



The Federal Redistribution 2006
NEW SOUTH WALES



Public Objection Number: 1706

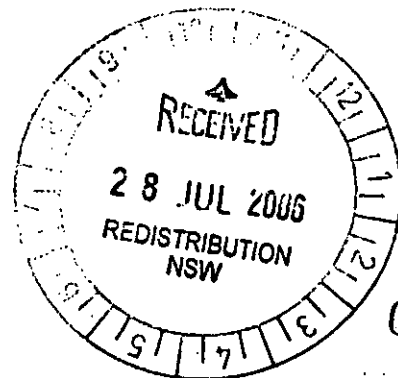
Name: THE NATIONALS

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THE NATIONALS

July 28, 2006

Redistribution Committee for New South Wales
Australian Electoral Commission
PO Box 20014
World Square, NSW 2002



Dear Commissioners

OBJECTIONS

The Nationals have closely examined your proposed Federal Electoral Boundaries, as published on June 30, 2006.

On behalf of The Nationals' organisation in NSW and Members of Parliament please find enclosed our objections to your proposed boundaries.

Our first and foremost objection is the proposed abolition of the division of Gwydir, a Federation seat in north-western NSW.

With respect, we strongly believe that there is no legislative or arithmetic imperative to abolish a non-metropolitan division. Further the Redistribution Committee had credible alternatives to the suggested abolition of Gwydir, namely the abolition of the Sydney seat of Blaxland.

The abolition of Gwydir and the creation of the mega-seat of Parkes specifically fails to take into account the legislative requirements to consider communities of interest and area.

And just as importantly, it is The Nationals' view that the AEC's use of Australian Bureau of Statistics census data has led to flawed enrolment projections. The figures are based on past events and therefore rely on the continuation of past events to be true.

The reality is that circumstances change in these areas.

There is a perception that the division of Gwydir was targeted because former Deputy Prime Minister and Leader of The Nationals John Anderson may retire at the next election. Nowhere is this listed as a legislative consideration.

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The Nationals note that the Federal Electoral Commissioner Ian Campbell, in a media release, dated February 24, 2006, stated in relation to the key criteria for determining electoral boundaries:

"In making its proposal about the redrawing of electoral boundaries, the Committee will consider community of interests and means of communication and travel within the proposed electoral divisions. The physical features and area of the proposed electoral divisions, and the boundaries of existing divisions in New South Wales will also be considered."

We maintain that the criteria referred to by the Commissioner should be the primary consideration in this process and should in no way be ignored for the sake of numbers.

We would welcome the opportunity to present our suggestions and objections at oral public hearings. In this regard, we are advised that you have tentatively set down hearings to commence on September 6, 2006. We would also like the opportunity to provide you with a response at these hearings to other objections and suggestions that you receive, where appropriate.

We formally request that at least one of these public hearings be held in the newly proposed division of Parkes to give local people and organisations an opportunity to address the Commissioners on the practical problems created by the proposal to put 47% of New South Wales in one division.

Thank you for the opportunity to make comments and objections.

Yours sincerely



Scott McFarlane
State Director

Overview

As the only political Party that solely represents the interests of country and coastal electors in NSW The Nationals strongly object to any attempt to diminish the electoral rights of non-metropolitan electors.

It is often said that redistributions are about the 'tyranny of numbers'.

The Nationals submit that the tyranny of numbers in this 2006 Federal Redistribution dictate that it is the metropolitan divisions that should be cut by one, not the non-metropolitan divisions.

The numbers alone do not support a cut being made in a regional area.

The 15 current divisions outside of the Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong basin are projected to have a total of 1,392,062 electors in 2010.

With the projected quota as determined by the Electoral Commissioner being 93,508, this will mean that these current 15 divisions contain enough electors for 14.89 divisions.

Comparatively, the current 35 divisions that make up the Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong basin are projected to contain 3,189,877 electors which would only be enough electors for 34.11 divisions.

New South Wales is only entitled to 49 division in the next House of Representatives. So, it would follow from the above that the Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong basin is entitled to 34 of the 49 divisions.

Regional NSW is entitled to 15 divisions.

These figures clearly show that the abolition of any electorate in NSW should take place in the Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong basin in order to ensure electors in regional NSW are not given fewer representatives than is their entitlement.

In order that the one-vote, one-value principle is maintained the abolition of a division must not occur in regional NSW.

The Report of the Redistribution Committee states that: "The Committee considered that there were insufficient elector numbers in the rural north-west to retain these two divisions....the divisions of Gwydir and Parkes were amalgamated as a result".

