



# ***LEGAL AFFAIRS AND COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE***

## **Members present:**

Mr ML Furner MP (Chair)  
Mr JM Krause MP  
Mr JE Madden MP  
Mr MJ McEachan MP  
Mr MT Ryan MP  
Mrs T Smith MP

## **Staff present:**

Ms B Watson (Research Director)  
Ms M Salisbury (Principal Research Officer)

## **PUBLIC BRIEFING—INQUIRY INTO THE ELECTORAL (REDISTRIBUTION COMMISSION) AND ANOTHER ACT AMENDMENT BILL 2015**

### **TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS**

**WEDNESDAY, 5 AUGUST 2015**

**Brisbane**

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**Committee met at 3.00 pm**

### **WALKER, Mr Ian, Member for Mansfield, Queensland Parliament**

**CHAIR:** Good afternoon. I declare open this public briefing on the Electoral (Redistribution Commission) and Another Act Amendment Bill 2015, a private member's bill. The committee has invited the bill's sponsor, Mr Ian Walker MP, member for Mansfield, to provide this briefing to inform the committee's consideration of the bill as well as to inform stakeholders about the intent of the bill. You know who I am and I think you know everyone else on the committee, Mr Walker.

**Mr Walker:** I do.

**CHAIR:** The committee's proceedings are proceedings of the Queensland parliament and are subject to the standing rules and orders of the parliament. These proceedings are being recorded by Hansard and broadcast live on the parliamentary website. A transcript of proceedings will be published on the committee's webpage. I welcome Mr Walker, member for Mansfield and shadow Attorney-General and shadow minister for justice, industrial relations and the arts. Good afternoon and thank you for attending today. I invite you to provide the committee with a brief explanation of the bill and its intent, after which the committee has copious questions to ask of you. Over to you.

**Mr Walker:** I thank the committee for the opportunity of giving a briefing on the bill and also thank you for readjusting your timetable to suit mine. You will be glad to know that as a result I was able to visit Cairns and that Indigenous art is doing well in Cairns, that chamber music is doing well in Townsville and that the good people of Charters Towers are doing great artistic things for their community as well. So I can happily report that to the committee.

This is an important bill and I suppose its genesis was, as I and my colleagues looked at the impending redistribution, which is due under the present legislation to start next year, to have a look at what the implications of that might be to the current arrangement of seats. As the members of the committee will be aware, the legislation presently requires there to be 89 seats—no more, no less—and only allows the Redistribution Commission to do its work in that context. The Redistribution Commission does its work following on from the work of EARC, which was established following the Fitzgerald inquiry back in the eighties, and in 1986 the present arrangement that we have of 89 seats was set up.

EARC looked at a number of things and made a number of recommendations. It looked at how many seats there should be and how regularly that should be reviewed. It also looked at what was then a contentious issue and remains an important principle—the extent to which the principle of one vote, one value would apply within Queensland given it is a decentralised state. The recommendations of EARC in broad terms were that there be 89 seats, that there be a review of that number every seven years by an independent body and that the one-vote, one-value principle be amended in Queensland to the extent that it was necessary to ensure that those who lived in rural and remote Queensland continue to have a reasonable degree of representation. The EARC recommendation in that regard was that there be a margin applied for rural and regional seats above 100,000 square kilometres in area such that the area was multiplied by that two per cent to give a notional number of electors to allow in fact those electorates to have fewer actual constituents but to leave them at a reasonable size which could be managed by a member.

The advice that I had when we looked at how those rules would now apply moving into the next redistribution was that the five existing big seats—Warrego, Gregory, Dalrymple, Mount Isa and Cook—were likely to fold down into four seats, so from five to four. The reason for that is that the growth in population is clearly mostly in the south-east corner and in some of the coastal areas and that if you are stuck with 89 seats and you have to create, for example, a new seat south of Brisbane between Brisbane and the Gold Coast and a new seat, say, around Caboolture, those two seats therefore have to come from somewhere else. Given the degree to which Western Queensland's population is growing compared with that of other parts of the state, it is clear that the west would pay the price to give the south-east corner in particular those new seats. That led us to question whether that was good public policy to have that situation exist. In this redistribution perhaps five would

become four but then in the next redistribution four would become three and I expect there is a point at which the parliament should say, 'That's not in the democratic interest of Queensland and we need to do something to ensure that seats don't just grow and grow in the west and become too big.'

