

From: Penny Taylor
Sent: Friday, 5 August 2011 4:59 PM
To: Elections
Subject: Submission relating to ACT Electoral boundaries and suggested changes

Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing to express some of my concerns about the proposed boundary changes that would result in the moving of three inner north suburbs (Lyneham, O'Connor and Turner) from the Molonglo electorate to Gininderra.

The first report into possible redistribution came down strongly against such a move, arguing cogently that it would 'significantly disrupt the community of interests that Lyneham, O'Connor and Turner share with neighbouring (north) Central Canberra suburbs'. Given this, it came as a surprise to me to read the second proposal that these three suburbs were to be removed from their organic geographic, historical, social and demographic community of interests. The demographics and interests of Gungahlin seem to fit far better with those of Belconnen.

In this submission, I will focus on social and community aspects since these are close to my heart. I would ask that you not read this submission as coming from an inner-city elitist who does not wish to be linked to the outer suburbs. I have given this some thought, particularly since many of our son's friends live in Gungahlin, a suburb they love and that I enjoy visiting. Gungahlin has developed its own thriving sense of community in a remarkably short space of time – but it is a community based on shared experiences, needs, and issues of concern. These are not the same as those that have formed and continue to inform the community we now know as 'the inner north'.

I first moved to Canberra in 1979. When we bought our house in Turner, many of my colleagues were surprised that we had opted for a 'guvvie' instead of larger suburban dwelling. I recall explaining to them that it was the local character we loved, the sense of community. Over the years, we have put a lot of effort into maintaining our community, physically and socially. My husband and I spent our earlier years in local council areas and have always missed this particular layer of government. When it comes to effective decision-making and implementation of actions, it is hard to beat local knowledge and understanding of local issues. Living in a local council area puts responsibility at the local level and gives easy access to one's elected representatives. In Canberra, this layer of government and sense of local representation is lacking, but at least members representing Molonglo could be expected to have a reasonable understanding of inner north issues – something we risk losing.

In the absence of a local council structure, and given our increased remoteness from decision makers, my husband and I have considered it important to assume more responsibilities ourselves. Let me give you some examples of how we live in our inner north community.

We live in Turner and play tennis at both Lyneham and Reid. We have never considered Northbourne Avenue a boundary – rather it is the boulevard that runs through the centre of our lives, something that has been enhanced by increased development along its flanks. We walk and cycle to shops and cafes in Civic, Braddon and Acton. We have friends across the inner north whom we visit regularly. Some have downsized and are enjoying life in new developments on either side of Northbourne Avenue, in both Turner and Braddon. We walk the full length of Haig Park (which crosses Northbourne Ave) with our dogs at least once a week, calling in on Ainslie friends when we reach Corroboree Park. We also take the dogs to the O'Connor Oval and to the Acton Peninsula. We shop principally in the local IGAs at O'Connor, Lyneham and Ainslie because we appreciate the community atmosphere in these shopping precincts and consider it important to support local facilities so that everyone has shops within walking distance. We go to Dickson Library, Dickson Swimming Pool, and large supermarkets as needed. Our doctor is in Ainslie; our dentist in Civic. Our children went to Turner Primary School and then to Campbell and Dickson. We seldom go to Belconnen or Gininderra; it is a long way away and we try to limit fuel consumption.

We pick up litter wherever our lives take us in the inner north. We prune branches that risk getting in cyclists' eyes as they pedal through our suburbs on their way to the ANU or town. We take part in seasonal working bees at Dirrawan Gardens, Reid to look after the tennis courts and their surrounds. We pull out noxious weeds wherever we see them and fill in holes in nearby parks that risk breaking ankles. My husband regularly cleans park benches in our area to encourage people to sit on them and enjoy our neighbourhood. In living our lives, we become aware of the needs of people in our community and try to assist as much as possible.

Of course, there is no reason why any of this should change just because an electoral boundary changes, but I fear the redistribution will have more than symbolic effects. The basis of our political representation will change as will many of the institutions that broker our interests and concerns resulting in fragmentation and confusion.

I am currently working on an ACT Heritage Grant preparing two self-guided walks focussing on inter-war Art Deco architecture at Acton and the inner north. Conducting this research has made me particularly conscious of the shared social history of the inner north. In the text for my guides, I notice that I have referred frequently to 'the inner north', confident that readers from within or outside the area would understand and relate to the concept. Yet this very concept appears to be under threat.

Can I please urge you to reject the redistribution proposed in the second report by the Augmented Commission.

Yours faithfully

Penny Taylor