Given we have already established that regional NSW is entitled to 15 divisions it is now clear that an erroneous assumption was the starting point for the Redistribution Committee's entire proposal. The Nationals respectfully insist that the redistribution process was flawed and the process should be taken back to the drawing board.

Critically, it is The Nationals' view that the AEC's use of Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) projection figures is flawed. The figures are based on past trends and therefore rely on the continuation of past trends to produce projections. The Nationals believe that the AEC needs to move to a new predictive population model that more accurately reflects demographic fluctuations.

The reality is that circumstances change in these areas. Testimony to this can be seen at the last redistribution of electoral boundaries where the projections used by the AEC proved to be grossly inaccurate. For example, the discrepancy from the projected figures since the last redistribution in the electorate of Reid was 11,416 voters short, in Sydney it was 9733 electors over and Wentworth was 6511 short of the forecast, based on ABS figures.

Additionally, with a Census due to begin next week it would seem that the projections are based on five year old figures.

In the case of Gwydir, there is substantial evidence that the projected figures are wrong. They fail to take into account factors such as new coal mines and other employment generating activities that have recently been publicly announced. These developments obviously mean population growth.

A report prepared for the Namoi Catchment Management Authority - "Socio-Economic Assessment of Namoi Catchment Action Plan" - authored by the Centre for Agricultural and Regional Economics Pty Ltd (CARE) - clearly shows projected population growth taking in a range of factors not considered by ABS statisticians.

The Gwydir/Parkes section of our objection, below, gives specific examples from this research.

While the Redistribution Committee has argued that better transport infrastructure and modern communications have improved the links between communities, which is undoubtedly true in many areas over the past decade, the evidence clearly shows that the communities most affected by the proposed boundary changes do not have parity with metropolitan areas in regard to these services.

Clearly, there are communities in north-western NSW which do not have access to the same broadband and mobile phone coverage as a Sydneysider.

In regard to transport links it should be noted that the travelling distance between Tibooburra and Moree in the proposed division of Parkes is 236km longer than the travelling distance between Sydney and Melbourne.

In the Report of the Redistribution Committee the Committee members stated that: ".....the Committee sought to keep electors in their existing divisions wherever it could be equitably achieved".

The Nationals note that on the North Coast in particular several divisions are within the projected quota and despite the claimed objectives of the Committee changes have been made unnecessarily to these divisions.

The Nationals originally submitted that while there will be a reduction of one seat due to population changes in NSW, from 50 to 49, there is a very strong case for minimal changes in non-metropolitan boundaries.

The Nationals' Suggestions complied with the quota of electors for the purpose of the 2006 redistribution at 93,508 electors and the projected enrolment parameters.

It also took into consideration the statutory requirements of:

- community interests within the division, including economic, social and regional interests
- means of communication and travel within a division
- physical features and area
- existing boundaries of divisions
- enrolment (both current enrolment and projected enrolment three and a half years after the redistribution).

Based on the above criteria The Nationals strongly maintain that a Sydney seat, Blaxland, should be abolished.

We argue that the Redistribution Committee has clearly failed to take into account many of the statutory considerations in its proposal to abolish Gwydir, particularly in relation to community interests and area.

Many townships have been split from their primary service centres and in some cases alienated from their only link to the rest of the State.

The key tenet in The Nationals' submission to the Redistribution Committee was that divisions in country and coastal areas of NSW should facilitate interaction between constituents and their elected federal representatives. Clearly the proposed boundaries have not been drawn with this outcome in mind. We strongly stand by this sentiment on the basis of equity and commonsense.

Gwydir/Parkes

Overview

The proposed abolition of the division of Gwydir is ill-conceived and fails to take into account key legislative criteria.

As has been previously noted there is no statistical basis for the removal of a division from non-metropolitan NSW.

On all measures this proposal should be overturned and as suggested by The Nationals, and the Liberal Party, in our original submissions, the Sydney seat of Blaxland should be abolished.

Community Interests Within The Division, Including Economic, Social And Regional Interests

With such diverse communities proposed to be placed in one new division it becomes difficult to ascertain any community interests between many of the far spread townships such as Tibooburra and Moree.

One of the main community groups that will be disadvantaged under the proposed new boundaries is the residents of Unincorporated NSW.

Unincorporated NSW has strong ties to the community of Broken Hill from which it will be separated under this proposal.

School children of towns such as Tibooburra receive their schooling via the Outback School Of The Air, their teacher broadcasting from Broken Hill.

In NSW local government departments are classified into regions, clearly indicating communities with common interests.

