

Expert Reference Group  
Elections ACT

## Review into the size of the ACT Legislative Assembly

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Expert Reference Group should suggest an increase in size to 25 members;
2. the number of electorates should be five;
3. individual electorate boundaries should be decided by the ACT Electoral Commissions;
4. the electoral boundaries should be broadly based on community-of-interest ideals. Prior to the 2012 Assembly election, boundary redistribution issues were a major source of community divisiveness.

### DISCUSSION

The North Canberra Community Council (NCCC) notes with interest that a bill to amend the *Australian Capital Territory (Self-Government) Act 1988* (Cwth) was introduced on 13 February 2013. The purpose of this Bill is to grant the Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly the power to determine its own numbers without requiring the Commonwealth to amend its legislation to enact any changes to the size of the Assembly. In the bill, referring to the two-third majority of Assembly members required to amend the number of its members, it specifies that:

“To achieve a specified majority pursuant to s26 of the Act, The ACT Government would be required to conduct a referendum of ACT voters.”

Given these conditions, it is highly unlikely that an increase in the size of the ACT Legislative Assembly will take place prior to the 2016 Assembly election.

In the longer term, the NCCC would prefer a seven by five member electoral system, broadly based on community council social-geographic community-of-interest boundaries, yielding 35 members. The seven community councils are (from north to south): Gungahlin, Belconnen, North Canberra, South Canberra, Woden, Weston Creek/Molonglo, and Tuggeranong. This would need to be done sensitively in dialogue with citizens to minimise the splitting of communities between electorates.

There has been a study done (refer Helyar - submission to this inquiry), which indicates that Canberrans are grossly under-represented by the current electoral system. For jurisdictions with comparable populations to the ACT across Australia, for example the Northern Territory and Tasmania, the ACT has the lowest number of legislators. Our experience suggests that under-representation is reducing the effectiveness of government in the ACT. Ministers and backbench committee members cannot keep pace with responsibilities. They become more and more hostage to the unelected bureaucracy. The NCCC is fully cognisant that there is an urgent need to increase the size of the ACT Legislative Assembly, both to increase the number of Ministers, and to ensure that the committee system works as effectively as possible.

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