

OBJECTION

The Federal Redistribution 2009
NSW



Objection Number **84**

by

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The Australian Electoral Commission
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Objections to the NSW Federal Redistribution – the Need to Retain the Seat of Reid

As someone who possesses a deep and abiding interest in politics and the wider area of community affairs, I write to express my very deepest concern at the proposal to abolish the seat of Reid. In this, I am by no means alone. There is deep disquiet among many in this area at the consequences of the abolition of this seat, and the redistribution of its constituents to other areas that would be difficult to reach, whose residents would have little in common with those of Reid and whose elected representative could not adequately service constituents with such differing backgrounds, values and needs.

History of Reid

The history of this seat goes back a long way and is closely intertwined with the history of the area. The seat was named after Sir George Houston Reid (1845-1918), who was Premier of New South Wales between 1894 and 1899, and was then elected to represent the seat of East Sydney in Federal Parliament in 1901. A brilliant speaker and known for his ready repartee, he was instrumental in advancing the plans for the Constitutional Convention in 1897-98, which he attended and at which he chaired the Finance Committee.

George Reid was the Leader of the Free Trade faction in the First Parliament and became leader of the Opposition. Elected the fourth Prime Minister of this country, he served from 1904-1905, after which he resumed his role of Leader of the Opposition until 1909. He was appointed High Commissioner to London, where he established Australia House, supervised the construction of the Australian fleet during WWI and actively supported Australian interests in Egypt and on the Western Front. When his appointment ended in 1916 he was elected – unopposed – to a seat in the British House of Commons, where he remained until his death in 1918. He has the distinction of being the only Australian ever to serve in all three legislatures – Colonial, Commonwealth and British.

Although George Reid lived at times in both Strathfield and Burwood, in close proximity to the historic Reid electorate, he was buried in the United Kingdom. Thus this seat, named after him, is a vital way of remembering his enormous contribution to Australian public life.

I understand that, according to AEC guidelines, the naming of federal divisions has been the subject of a number of recommendations from parliamentary committees, and was dealt with most recently by the 1995 Inquiry of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters.

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A set of guidelines, or conventions, has been developed which are referred to by redistribution committees and electoral commissions. In the main, **divisions should be named after deceased Australians who have rendered outstanding service to their country. When new divisions are created, the names of former Prime Ministers should be considered.**

Yet in this case, the committee has recommended the reverse – the *removal* of a former prime minister's name and its replacement with that of a later one. This would appear to fly in the face of recommended procedure, especially since, apart from Joseph Cook and William McMahon, all 18 deceased, previous Australian prime ministers have a seat named in their honour and are still represented in Federal Parliament today. George Reid's merit and contribution to this country are considerable; they should not be dismissed so lightly.

The seat of Reid has existed since 1922, taking in at times parts of the seat of Lowe – from 1922 – 1933 it contained Strathfield, South Strathfield, Homebush and Flemington, and from 1934-1948 Homebush and Flemington were still part of Reid. One MHR for Reid, Percy Coleman, lived in Homebush and is buried in that area.

In the *Executive Summary of the Proposal for New South Wales Federal Electoral Redistribution*, posted on the AEC website, Section 4 notes that “three outer Metropolitan divisions, that of (Berowra, Fowler and Hughes) and an inner metropolitan seat (Lowe) are below the 3.5% range and must gain electors”. This section also highlights the fact that two provincial divisions, Cunningham and Throsby, and six rural divisions (Calare, Gilmour, Lyne, New England, Parkes and Riverina) are also below the 3.5% range and so need to gain electors.

In Section 5 of the Summary it is stated that the Federal Seat of Reid “**is the only division above the permissible tolerance range and therefore must lose electors**”. “Too many” voters seems to be a very unfair reason to abolish a seat. Since the Sydney Olympics in 2000, major housing construction has occurred throughout this electorate – the new housing estates of Newington and Sydney Olympic Park, those on the old Lidcombe Hospital site and the RAAF base at Regents Park. Major construction has also occurred in the existing suburbs of Guildford, Holroyd, Merrylands and Auburn, where construction near Auburn station has been quite intense.

Reid is also experiencing a Housing Department upzoning, and given the State Government's direction of urban consolidation, especially near railway stations, this electorate will continue to expand as more people seek housing close to public transport. Indeed, as at 19th February 2009, Reid currently has an actual enrolment of 94,761 (0.43%).