The Far West local government region encompasses Unincorporated NSW, Broken Hill City Council and Central Darling Shire Council.

The Far Western Rural Fire Service Area takes in Bourke, Broken Hill, Brewarrina, Central Darling, Cobar and Unincorporated NSW, again identifying communities of interest.

These and many other examples clearly indicate that the strong ties between Unincorporated NSW and Broken Hill should not be broken for any reason.

Means Of Communication And Travel Within A Division

The size of the proposed new division of Parkes means that travel for both an MP and constituents within the division becomes a major obstacle to communication.

The current Member for Parkes is able to service the remote areas of the current boundaries due to the location of a second electorate office in Broken Hill. Under the proposed boundaries this office would no longer be within the electorate and due to the large population in the proposed north western portion of the electorate, a second office would surely be located in one of these communities, such as Moree. These changes mean that residents in the west of the proposed division, particularly in Unincorporated NSW, are isolated from their MP.

For a resident of Tibooburra to travel to meet their local representative would involve a road trip to either Moree or Dubbo.

Town to Town	Distance	Driving Time
Tibooburra to Moree	1118.02 km	12 hours 56 minutes
Tibooburra to Dubbo	806.93 km	9 hours 36 minutes
Tibooburra to Broken Hill	351.23 km	4 hours 28 minutes
Sydney to Melbourne	882.36 km	9 hours 14 minutes

These travel times and distances illustrate the fact that Tibooburra residents, along with other residents of the far west of the proposed Parkes division, would be asked to travel unreasonable distances to reach their "local" member of parliament.

It is worth noting that during the drive from Sydney to Melbourne you would cross 12 Federal Divisions, while in the longer drive from Tibooburra to Moree you would not even entirely cross one division.

The communities of Tibooburra and surrounding settlements can only be accessed by a single partly-sealed road which can only be reached from Broken Hill.

Additionally, the only air access to Broken Hill is via Dubbo or Adelaide. This means that the Member for the proposed division of Farrer will be required to either to travel through Dubbo, currently the key service centre for the existing division of Parkes, or leave the State entirely.

Distances of this nature present major difficulties when the reality is that while major work is being undertaken to improve telecommunications services there is not currently parity with metropolitan areas.

Physical Features And Area

The proposed new division of Parkes is almost 380,000 square kilometres in size, or 47 per cent of NSW. That makes this electorate bigger than Japan and Germany and five and a half times the size of Tasmania. It should be noted that Tasmania has five Federal representatives.

This presents a major challenge for the Member of the newly proposed division of Parkes to service the area, which includes remote and indigenous communities.

The proposed division is split by a natural feature, which cannot be removed. The area of the Pilliga Nature Reserve (80,240 ha) and the Pilliga State Forest which in total consist of (126,415 ha) are major features which divide the proposed electoral division. This area is a geographical boundary between the main economic regions of the proposed electoral division.

Broken Hill's water supply is sourced from the Central Darling Shire, specifically the Menindee Lakes and Darling River. Broken Hill's water is reticulated via a pipeline 120km from Menindee. The Electorate of Farrer sources its water supply from the Snowy and Murray Rivers.

The proposed new division has no vast tracts of unpopulated areas. Rather it is comprised of small rural communities and settlements. While the division of Capricornia in Queensland is larger than the proposed division of Parkes, it contains extensive areas of unpopulated land mass.

Enrolment (Both Current Enrolment And Projected Enrolment Three And A Half Years After The Redistribution)

Given the proposals of all major Parties complied with the enrolment requirements and did not propose the abolition of any division in the north-west of the State, it is clearly possible to redraw the boundaries in this area while meeting all the legislative and statistical criteria.

The Nationals have major concerns with the data used for projected enrolment three and a half years after the redistribution.

As previously referred to in this submission's overview, in the case of Gwydir, there is substantial evidence that the projected figures are wrong. They fail to take into account factors such as new coal mines and other employment generating activities. These developments obviously mean population growth.

A report prepared for the Namoi Catchment Management Authority – "Socio-economic assessment of Namoi Catchment Action Plan" – prepared by the Centre for Agricultural and Regional Economics Pty Ltd (CARE) - clearly shows projected population growth taking in a range of factors not considered by ABS statisticians.

The purpose of the research was to endeavour to establish an estimate of the size and structure of the economy as it is in 2006, including population projections. The developments that are built into the estimated table include:

- Almost steady agricultural employment combined with productivity growth leading to increased output value, especially when combined with drought recovery.
- Significant growth in coal mining, with most occurring post 2006 – up to 2006 much of the activity is in construction and development.