This had been looked at of course quite independently before by the Clerk of the Parliament and he had produced a paper in 2008 saying that in his view the parliament needed 10 more seats to be properly representative, and I will table that for the committee's benefit. The question then for us became: given that if we do not do something those seats are going to collapse and if there is a view—as the Clerk had, I think, quite positively and persuasively put in his paper—that there is room for an increase in numbers, how can we responsibly do that and how can we from our side of the House craft something that may be acceptable to at least a number of the parties in the parliament? It is in many ways the ideal parliament in which to raise such an issue because no party has a dominant position and so there is a need to have a model that is acceptable across-the-board, so that led us to this model which we have proposed and that is really to take on the EARC principles and to take them further but as far as possible not depart too much from those.

So this bill picks up the EARC recommendation of a review by an independent body of the number of seats. It suggests that the existing redistribution commissioners be added to and be increased in number so that extra skills, particularly in areas of demographics and population growth trends and town planning for example, are skills that can be included within what I will call this mini EARC for this purpose. That body then has the ability not only to recommend the redistribution but also to look at whether or not more seats—up to a maximum of five extra seats—are needed and also to look at whether the EARC recommended margin of two per cent should lift to four per cent to give greater flexibility to the commission when it is looking at the redistribution, if its view is that it needs to do something to stop those seats becoming so big that they are not serviceable by a single member.

They are difficult seats to service. I was in Charters Towers during the week. Mr Knuth, the member there, has an office in Charters Towers. I think six hours north of him is Mareeba, which is the northernmost large settlement in his electorate, and if he goes south five hours he gets to Moranbah. So he has a huge area to cover, and the question would have to be raised as to the community of interests that exists, if any, between a place like Atherton and Moranbah and yet he is meant to represent both of those. There is, in our view, a point above which an electorate gets to a size that no extra amount of photocopiers or cars or offices or staff compensate for the fact that a member is getting to a point where he or she simply cannot service in a personal sense an area of that size.

Our bill proposes to do that by way of this independent body as close to EARC as you can get, by looking at the numbers with a cap on that and by removing that from political decision-making and giving it to the independent body. It proposes that those independent commissioners be appointed with the consent of and the agreement of all party leaders within the parliament so there is no bias in that regard. It also allows them to look at the margin—that is, whether the two per cent or four per cent or some figure in between should apply to give them the flexibility to remove the straitjacket and allow them the flexibility to say, 'We need that margin if we're to keep these large seats at a workable size.'

There has been significant support for the proposal from academia, and I will table an article by Paul Williams from Griffith University—his argument goes to the number of seats—and then an article from this morning's *Courier-Mail* from Dr Lelliott from the Australian Fabians also arguing that this should be a matter that is positively looked at by the committee. Mr Chairman, I think that is all that I need to say by way of opening remarks, but I am happy to take the multitude—I think you said—of questions that you have.

**CHAIR:** Copious.

**Mr Walker:** Copious.

**CHAIR:** Thank you for that and I assume that there is no opposition to accepting those two or three documents that have been tabled this afternoon. Mr Walker, I have just a couple of questions. Firstly, as you are aware, we had the Electoral Commission before us last week to hear their evidence on the proposed bill. I am wondering what dialogue you have had with the Electoral Commission, in particular on the expansion of the Redistribution Commission from three to five.

**Mr Walker:** I have not had any dialogue with the Electoral Commission in that regard and did not feel it appropriate to do so given that this was a private member's bill and not one introduced by the government.

**CHAIR:** I am just trying to get my head around where the concept was developed in terms of moving from three to five. The evidence that the Electoral Commissioner provided at that hearing indicated that it was adequate in terms of the workload of three and also went on to say that it was debatable whether five was going to make it easier or complicate things.

