

COMMENT ON PUBLIC SUGGESTION

The Federal Redistribution 2009
NSW



Comment on Public Suggestion Number 6

by

Griffith City Council

2 Pages



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12 May 2009

The Chairman
Redistribution Committee for New South Wales
Australian Electoral Commission
PO Box K406
Haymarket NSW 1240

Dear Chairman

Electoral Boundary Redistributions in New South Wales – Submission by Griffith City Council

I refer to the current redistribution process of election boundaries being investigated by the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) – specifically, submissions which would see the abolition of the Federal Electorate of Riverina in its current form.

This matter was discussed at Council's Ordinary Meeting of Council on the 12 May 2009 whereby Council resolved to strongly urge the AEC to retain the seat of Riverina in its existing format. The Riverina electorate currently has an area of 42210 sqKM making it the 16th largest electorate in Australia and the 5th largest in New South Wales. Any redistribution process that further increases the size of this electorate is seen as unfavourable and would severely impact on constituents' ability to meet with their local member. At present, the distances travelled by community members and the sitting member in order to meet and raise issues is significant; any increase to the electoral area would mean that many community members would be further marginalised.

The Federal Member for Riverina, including the sitting member, Kay Hull and her predecessor, Noel Hicks, has always maintained and utilised an office in Griffith and Wagga, following its incorporation into this electorate, as a means of making access appropriate for the residents of Griffith and other regional and rural towns, particularly those communities located to the west of Griffith. The seat of Riverina has existed since Federation and the City of Griffith has been part of this electorate since the centre was proclaimed in 1916. The name of the electorate was drawn from the area in which it is located and consists primarily of those centres that have thrived on the banks and resources from the Murrumbidgee River system. Griffith City Council would strongly object to any proposal to move this Local Government Area to another electorate, particularly one with which it has little, if any, community of interest.



A proposal submitted by the NSW Division of the Liberal Party of Australia suggests redrawing the electoral boundaries with three seats in Western NSW based principally on the centres of Dubbo, Orange and Wagga Wagga. Should this proposal be endorsed by the Electoral Commission, it would see the expansion of the Calare electorate based in Orange, NSW, to capture the Local Government Areas of Bland, Carrathool, Coolamon, Griffith, Leeton, Murrumbidgee, Narrandera and Temora. This would be totally unacceptable to a growing city like Griffith where residents would be required to make a round trip in excess of 800 kilometres to meet with their local member.

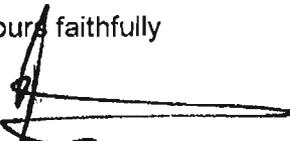
In the current environment, when regional areas are battling some of the toughest economic times ever experienced, any further erosion of their ability to be heard at a Federal level would further undermine communities in regional Australia. The Federal Government has also recently replaced Area Consultative Committees (ACC's) with Regional Development Australia Boards (RDAB). RDAB will provide a critical link between the Federal Government and regional Australia. These boards are based on the existing federal electorate boundaries and any alteration to these boundaries would cause severe disruption to this consultation processes of this organisation and would have a negative effect on the ability of the RDAB to succeed.

While the need to reduce the number of Federal Electoral Divisions in NSW to 48 seats is understandable, any move that would further erode the ability of regional Australia to survive the current economic climate is unacceptable. Currently, the 15 rural members located in NSW represent 98.4 percent of the state, with the remaining 34 members required to cover just 1.6 percent of NSW, we would respectfully suggest that any reduction in electorate numbers would be more appropriate in the metropolitan region.

Griffith has an intense area of population and a strong, established and successful network with the centres of Leeton, Narrandera, Wagga Wagga, Coolamon, Junee, Gundagai, Temora and Cootamundra. While this affiliation would most likely survive an electoral boundary redistribution in the short term, the ongoing viability of any region is closely linked to the ability of a local member to adequately represent an electorate in Parliament. Creating electorates that are larger in size base purely on population does not meet the AEC redistribution aim to achieve equal representation - in fact, in regional areas it does the opposite.

Griffith City Council strongly urges the Australian Electoral Office to leave intact the current seat of Riverina.

Yours faithfully



PETER BROOKS
GENERAL MANAGER