- Expansion in gas supply with a new pipeline – especially post 2006.
- Continued expansion in meat and cereal processing.
- Growth of timber processing
- Higher population growth underpins growth in building and construction, trade and many areas of services:
- Transport growth especially in road and air services.
- Continued growth in visitation at about the population growth rate.
- Development of additional business services associated with business growth and population growth.

The table below, extracted from the report, makes population and employment projections taking into account these factors, compared to the former Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources figures.

Population Projections

	Employment by Workplace			Population			DIPNR* Projected Population		
	2001	Projected 2006	Projected 2011	2001	Projected 2006	Projected 2011	2001	Projected 2006	Projected 2011
Gunnedah	4,538	4,872	5,503	12,089	12,181	13,423	12,570	12,170	11,810
Quirindi	2,063	2,231	2,502	4,816	5,212	5,845	5,020	4,860	4,720
Narrabri	6,155	6,577	6,824	15,458	16,441	17,060	14,540	13,970	13,450
Walgett	3,188	3,179	3,497	7,960	7,947	8,742	8,330	8,130	7,980
Tamworth & Parry	20,504	21,982	23,519	47,621	51,122	54,695	42,510	43,700	45,020
Manilla	803	806	816	3,236	3,167	3,262	3,320	3,330	3,350
Nundle	443	439	437	1,289	1,255	1,213	1,130	1,340	1,360
Barraba*	785	785	785	2,186	2,186	3,140	2,260	2,140	2,040
Namoi	38,480	40,871	43,882	94,655	100,537	107,944	89,680	89,640	89,730

* Used resident employment due to apparent error in workplace employment and assumed no growth / decline since.

* Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources (DIPNR).

The Namoi Catchment Management Authority report states:

“It is our considered view that the trends that prevailed in the 1990s are unlikely to prevail in the 2000s. Many of the projections that have been made, such as those for population in the inland regions, are likely to be very wide of the mark as a result.

“Within this report, we provide some alternative projections that take into account the absence of factors that existed in the 1990s and new developments that are already evident in the 2000s. The differences are dramatic.

“Some of the factors in our considerations include:

- Coal mining caused many job losses in the 1990s but is a substantial growth industry in the 2000s and with the prospect of further growth.
- The rationalisation of the banking industry consequent on the application of IT and new management systems in the 1980s and 1990s has run its course. There may even be a reversal under way as major banks attempt to ‘repersonalise’ banking while the minor banks and other financial organisations such as credit unions gain market share.

Some of these have all of their back office and management in the region.

- A significant number of other national networks followed the banks in rationalising their operations and branch structures. These included the distributors of machinery, the suppliers of farm goods and services and the networks of wholesalers handling farm products. That rationalisation also appears to have run its course and with the implementation of new competition policies, new local businesses servicing local areas have developed.
- The rationalisation of the public rail transport system has been completed and that led to many jobs being lost within the Namoi over the past 20 years. Some of the slack has been taken up by expansion of the (local) road transport operators. With the rail services now being provided by the private sector, it seems likely that there will be more innovation in the services provided, greater efficiency in the overall logistics and additional employment in the regions.
- There has been a huge growth in consumer spending in Australia over the past few years that has slowed in the middle of 2005 but appears to be picking up in mid 2006. Retailing in regional areas has always been a substantial regional economy activity. The effect of that boom in consumer spending on most regional towns is obvious and has been an important part of further investment, growth and employment. Most of the main urban centres have new retail developments under way in 2006 that will improve the scope and quality of retail activity and create a range of employment opportunities.
- In recent years, there has been an increase in outside investment in the NSW regions, initially in rental housing but also in businesses. That has enlivened local property markets, increased property values and created a wealth effect. Some of that effect supports the consumer spending growth seen in recent years and it provides equity to support capital raising for business investment.
- The 2000s might also see a period that is more supportive of agriculture that has been struggling with an above average number of poor seasons and modest to poor commodity prices. During the 1990s, there appeared to be little net growth in agricultural production in this region (although it is difficult to verify statistically). Recent years have seen an improvement in seasonal conditions, and a stabilising of the exchange rate in the mid US\$0.70-80c range. There is likely to be some spin-off in terms of international agricultural commodity prices, especially for meat while we can be ever-optimistic about some rationalisation of international agricultural trade that will be of benefit to Australia. Overall, the Namoi would seem to be in a position where the 2000s will overshadow the troubled times of the 1990s in terms of agricultural production."