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As mentioned above, the Report states that in Section 49 of the summary, "**Reid is 6.78% above the projected enrolment average and must lose electors**". This compares with the adjoining electorate of Lowe, with an actual enrolment of 88,360 (-6.35%) and a projected enrolment of 93,862 (-5.82%). Section 265 indicates that Lowe must gain another 1583 electors but no more than 8507 electors to be within numerical

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tolerance. At the 2006 census, Lowe had a population of 131,893 compared to that of Reid with 161,856.

With the projected growth of this region, as well as future housing estates planned for North-West and South-West Sydney, the debate regarding the loss of another rural seat has to be looked at. **The reality is that a number of rural seats will not be able to maintain the minus 3.50% tolerance for projected growth in the future and this will lead to the loss of a rural seat in a further redistribution in NSW in the very near future.** The campaign to preserve Riverina may have been intense but I feel the outcome is not democratic. At present time, Calare and Parkes have the lowest permitted enrolment tolerance of 8.53% and 8.38%. With growth in the adjoining seat of Parramatta (on current boundaries) there is no doubt that an inner metropolitan seat in this area will soon emerge.

In the seat of Parramatta (see Section 315) projected enrolment growth is 101,633 (2.76%). Parramatta could gain up to 736 electors or lose up to 6188 electors and still remain within numerical tolerance. Parramatta has an actual enrolment growth of 2.75% (96,952). The 2006 census for the federal seat of Parramatta was 143,469.

The Reid electorate attracts many migrants whose first residence in Australia is this area. One quarter of the Australian population was born overseas – for Reid it is virtually half, and in time they become Australian citizens and are thus eligible to participate in our democracy. Since July 2008 there have been 1201 new citizens at Auburn Council, 1186 at Parramatta and 918 at Holroyd, a significant number of whom would reside in the Reid electorate. While it is not a technical requirement of the AEC, as far as service delivery is concerned, Reid has one of the highest populations in Australia (161,856 – Census 2006) due to the enormous number of non-citizens.

In the 2006 Redistribution of NSW proposal, the commissioners acknowledged in Section 226 that "the water supply pipeline formed a large part of the existing boundary between the divisions of Blaxland and Reid. The committee considered that the consistent use of this feature along the entirety of the boundary between Blaxland and Reid would be appropriate". This very sensible, acknowledged boundary has been ignored in the latest process.

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Clearly the pipeline between Prospect and the Potts Hill reservoir is a natural boundary, one used by local government and other government services. In the health area, people living in South Granville and Guildford can only be serviced by Westmead and Auburn hospitals, as part of the Sydney West Area Health Service. The same thing applies to Centrelink where Guildford and Merrylands residents are serviced by Merrylands Centrelink Office, while South Granville is serviced by the Centrelink office in Auburn.

Section 263 of the Report states that "Cabramatta-Regents Park and Bankstown-Regents Park railway lines provide additional means of communication and travel within the division". Certainly not for residents in South Granville, Guildford or Merrylands who have to travel to Bankstown to see their federal MP and do not have their own private transport – they face considerable difficulty in accessing direct travel within the proposed new division of Blaxland. The Bankstown line is somewhat intermittent and travellers have to change trains at Cabramatta or Lidcombe, while there are very few buses to Bankstown.

It can also be argued – strongly, in my opinion – that there is little, if any, shared community interests between the residents of Guildford and South Granville and those of Chester Hill and Villawood.

Due to traffic conditions, the residents of Granville find the centres of Merrylands, Granville and Parramatta as their natural focus for shopping. Also, Merrylands is the location of the Holroyd Council offices. The member of parliament that represents these suburbs should be one who has contact and involvement with local concerns. The member for Blaxland would only have a fringe awareness of the concerns of those from the Bankstown area, and it is likely that many of the opinions, values and especially the needs of residents in these very different suburbs would not be consistent with each other, due to the lack of interaction and commonality between these areas.

2006 Redistribution of NSW Proposal

Section 63 of the Proposal states, "As noted earlier in this report, New South Wales has generally experienced low population growth relative to the national average. Inland areas of the State are growing more slowly, relative to the rest of New South Wales. Exceptions to this trend include pockets of high growth in outer metropolitan and in some coastal areas. Enrolment growth patterns generally reflect population changes."