**Mr Walker:** Yes, I understand your question. The reason for suggesting that the committee expand is that, as I said, in our mind we are wanting to create, for want of a better word, a mini EARC to look at this, given that the role is expanded from merely drawing the lines on the map to actually looking at the numbers of electorates and the weightage that needs to be given to them. I think that does put extra responsibility on commissioners and, in my view, it is a sensible thing to add skills to that. You will see that the bill sets out the skills that would be required of the additional people and they would be in the area of demographics or town planning or economic growth or those sorts of areas so that the criteria that are also set out in the bill for determining the number of seats can be properly applied.

**CHAIR:** Furthermore, the explanatory notes indicate that the costs of moving from three to five will be met within the existing resources of the commission. Once again, the commission indicated in their response on this matter that, should they have to provide two extra staff, there will be job cuts in the commission. Is that something you are proposing to occur in the commission therefore?

**Mr Walker:** This is a limited role that occurs once every three elections—it is not a continuing role—and I would not expect that the economic impacts were such that they could not be absorbed by the commission in its normal running expenses over that time.

**CHAIR:** That is contrary to the evidence that we heard.

**Mr Walker:** I understand that.

**Mrs SMITH:** Mr Walker, thanks very much for your presentation today. What was the government's immediate reaction to this bill that you introduced?

**Mr Walker:** The only reported reaction I saw was that of the Premier which was a sort of 'no more politicians' line, and I can understand from a superficial point of view why she would say that. It is an easy response to make, but I do not think it is a thoughtful one and I think we do need to think through the issues involved. From 1986, when the 89 seats were set in place, the population of Queensland has effectively doubled and so in broad terms—and I am just using round numbers here—the average parliamentarian represented 17,000 voters back in 1986 whilst that same parliamentarian now represents 34,000 voters on average. I am not arguing that there is a direct relationship between the number of people you represent and the number of parliamentarians you need.

For example, my electorate is just under 80 square kilometres in size. We do a lot of our work with my constituents, as I expect most of you do, by email. I actually looked at the figures yesterday. I asked the parliamentary IT people to give me the figures of the amount of email traffic from my office, for example. From 1 January to 31 July, or in fact until yesterday, there have been 15,000 emails in and out of the two accounts I have—the Mansfield and the Ian Walker parliament account. Again, I expect you guys are not much different. For those of us in the city and in smaller electorates, that advances in IT and mobile technology in transport generally does allow us to service more people and still do it pretty effectively, but that is not the case for the guys and girls out in the bigger electorates. IT assistance is not a great deal of help if your voters do not have good IT connection and transport becomes a difficulty.

In terms of the sorts of electorates that we in this room represent—I got the figures out—there is my electorate at 78 square kilometres; the member for Mount Ommaney has the joy of 30 square kilometres to represent; Mr Chairman, yours is 244 square kilometres; and the member for Beaudesert's area is 4,300 square kilometres. I think there is an ability still at that size to service an electorate well given the increase in technology, that there is no immediate need to say, 'Well, I have too many people to service,' but then when you move to the electorate of Cook at 196,000 square kilometres, Dalrymple at 105,000, Warrego at 279,000, Gregory at 327,000 and the biggest of all Mount Isa at 570,000 square kilometres—bigger than France—you are talking about areas that are just becoming more and more difficult to service.

I do not think the sabre-rattling call of 'we are against more politicians' is a proper answer to the difficult issues that these raise. If you look at Robbie Katter's electorate, for example, Mount Isa, and the extra numbers that it will need under the present rules to continue to be an electorate—again the number is, off the top of my head, about 20,000 extra people in round terms—Mount Isa needs to pick up 20,000 extra people to survive. For an electorate of that size in the remote parts of

Queensland to find 20,000 people you have to go a long way and so it will get bigger and bigger. I think Mr Laurie has said, in a moment of overstatement but trying to make the point, that eventually the electorate of Mount Isa's boundary will be the western suburbs of Toowoomba. It will continue to grow. If you do not want that to happen you do have to do something. The pretty simple question, then, in the end for the committee is: are you happy for the large seats to get larger and fewer or do you want to put a stop to that? If you do, this is a solution. If there is another solution that is fine, but that is essentially the decision that the committee has to make.

