



**The Federal Redistribution 2006
NEW SOUTH WALES**



Comments on Public Objections – Comment No: 155

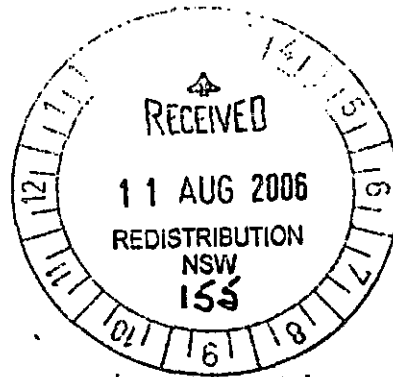
Name: THE NATIONALS

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THE NATIONALS

August 11, 2006

The Redistribution Committee for NSW
PO Box 20014
World Square, NSW 2002



Dear Commissioners

As you are aware, there has been a substantial wave of community outrage at the proposed redrawing of federal electoral boundaries, particularly in north-western NSW.

The premise that one Member of Parliament can represent almost 50 per cent of the State, while 48 other Members represent the remaining 50 per cent of the State has prompted this unprecedented number of submissions, which include 8,500 names on petitions objecting to the abolition of the Gwydir division.

In a media statement of July 31, 2006, the Australian Electoral Officer for NSW Mr David Farrell stated: "The redrawing of the State's federal electoral boundaries has been, and continues to be, a consultative process to ensure that each of New South Wales electoral divisions has, as near as possible, the same number of electors."

If this process is truly consultative, it cannot ignore the massive response from individuals, local government, charities and community organisations objecting to the abolition of the Gwydir division. Given such widespread objection and the presence of several credible alternatives, the existing proposals for the boundary arrangements in north-western NSW deserve to be re-drafted.

The Nationals, noting the large number of objections calling for public hearings in North and Central Western NSW, reiterate our call for the Augmented Electoral Commission to conduct public hearings in these areas.

While the majority of objections were made against the abolition of Gwydir and the loss of a country division, there were objections that warrant further comment due to particularly untenable and illogical proposals.

The Labor Party's support for the abolition of the Gwydir division is peculiar given the Chair of the Country Labor Committee, Christine Robertson MLC, indicated to ABC Radio in Tamworth on July 10 that her Party would be formally objecting to the abolition of the division.

Further a spokesperson for Ms Robertson told the Daily Liberal newspaper in Dubbo on July 17 that she does not support the proposal to abolish Gwydir.

It is extraordinary that a faction of the Labor Party that purportedly represents country constituents would deliberately mislead the public in the lead-up to the objection process.

New South Wales Head Office

All correspondence to: GPO Box 4558 SYDNEY NSW 2001

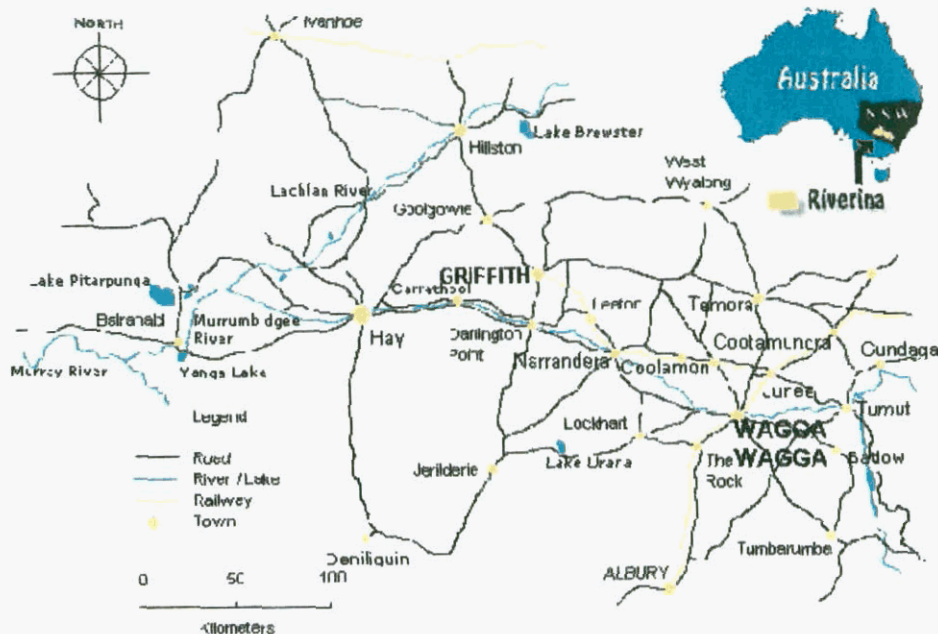
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The Nationals acknowledge the NSW Liberal Party's original submission was opposed to the abolition of a country division and broadly supported the proposals The Nationals put forward. However, the Liberal Party's objections, and alternative suggestions, put forward for country NSW do not take into account community of interest factors.

The Liberal Party's latest suggestion for the division of Riverina would see the division shift in a northerly direction to take in the local government areas of Cobar, Bogan, Lachlan and the remainder of Carrathool. This proposal fails to take into consideration the fact that "The Riverina" is well known as a geographical area as well as an electoral division.

The Riverina area has a specific set of common interests. The website Riverina Tourism (www.riverinatourism.com.au) clearly identifies this area as a unique part of New South Wales serviced by the Murrumbidgee River. The following map is taken from the Riverina Tourism website and shows the area classified as The Riverina.



The proposal to extend the division containing this area as far north as Cobar Shire significantly diminishes the interests of the communities within The Riverina. The proposed changes mean that the division will no longer be essentially "Riverina". Riverina residents need to be contained in a division that can best service their specialised interests, including irrigation farming and processing industries.

The Liberal Party has also proposed in their objections that the division of Farrer be extended to the Queensland border, taking in Unincorporated NSW as well as Broken Hill. As The Nationals stated in our objections, the means of travel between Albury, which is the major centre of the Farrer Division, and Broken Hill are limited. Air travel to Broken Hill is only available through either Dubbo or Adelaide. In order for a resident of Broken Hill to have a face-to-face meeting with their Member of Parliament in Albury they would be required to either drive 909km or to pay over \$850 in air fares to travel through Dubbo and Sydney to reach Albury (costs based on www.rex.com.au and do not take into account any necessary accommodation costs). Residents of the more remote

areas in Unincorporated NSW would face even more difficulty in reaching their representative, needing to drive over 1080km to reach Albury.

The Liberal Party has argued that these changes to the proposed boundaries are necessary in order to maintain the community of interest links between Orange and Bathurst. The Nationals believe that such wide reaching proposed changes, affecting so many communities throughout New South Wales, are not justified in order to reunite two relatively large regional centres, especially as each of those cities are regional centres in their own right. The flow-on effects of this one objective disrupts many more communities, especially those in far north-west NSW.

As evidenced by the deluge of objections from country residents to the proposed map, country people feel seriously aggrieved at the prospect of a non-metropolitan division being abolished, especially as it is widely understood that there is no legislative or statistical imperative to do so in this redistribution.

The Nationals, as the only major political party dedicated solely to represent country and coast NSW, re-iterate our request that the Australian Electoral Commission provide opportunities to hear first hand the concerns of regional voters regarding the proposed boundary arrangements.

While The Nationals maintain that no division in country NSW should be abolished we have considered the objection and alternative proposal made by The Hon John Anderson MP and recognise that such a proposal is a more logical distribution of electors than the Redistribution Committee's proposed boundaries.

Yours sincerely



Alison Penfold
Incoming State Director



Scott McFarlane
Outgoing State Director