The report further states:

“In summary, there is a basis for optimism about future trends in the Namoi region. In parts of the region, there is already strong evidence that the wheel has turned. Definitive evidence will likely not emerge until the results are available from the 2006 Population and Agricultural Censuses.

“The input-output table built for this study has been compiled with the knowledge of many developments that have already occurred or are planned in the region. It also takes into account some of the national trends that underpin various industry sectors. The result is one where employment is growing at 1.2 per cent per year (cumulative) that is far faster than any period in the past two decades (the late 1990s was 0.3 per cent).

“If the bright economic outlook that is outlined is confirmed by facts that will emerge in due course, then the Namoi region will be on a strong growth path into the future. That alone will be a major factor in sustaining that growth as others will see the growth occurring and want to climb on board.”

Clearly, the report's approach to future projections of population and growth is very region specific and far more likely to present an accurate picture of where population and growth are headed than statistics based on past events, and relying on those events continuing.

Richmond/Page

The proposed changes to the border between the Divisions of Richmond and Page are unnecessary and unduly disruptive to local communities.

It is perplexing that the number of electors redistributed out of Richmond is almost identical to the number of electors redistributed into Richmond. This proposed re-draw is a change for the sake of change.

Electors in area transferred to Proposed Division of Page	7743 (projected)
Electors in area transferred to Proposed Division of Richmond	6267 (projected)

Given that on current boundaries the division of Richmond is well within the quota range at 95,809 projected electors it seems superfluous to make any change at all to this division.

The Nationals propose that the following scenarios are a more desirable outcome for these two divisions and continues along the line of our original proposal which advocated minimal change where possible in non-metropolitan NSW.

Page How constituted	Actual Enrolment 2.12.2005	Projected Enrolment 31.05.2010
<i>SLA's from existing division of Page</i>		
Ballina (A) (Part)	14 207	14 886
Clarence Valley (A) – Copmanhurst	2 792	3 020
Clarence Valley (A) – Grafton	11 374	11 711
Clarence Valley (A) – Maclean (part)	4 030	4 314
Clarence Valley (A) – Nymboida	2 939	3 098
Kyogle (A)	6 246	6 422
Lismore (C) - Pt A	20 153	21 171
Lismore (C) – Pt B (part)	2 161	2 273
Lismore (C) – Pt B (part)	6 033	6 267
Richmond Valley (A) – Balance	7 152	7 438
Richmond Valley (A) – Casino	6 984	7 016
<i>Total from Existing Division of Page</i>	<i>84 071</i>	<i>87 616</i>
<i>SLA's from existing division of Cowper</i>		
Clarence Valley (A) – Maclean (part)	4 977	5 473
<i>Total from Existing Division of Cowper</i>	<i>4 977</i>	<i>5 473</i>
<i>Total for proposed division of Page</i>	<i>89 048</i>	<i>93 089</i>

Richmond How constituted	Actual Enrolment 2.12.2005	Projected Enrolment 31.05.2010
<i>SLA's from existing division of Richmond</i>		
Ballina (A) (part)	6 110	6 874
Byron (A)	19 218	20 623
NSW Water Areas	0	0
Tweed (A) – Pt A	34 970	39 609
Tweed (A) – Pt B	18 909	20 960
Ballina (A) (part)	7 011	7 743
<i>Total from Existing Division of Richmond</i>	86 218	95 809
<i>Total for proposed division of Richmond</i>	86 218	95 809

Lyne

The Nationals originally suggested the transfer of Lord Howe Island to the division of Lyne from the division of Sydney.

The Nationals understand that objections to Lord Howe Island not being incorporated into Lyne under the proposed boundaries are being submitted by Mr Peter Riddle, Managing Director of the Lord Howe Island Sea Freight company, as well as the Port Macquarie-Hastings Council.

The Nationals maintain that this redistribution provides a perfect opportunity to unite Lord Howe Island with its natural community of interests with Port Macquarie in the division of Lyne.

Taking this logical step would result in the following outcomes for the Division of Lyne;

Lyne How constituted	Actual Enrolment 2.12.2005	Projected Enrolment 31.05.2010
<i>SLA's from existing division of Lyne</i>		
Greater Taree (C)	31 901	34 430
Hastings (A) – Pt A	28 192	31 221
Hastings (A) – Pt B	20 692	22 765
Kempsey (A)	2 270	2 418
Total from Existing Division of Lyne	83 055	90 834
<i>SLA's from existing division of Sydney</i>		
Lord Howe Island	274	276
Total from Existing Division of Sydney	274	276
Total for proposed division of Lyne	83 329	91 110