

From: Eugene Bajkowski
Sent: Friday, 5 August 2011 2:42 PM
To: Elections
Subject: Submission RE: Redistribution of the ACT Electorates

EUGENE ANDREW BAJKOWSKI

Canberra, 4 August 2011

Mr Phillip Green

ACT Electoral Commissioner,

ACT Electoral Commission

P O Box 272

Civic Square ACT 2601

5 August 2011

Dear Mr Green,

RE: Redistribution of the ACT Electorates

As a 50% co-owner of a property in Turner, ACT (a free-standing house with a backyard at 12 Stawell Street which earlier was the residence of my deceased parents for many years) I wholly and vigorously endorse and support the Submission lodged with you by the Turner Residents Association (TRA) in relation to the ACT Electoral Commission's Proposed Redistribution of the ACT's electorates. I share TRA's grateful acknowledgment of the Electoral Commission's decision to extend the timeframe for receiving Submissions from the public, especially in light of the hitherto very low level of community awareness about, and clear understanding of, the importance of the process and its implications for the democratic process of representation of community views, aspirations and concerns. In particular, and especially, in view of the stunningly radical and unprecedented extent of the proposed electoral redistribution.

I support the Redistribution Committee's sensible original proposal for the retention of a seven member Molonglo seat through the transfer of the suburbs Crace and Palmerston into the seat of Ginninderra. This represents a sensible and equitable balance of interests by the ACT Electoral Commission and also minimises disruption and delivers a welcome measure of certainty to voters, candidates and ACT Legislative Assembly members. .

In support of this view I now turn to the guidelines which the Committee and Commission must duly consider.

Guideline C(i) specifies the need for due consideration for the community of interests within each proposed electorate including economic, social and regional interests.

Turner is one of the suburbs which surround the City and it is important to remember that it was developed in accordance with the "Garden City" concept which historically has been the defining character of Canberra. This has enabled ACT residents to "belong" to a planned city of parks and open spaces. The older suburbs thus require adequate electoral representation as a bloc in order to preserve this character. The alternative is to artificially combine old and new suburbs which have few common interests, and possibly some divergent interests and different preferences and lifestyles.

Turner is one of the long established suburbs of the Inner North. It was settled during the 1940s, that is some 70 years prior to Gungahlin which was commenced during 1991. It is a vibrant, decades-old social community whose residents continue to share common values and bonds and pursue common initiatives, notwithstanding gradual demographic alteration brought about by densification.

North Canberra, South Belconnen and Woden contain nearly half of all the Canberra residents aged 65 and over. In contrast, the more recently settled suburbs of Gungahlin and South Tuggeranong have less older residents. Based on this demographic they have similar infrastructure needs such as transport, support services and social networks. They therefore belong together in electoral terms.

The Inner North and South suburbs are situated in the vicinity of the major social, cultural, educational and legal institutions of the National Capital. Their shared voice is paramount to the maintenance and development of these institutions for the use and participation of all ACT residents. In particular, the North Canberra suburbs have a long-standing, organic connection to the remainder of the inner north through the public schooling system, health centres, sport and recreational associations, and employment in the city centre, CSIRO and Australian National University. By the same token, all residents in the north depend on major health care facilities (notably Calvary Hospital) located in neighbouring Ginninderra.

Guideline C (ii) requires due consideration of the means of communication and travel within each proposed electorate.

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Guideline C (ii) requires due consideration of the means of communication and travel within each proposed electorate. Turner and O'Connor are within walking distance of the city. Hence their focus is on cycle access, footpath safety and road maintenance. They are supplied with frequent bus services. In this dimension they are quite distinct from suburbs such as Gungahlin, Palmerston and Crace where the majority of residents must, of necessity, commute for work, leisure and recreation. This is a very important distinction.

Guideline C (iii) requires due consideration of the physical features and area of each proposed electorate.

Turner as one of the older suburbs in the inner City has physical features which are similar to such suburbs as Reid in terms of their heritage character. Their role in the preservation of these features (such as Haig Park) is necessary for the benefit of all Canberra residents.

The suburbs of Turner, Braddon, Lyneham and Dickson have been brought together physically through the Government's housing re-development program. They share very similar and valid concerns related to the quality of housing, privacy and the preservation of green space.

The Augmented Commission's revised preference for an expanded seven member seat of Ginninderra will compound rather than help to ameliorate the above legitimate concerns that all Canberra residents have about the limitations posed by the current system to more effectively represent in the ACT Legislative Assembly distinct residential communities with differing and unique characteristics.

Gungahlin is not the only growth centre experiencing significant demographic change which, in the interests of fair and just democratic representation, warrant its residents having a more coherent voice in the Assembly. The ACT Government's policy of increasing population density in suburbs which are proximate to the city centre also entails a rapid increase of the voter population in the inner north through a policy of urban infill — and in suburbs such as Turner, Dickson and Braddon, this has recently been accelerated. Population increases in all inner north suburbs are, in the Electoral Council's own estimates, among the highest anywhere in Canberra beyond the newly created subdivisions to the north. Voter numbers are neither static nor declining in these inner north suburbs, unlike in some established suburbs in Molonglo and Brindabella.

Conclusion

The proposed electoral bifurcation of the inner north through the removal of Turner, O'Connor and Lyneham from the seat of Molonglo would diminish the capacity for inner north residents to have a fair voice within the Assembly.

Furthermore, the impact on residents and voters in the suburbs affected by the revised redistribution (approx. 30,000) would be particularly adverse because of the very different nature of their interests and concerns facing them — these tend to be more synonymous with issues and concerns relevant to voters and candidates in Central Canberra (Molonglo).

Under the proposed redistribution to result in an augmented Ginninderra, suburbs such as Turner and O'Connor would become merely a marginal and insignificant electoral pool of votes because they would find themselves on the periphery of an electorate governed for the most part by entirely different sections of the revised Territory Plan, and divorced from the attendant issues, concerns and interests that the Territory Plan seeks to balance in those areas. Suffice to say, the electoral process is a vital pillar of public accountability in the democratic process of effectively balancing these interests.

Yours sincerely,

Eugene Andrew Bajkowski