**Mr MADDEN:** Thank you for coming in today, Mr Walker. The general view is that we are overrepresented with local government members, councillors—I am a former councillor myself—federal members and state members. With your proposal we would have at least two extra state members, possibly five, and at least two more commissioners. What do you have to say to the taxpayers of Queensland who would prefer to keep the status quo and believe in one vote, one value?

**Mr Walker:** Can I firstly say that my proposal does not mean any new members. It allows the commission to make that decision. We are not proposing a new member or any change to the current rules. It may well be that when the commissioners meet exactly the same situation pertains post redistribution as it does now.

**CHAIR:** But you do open the opportunity for that.

**Mr Walker:** Correct, and that is precisely what we want to do, but that will be an opportunity that is exercised with the strict rules set out in the legislation for the commissioners to apply, and that is all about ensuring that Queenslanders get proper representation and that electorates are not too big for people to manage. But if the commission comes to that conclusion at the moment, it has nowhere to go. It has only 89 seats to play with. Our proposal gives the commission that discretion, if they want to exercise it, if they do not think Queenslanders are being properly represented. There are tools then given to them to do something about it. So it does not make that decision for them—it does not add one new politician—but it does allow the commission to have a look at it. Bearing in mind that it has been 30 years since it changed and bearing in mind that EARC, born of the Fitzgerald inquiry, said that an independent group needs to look at it every seven years, we are following what the commission said. That will then give this mini EARC the power to do that. It is a matter of discretion for that independent body and not a direction by the legislation itself.

**Mr MADDEN:** Why should we depart from one vote, one value with regard to state politics when that is not the case with local government or federal government?

**Mr Walker:** The concept of one vote, one value is obviously an important concept. It is one that EARC examined at the time and one vote, one value does not apply now. The margin was recommended by EARC and adopted by the then Labor government at the time. It was a margin of two per cent for the bigger electorates. What this does is allow that margin to be reviewed if it is not keeping up with the demographic changes between the bush and the city. Within that 30 years the flight of people from bush to city is pretty obvious and it may be that the two per cent margin no longer does what EARC wanted it to do and you need to look at the mathematics again. But I think it is an important point to make that nothing in our bill moves away from the principle that EARC established and one of your predecessor governments adopted. There is no new principle being introduced here. This is a matter of asking whether the particular margin that was advised by EARC still gives the result that EARC wanted, and that was as close as possible to one vote, one value but acknowledging that a strict application of that is going to mean difficulties for representation in the west.

**Mr KRAUSE:** Mr Walker, could you let the committee know who you have consulted with and spoken to in relation to rural and regional representation as it relates to this bill and how this bill may affect rural and regional representation?

**Mr Walker:** I have spoken, obviously, to people within the LNP team who represent rural and regional electorates. I have spoken to them about the principles in the bill. I have actually gained from the experience of trips out to those electorates with my colleagues. One that particularly sticks in mind was going out with Vaughan Johnson when he was the member for Gregory in the last parliament. My wife and I travelled for a couple of days with Vaughan around his electorate. It is probably not really until you do that that you do appreciate how big the distances are between the places of significant population that those members represent. From going from Emerald to Longreach to Barcaldine with Vaughan, I saw how things were different along the way and I saw the tyranny of distance that he had to deal with in representing those people.

As I said before, just in this last week I visited Dalrymple to get some idea of how that electorate is serviced by its member. I met Mr Knuth in his Charters Towers office. He asked me to follow him around to see some of the local sites. I followed around his four-wheel drive, which had a good thick

coating of dust on it that probably made the white vehicle redder than the skirting on these tables. He does a lot of travelling. He was about to head off that night to Atherton. He raised something with me in just doing that simple thing that is not an issue for us. He said that he would probably go via the coastal highway because he wanted to make phone calls on the way. He could not do that if he took the most direct route because he would be off the air for six hours. There are practical issues for the women and men who are representing Queenslanders out there that I do not think you easily appreciate as a city member until you go and drive with them and walk in their shoes for the things that they have to do from day to day.

