

Mr Philip Green
ACT Electoral Commissioner
PO Box 272
CIVIC SQUARE ACT 2608
By email: elections@act.gov.au

8 March 2007

Dear Mr Green

The Gungahlin Community Council Inc. (GCC) is an incorporated, not for profit, community-based association operating within the Gungahlin region of the Australian Capital Territory.

The district represented by the Council covers an area in the north to northwest of the Territory between the ACT/NSW border and the Barton Highway, Federal Highway/Northbourne Avenue to the South and East.

The objective of the council as defined in its constitution is:

- To preserve and improve the social, cultural, economic and environmental well being of Gungahlin and the Gungahlin Community.

To achieve these objectives the Council undertakes to:

- consult with members of the Gungahlin community
- represent the Gungahlin community, and lobby authorities on the community's behalf
- provide a non-political environment where members of the community can express their aspirations, concerns and suggestions
- provide a public forum where members of the community can obtain information, support and opportunities to network with others
- advise, support and assist any organisation with compatible objectives to those that have been adopted by the Council
- liaise with members of the public, legislators, officials and community representatives
- to provide appropriate information and opinions on matters relevant to the Gungahlin community.



***Gungahlin
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In line with achieving these objectives, the Gungahlin Community Council wishes to lodge the following submission to the 2007 electoral boundary review.

The Gungahlin Community Council, which is now 15 years old, is concerned that the current anomaly with the electoral boundary between Ginninderra and Molonglo that leaves just Nicholls in a different electorate should not be allowed to continue. This has resulted in our community being under-represented in each of these electorates, leading to disadvantage for our community in the way of planning, services and infrastructure provision.

In the interests of correcting this situation, I wish to put to you a suggestion for boundary realignment that stays within the current 7-5-5 legislative situation, and another that considers options if the breakdown of representation was to change.

7-5-5 member solution

Currently the Molonglo electorate stretches from the northern ACT boundary down through most of the Woden area and around to the west. There is not much consideration of the “common community of interest” provision in this layout. The committee is faced with merely ‘tinkering’ with this current situation, or making a substantial change now builds in provision for future shifts.

Population growth in the next decade will occur mainly in the Gungahlin, Molonglo and City areas - mostly north of the Molonglo River. Therefore any boundary realignment should take into account this growth by setting the electorates up for incremental changes rather than wholesale. The current electorates do not provide for this.

The Molonglo River is a natural boundary to aim for, but the numbers do not work for a 7-5-5 distribution at this point. However our modelling has shown that Brindabella would work as the 7-member electorate, including all of the suburbs south of the river except for South Canberra itself.

Two 5-member electorates north of the river would provide for the future population growth areas, and contain the electorates within fairly close geographical and social proximity - quite different from the current situation. Ginninderra could remain as a predominantly Belconnen electorate, and Molonglo would encompass South and North Canberra, plus Gungahlin.

As population grows at Gungahlin and then Molonglo, subsequent boundary realignments could see the Molonglo electorate retreat from South Canberra to the river/lake.

With this alignment, the Gungahlin community could be assured of dealing with relatively ‘local’ elected representatives, and with the entire community within the one electorate - preferably from this review.

Then as population continues to grow, there would likely be an increase in the number of members, so an additional two members could be introduced to one of the northern electorates, while maintaining the overall odd-number total.



Electorate restructure

Maintaining the current 7-5-5 structure presents inherent problems with maintenance of the democratic principles of the original legislation. With larger geographical electorates and as the electorate populations increase, it becomes harder to ensure a diversity of candidates. Bigger equals more money required to mount a campaign, favouring established parties to the detriment of minority parties and independent candidates. It could be argued that a government such as the ACT's with no upper house needs a diversity of elected members to maintain accountability. Governments with absolute majorities are not in the ACT community's interest, as accountability is essentially limited to once every four years only.

The options for redividing the ACT electorates within the current 17 members are very limited, as there are the over-riding provisions that each electorate and the overall number must all have odd numbers of members. The solution of least change with respect to total number of members is to change to 19, in a 5-5-3-3-3 configuration. This would ensure smaller electorates are within the campaigning reach of a broader diversity of candidates, individual communities of interest have more opportunity to 'connect' with their local members, and electorate boundaries are more closely aligned with those communities. Subsequent boundary alignments could also more easily accommodate population shifts.

Our modelling shows that these boundaries could be configured with two 5-member electorates south of the river (divided into Tuggeranong and Woden/Weston/South Canberra), and three 3-member electorates north of the river (divided into roughly Gungahlin, Belconnen, and North Canberra). Some division of communities would occur between the three northern electorates over the next couple of electorate periods due to expected population growth, but again in this model, at least the electorates would have close geographical and social links, making any division less of an issue than it currently is.

Thank you for your consideration of these proposals.

Regards,

Alan Kerlin
President Gungahlin Community Council