Section 67 covers the various other proposals put forward by different parties. The Liberal Party proposed abolishing Blaxland and moving its electors to Lowe, Reid or Watson. The ALP proposed the abolition of both Reid and Riverina and the creation of a new division centred on Liverpool. The National Party proposed the abolition of Blaxland. Mr Andren MP and Mr Lush separately proposed re-drawing boundaries for the twenty-five divisions with the Greater Metropolitan Area of Sydney, in order to maintain seven divisions west of the Great Dividing Range.

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The commissioners indicated in Section 68 of the 2006 Redistribution Proposal that: “Whilst seeking to maintain a relative equality of voters between divisions, the committee also recognised the need to consider the State as a geographic whole”. The committee acknowledged, therefore, that it must seek to link the relative low and high growth areas of rural and coastal New South Wales.

Also noted in Section 75 is that: “after taking into account the criteria contained in the Electoral Act, wherever possible the committee used the following principles in developing the proposed electoral boundaries: reflecting the movement of western electors towards major centres; **upholding and restoring divisional communities of interests; ensuring means of communication and travel were considered**; diminishing historical constraints imposed by geographical regions and features in the light of improving communications and transport; minimising the extent of elector movement to proposed divisions”.

Section 77 covers the decline in relative enrolment share in the divisions west of the Great Dividing Range, with the neighbouring divisions of Parkes and Gwydir having the lowest projected enrolment and the greatest variations from the state average. The committee considered that there were insufficient elector numbers in the rural northwest to retain these two divisions.

The Commissioners acknowledge in Section 264 that Reid had above average projected enrolment growth. It also noted, in Section 270, that “well over 60,000 electors from the existing division of Reid remain in the proposed division. In accordance with the guidelines for naming divisions, **the committee proposes that the name of Reid be retained.**” In 2006 **the projected growth was a reason for retention.** One must question why, in 2009, that same growth is being cited as a reason to abolish Reid.

The legacy of the 2006 redistribution was widespread conjecture about the survival of a rural seat. There is a need to again review why rural areas have maintained their seat numbers despite some of them being under-quota.

Auburn Council

Auburn Council has been part of the electorate of Reid since 1922. The only time Auburn was part of the Blaxland electorate was between 1949 and 1967. As at 30th June, 2008, the estimated resident population of the Auburn Council area was 73,495 – an increase of 3.09%. According to 2006 Census data, Auburn Council shows that the number of residents who did not move from the area between 2001 and 2006 was 27,998 (63.8%). The number of residents who moved in from another country was 7,607 (17.3%). Very few people moved in from other parts of New South Wales, being only 18.9%.

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The proposed boundaries will shift the Auburn Council area into two federal seats. Auburn has the largest overseas-born population of any LGA in New South Wales (53.2%) and, per capita, a higher percentage of new arrivals from refugee backgrounds than any other LGA in the state. Given the non English-speaking background factors, voters from an overseas background face additional difficulties in obtaining government services, as well as the prospect of having to travel further to have their issues addressed by a member of parliament. The electorate's office has been at Granville for about four decades from the first stage at which it received permanent offices, and is situated close to Granville railway station, allowing easy access to electors coming by train.

The proposed boundary between the Federal seats of Blaxland and the new seat of McMahon is confusing. It appears that the boundary starts at Duck Creek and travels east along Wellington Road towards the Graham Street intersection. At Graham Street, the boundary travels south before it takes a left-hand turn at Tilba Street to the railway bridge at Kerr Street. Just after crossing the railway line, the boundary takes a right-hand turn into Brixton Street, before heading south towards London Road, where it travels east along George Street, opposite Coleman Park, before travelling south along Joseph Street to the pipeline.

One has to ask how these various, convoluted twists and turns are in accordance with the ideas of boundaries between seats being along major road, rivers, other waterways etc. They appear to be boundaries for a predetermined outcome, and will create more combined booths in these electorates. The informal vote in Reid is already well above the national average, and this would likely increase as electors would be confused about what electorate they belonged to. At the 2007 election, 3663 electors voted at Berala Public School with an informal vote of 7.2%. One can predict this would only rise under this proposal.

In conclusion, this submission provides real and compelling reasons for the retention of the seat of Reid as part of the highest growth region in New South Wales, and for the continued recognition of the efforts and contributions to this country of George Reid, former NSW Premier and Prime Minister of Australia.

Yours sincerely



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