems that are unique to newly developing areas, such as transport problems and the establishment of a new town centre. It would therefore be preferable that it should not be split into two sub-units. However, the developing population shifts in Canberra require that one option out of a number of unwanted options needs to be adopted.

**Table 4:** Numeric difference of shifting one or two Gungahlin suburbs from Molonglo to Ginninderra.

	<b>Ginninderra</b>		<b>Molonglo</b>	
Quota	62160	63791	87024	89307
<b>Shift Nicholls</b>				
Total	61066	62384	88156	91296
Variation	-1.76%	-2.21%	1.30%	2.23%
<b>Shift Nicholls + Palmerston</b>				
Total	64602	66267	84620	87413
Variation	3.93%	3.88%	-2.76%	-2.12%

The two Gungahlin suburbs closest to Belconnen are Nicholls and Palmerston. One or both could be shifted to achieve the necessary voter shift to satisfy the requirements of the Act (Table 4). Shifting either one or two suburbs to Ginninderra would be feasible options. However, both would be undesirable as they would force the affected Gungahlin suburb(s) into an

association with Belconnen with which they have no natural alliance, and separate them instead from the other Gungahlin suburbs with which they do share a community of interest.

The main advantage of shifting only one suburb (Nicholls) lies in the fact that fewer voters would be inconvenienced by losing their natural alliance. There is no readily apparent advantage in shifting more suburbs than would be necessary to meet the requirements of the Act.

## Shifting North Canberra suburbs to Ginninderra

The boundary between the electorates of Ginninderra and Molonglo has so far corresponded to the distinction between the townships of Belconnen and North Canberra. These township entities constitute well-recognised 'communities of interest', and the integrity of both should be maintained if possible. Again, as with the option of shifting one or two Gungahlin suburbs, the requirements of the Act will force one of a number of undesirable paths to be taken.

**Table 5:** Numeric difference of shifting three North Canberra suburbs from Molonglo to Ginninderra and Hall from Ginninderra to Molonglo.

Suburb	1999	2001
Lyneham	2804	3086
O'Connor	3374	3348
Turner	1230	1442
Hall	245	245

	Ginninderra		Molonglo	
Quota	62160	63791	87024	89307
<b>Shift North Canberra suburbs and Hall</b>				
Total	66049	67221	83173	86459
Variation	5.86%	4.99%	-4.14%	-2.91%

One of these options would be the shifting of the North Canberra suburbs that are located to the West of Northbourne Avenue (Lyneham, O'Connor, Turner) to Ginninderra. This would make Ginninderra marginally too large.

Conforming with the numeric requirements could be achieved by shifting Hall from Ginninderra to Molonglo (Table 5). This would be a sensible rearrangement in any case as Hall is geographically really

part of Gungahlin. Its location with Belconnen rather than Gungahlin has always been an anomaly.

Ginninderra would come precariously close to the +/-5% requirement by the time of the next election. However, the projections in the background document of the Electoral Commission may be regarded as somewhat too conservative. The reduction in public service jobs that began with the election of the first term of the Howard Government appears to have been largely completed. Instead, the number of jobs has started to increase again, especially in the Tax Department. There also has been a greater than expected increase in private sector jobs in Canberra.

The population of Canberra is therefore likely to increase more than projected in the background document. As new growth occurs predominantly in the newer Gungahlin suburbs, any acceleration of Canberra's growth is therefore likely to increase the size of Molonglo relative to Ginninderra. This would mean that both Molonglo and Ginninderra would be likely to meet their required number of voters more easily than projected based on the background documentation.

The advantage of shifting these suburbs would be that they are close to Belconnen and constitute a recognised sub-group within North Canberra. Moving these suburbs would also not be ideal but may be no worse than the other options. The shift of Hall to Molonglo to be co-located with Gungahlin would be a bonus of the change.

## The Woden suburbs in Brindabella

The inclusion of Chifley, Pearce and Torrens in the electorate of Brindabella continues to be unsatisfactory. They have no natural affiliation with the Tuggeranong suburbs that make up the rest of Brindabella. However, there does not appear to be a simple solution that would rectify that problem and would not cause even greater problems. Brindabella is projected to be of just the right size. Accelerated growth of Canberra, if it occurs, would probably make Brindabella slightly smaller than desired. However, that is likely to remain well within acceptable limits.

Taking the Woden suburbs out of Brindabella, however, would not be feasible as it would make Brindabella too small. Taking additional suburbs out of Woden and adding them to the electorate of Brindabella would not solve the problem, and would merely exchange one set of unsatisfactory boundaries with another set. In fact, it would subject even more suburbs to an alliance with Tuggeranong with which these Woden suburbs have no natural affiliation. **While the problem of the Woden suburbs in Brindabella is well recognised, there is still no feasible solution to rectify the problem.**

### **Overall recommendation**

- It is recognised that the projected population shifts in Canberra mandate a shift to the electoral boundaries.
- There is no solution to the problem that would not carry significant disadvantages. We rank the four options considered in order of preference as:
  1. Making Ginninderra the 7-Member electorate (by combining Gungahlin, Belconnen and Weston Creek).
  2. Shifting 3 North Canberra electorates to Ginninderra and Hall to Molonglo.
  3. Shifting Nicholls from Molonglo to Ginninderra.
  4. Shifting Nicholls and Palmerston from Molonglo to Ginninderra.
- We continue to seek solutions to the unsatisfactory inclusion of Woden suburbs within Brindabella, but no obvious solutions present themselves.

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