



Phil Green
Electoral Commissioner
ACT Electoral Commission
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Submission to Redistribution Committee ACT Electoral Commission

Dear Redistribution Committee members,

I make the following submission to the Redistribution Committee as the Secretary and Registered Officer of ACT Branch of the Australian Labor Party.

I must begin by acknowledging the professionalism displayed by Elections ACT in its role of providing high quality electoral services that ensure fair and open elections for our community in our unique representative system of democracy and government.

There is currently a very passionate debate being undertaken regarding the democratic rights of ACT residents. One of the reasons that these rights are cherished is that our government agencies and authorities have nurtured confidence in our unique system of government. ACT residents have now experienced 21 years of self-government since 1989 and 5 Hare-Clark elections since 1995. They better understand the voting opportunities and representative limitations our system provides. There is an “emerging maturity” and pride in our system of government and a growing public acceptance that the Hare-Clark system can provide opportunities for public representatives to work more cooperatively.

One of the key representative limitations is that due to the size and current composition of the three Assembly electorates a uniform “community of interest” which binds each electorate is not readily identifiable. This is somewhat inevitable when there are only three electorates and there are more than three distinct town centres, significant natural boundaries and numerous suburban precincts.

If you asked Canberrans where they lived they normally identify mostly with their nearest town centre or actual suburb, never with their Assembly electorate. Smaller and more numerous electorates that still retained proportional representation would improve “community of interest” whilst retaining the unique character and objectives of a unicameral Hare-Clark parliament.

The ACT Branch of the Labor Party has always been a very vocal advocate for individual and communal democratic rights and championed systemic improvements to our unique model of representative democracy. To be effective that advocacy must acknowledge the contextual factors which affect the universal franchise we enjoy in our community.

As in previous submissions, ACT Labor believes that although there is a long-term need for more substantial reform, the stability of the current electoral structure serves to increase the public confidence in the administration and outcomes of Territory Elections.

In the past, all three current ACT political parties have argued for an increase in the size of the ACT Assembly. An increase in the future is inevitable.

The recently released ACTPS Review stated "ACT residents remain significantly under-represented today in comparison to the rest of Australia." At a combined state and local government level, representation in the ACT is 1:14,285 compared to Tasmania at 1:1,110 and the Northern Territory at 1:685.

The review lists various reasons why an increase in the size of the Assembly and Executive would benefit governance and accountability, including enabling Members "to serve their constituents better" and enhancing the "capacity of the legislature to scrutinise the activities of the Executive".

However the wholesale reform of the Assembly size and design is not practical at this stage in the ACT's electoral cycle.

Moving a small number of suburbs between electorates would minimise the possibility that the proposed redistribution would generate many objections and would also improve the likelihood of wider support for more substantial reform in the future by minimising the disruption that would be caused by a significant change now as well as one in the near future.

In these circumstances a significant change to the current boundaries will compound the confusion that already exists regarding Assembly electorates and community of interest objectives. Although fundamental weaknesses regarding community of interest in the existing system cannot be fixed through redistribution, a short-term solution is needed to enable next year's election to proceed with as little disruption and as much notice and fairness as possible.

ACT Labor therefore requests that the Redistribution Committee seek a minimalist approach to boundary changes that will provide greater confidence in the existing system, boundaries and in the management of ACT electoral regulations. This would also be prudent given the current Senate debate around the ACT Assembly's rights to determine the size of its own legislature.

Yours sincerely,



Elias Hallaj

Secretary, ALP (ACT Branch)

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