Comment # 6
On Public Suggestions

Mr Charles Richardson

4 pages

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Redistribution Committee for South Australia
Australian Electoral Commission
G P O Box 344
ADELAIDE SA 5001

Dear Friends,

Thank you for the opportunity to make comments on the submissions received relating to the proposed redistribution of federal electoral boundaries in South Australia. Please find enclosed a short set of comments.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Charles Richardson

enc.
REDISTRIBUTION OF FEDERAL ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES
IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA:

COMMENTS ON THE SUGGESTIONS RECEIVED

BY

CHARLES RICHARDSON

Rather than comment in detail on the numerous submissions the Committee has received, I thought it would be more useful to draw the Committee’s attention to what I regard as the basic issue that they raise.

The basic issue

South Australia currently has twelve federal divisions: eight that are clearly metropolitan, three that are predominantly rural or provincial, and one (Mayo) that has significant elements of both. With the abolition of one division, the metropolitan areas of the state will provide enough electors for approximately eight divisions. Using, for example, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) definitions, the Adelaide Statistical Division contains, on the current enrolments, 8.09 quotas (8.08 on the 2007 projections).

The basic issue, therefore, is this: should the Committee in effect abolish Mayo, leaving eight metropolitan and three non-metropolitan divisions, or should it abolish a division elsewhere, leaving two or more divisions that mix substantial numbers of both types of electors? Putting the question another way, should it try to use the boundary of the metropolitan area as much as possible to separate electoral divisions, or should it create divisions that straddle that boundary?

My submission embodied the first of these strategies (although I described it as abolition of Makin, it involves the merging of Makin and Mayo to create a basically metropolitan division). I am pleased to see that a number of submissions support this general approach, including those from the National Party (number 9) and from a number of Liberal Party Members of Parliament (notably numbers 3, 13 and 14). The alternative strategy is given its most detailed exposition in the submission from the Australian Labor Party (number 18).

The ALP’s submission

The ALP submission demonstrates in my view the weaknesses of this alternative approach. It creates two divisions, Mayo and Bonython, that straddle the metropolitan/non-metropolitan divide. Far from comprising reasonably homogenous outer suburban or fringe
metropolitan territory, they both include an odd mixture of unmistakably urban and unmistakably rural electors, as well as others in between.

Nor does there seem to be any substantial compensating advantage to be gained. The division of Barker would not (contrary to the impression given in the submission) be confined to purely rural areas, since it would include Strathalbyn, and also would have to extend up into the mid-north region – stretching from there to Mount Gambier.

Mayo would gain the Fleurieu Peninsula from Barker and the Barossa Valley from Wakefield, although community of interest between them is surely tenuous and communication difficult. It would however still contain a remnant of the suburbs, in the City of Campbelltown, which would look more out of place than ever. (Christopher Pyne MP, in submission number 3, suggests crossing the boundary in the opposite direction, putting a small portion of the Adelaide Hills municipality into Sturt.) Mayo would also be left with an incongruous corner of the City of Tea Tree Gully, which clearly should go into Makin or Sturt.

Worst of all, however, is the ALP proposal for Bonython. I agree with the argument that the municipality of Gawler is fundamentally metropolitan, and should ideally be in a metropolitan division (I was unable to find a satisfactory way of doing this). But what the ALP suggests is putting it in a division that would unite it with both suburban areas and with the Clare Valley, but would divide it from the Barossa Valley! This would also result in splitting the District Council of Kapunda and Light between two divisions, and that of the Clare and Gilbert Valleys between three divisions. At the other end, the proposed boundary between Bonython and Port Adelaide appears to run right thru the middle of Salisbury.

**Variations on the ALP's approach**

If, contrary to my argument, the Committee wishes to abolish one of the existing three non-metropolitan divisions, I suggest that the Australian Democrats submission (number 24) provides a better model for doing so. It would effectively merge Bonython and Wakefield, creating a division that included Gawler, the Barossa Valley and the City of Playford. Goyder District Council and the Clare Valley could also fit in this division.

Submission number 10, from Mr Christopher Connolly, is another variation on the same theme, although his proposal in my view involves an unnecessarily high degree of disruption to the existing metropolitan divisions, particularly Adelaide and Sturt. This is the result of following municipal boundaries in preference to the existing electoral boundaries; in this respect he is at the opposite extreme to the ALP, which seems to want only disregard municipal boundaries.

I believe that my submission represents a reasonable compromise on this point. Municipal boundaries are an important guide to community of interest, but should not be followed slavishly. The table on the following page compares the effect of my proposal on local government areas with that of the ALP submission.
(Note that I am working with the black and white reproductions of the ALP’s maps, which are sometimes difficult to interpret, so it is possible I have not correctly identified all of their proposed boundaries – my apologies if that is the case.)

Other submissions

The One Nation submission (number 17) preserves, as does mine, three non-metropolitan divisions, although in a less satisfactory way. It actually describes itself as providing for four non-metropolitan divisions, but its proposed Mayo is clearly metropolitan in character, having shed Strathalbyn and moved into the cities of Burnside and Mitcham. Its most rural remaining area would be the District Council of Mount Barker, which fits reasonably well with the Adelaide Hills, but the price for keeping it in Mayo is twofold: firstly, Wakefield has to move further into the suburbs, approaching very closely to the main urban concentrations of the City of Playford; secondly, Mayo and the three non-metropolitan divisions would all be very close to the lower limit of the allowed tolerance for projected elector numbers (ranging from 2:97 to 3:43 per cent below quota), which involves a systematic dilution of the representation of metropolitan electors.

Mr Martin Gordon, in submission number 7, has a plan which is conceptually similar to the One Nation proposal: he also suggests merging Hindmarsh and Port Adelaide, and retaining some rural areas in Mayo. By moving Murray Bridge into Wakefield (as I had also recommended) he is able to avoid so much disruption in the northern suburbs, but at the cost of producing a proposed Barker that extends from Mount Gambier to McLaren Vale and whose two halves have no connecting links. I suggest that Mount Barker is a better fit with the rest of Barker (the name helps) than the City of Onkaparinga.

Mr Glynn Evans, in submission number 1, has adopted a strategy similar to mine, and I would endorse a number of his comments (although not his readiness to raise political considerations, which I trust the Committee will avoid). In particular, he agrees with my suggestion that the western boundary of Adelaide should move eastwards to the municipal boundary, shedding electors to Hindmarsh and Port Adelaide.