**Mr KRAUSE:** You spoke recently about different communities of interest within a particular electorate. It might have been a discussion we were having on another day, in fact. If this proposal to give the commission some discretion about how many seats should be in the parliament is taken forward, is one of the issues that you think should be addressed how many different communities of interest there are in a particular electorate? I can say from my experience in Beaudesert, which as you said is about 4,300 square kilometres, that there are at least four, maybe five, different communities of interest just within that seat, which, admittedly, is quite small compared to some of our western and north-western seats. Would you like to make some comment about that particular issue?

**Mr Walker:** If I could take up that point and draw your attention to clause 13 of the bill which does set out what the commission has to consider in looking at the number of electoral districts. They include, firstly, the extent to which there is a community of economic, social, regional or other interests within each existing electoral district, the ways of communication and travel within the district, the physical features of the district, the boundaries and the area of the district, the extent to which the area of the district affects the ability of the member of the Legislative Assembly to effectively represent the district and demographic trends in the state.

Bearing in mind that a normal redistribution will effectively cover three parliamentary cycles, there is a need to look to the future as well as to just draw the lines that happen to suit the particular time. The first of those relates to communities of interest, and you make the valid point that all of us have different communities of interest. Within my electorate I have a reasonably densely settled urban area but I have a rural-residential area that has different interests. But I can still see one of those people in the morning and one in the afternoon no trouble, whereas if Robbie Katter has to represent Mount Isa and Birdsville, two very different communities a long way apart, there is no way of course that we could have a pure system that would allow you simply to represent one community of interest. We all have to juggle that, but I think to the extent possible, particularly as seats get bigger, the extent to which members are being expected to cover a number of different interests is something which the commission should have account of when it is looking at the number of districts. The bill deals with that specific point.

**CHAIR:** I will just pull you up on that response about Robbie Katter having to represent someone in Mount Isa and Birdsville. I have a map of the electorate. There does not appear to be Birdsville on that. It stops just below Winton.

**Mr Walker:** Sorry. I might not have had an up-to-date map.

**Mr KRAUSE:** That is a 1999 map you are holding there.

**Mr Walker:** I thought he did have Birdsville. We might be able to find that as we speak. I thought he had Birdsville, I must say, but I have been wrong before.

**Mr KRAUSE:** I believe the 2008 boundaries include Birdsville.

**Mr Walker:** Mount Isa on the map I am looking at, which is page 239 of the ECQ document, does take in below Birdsville.

**CHAIR:** I stand corrected.

**Mr RYAN:** Thank you for coming in, Mr Walker. Good to see you. Have you obtained any constitutional advice about your bill?

**Mr Walker:** No, I have not.

**Mr RYAN:** The reason I ask is that there were some comments made by the High Court in the McGinty case about extreme cases where the inequality of electoral divisions was such as to deny ultimate popular control. The reason I ask about the constitutional advice is whether or not what you are proposing in your bill accords with principles of representative democracy and representative government. I just make that as a statement.

**Mr Walker:** Could I react to that, just on the principles. I am not aware of the case so I cannot comment on that. The issue of representative democracy and the appropriate principles that should apply are always—and EARC obviously came to the same conclusion—a matter of getting the balance right. One vote, one value is obviously where we would all want to start, because that is a pretty basic starting point. But as EARC said, if one vote, one value means that the person who is living in one of those larger electorates in fact is denied practical representation compared with someone living in Morayfield then you have to do something about that, too.

My view would be that, in putting this bill forward, I have tried as far as possible not to change the principles, and the principles do not change. Certainly the margin to be applied and the question of the number of seats change, but I do not believe that departs from the principles of EARC which have now long been accepted by both sides of politics.

**Mr RYAN:** Thank you for that. The McGinty case in fact did not establish a principle of one vote, one value and in fact was fairly flexible in its view of representative democracy in government. It is a good read.

**Mr Walker:** I promise I will read it tonight, Mr Ryan.

**Mr RYAN:** Of course, those great people like Gaudron and Toohey have some pretty progressive views but the others have very orthodox views.

**Mr Walker:** I will refrain from commenting on any particular justice of the High Court, as you can imagine.

**Mr RYAN:** I did want to explore your point about the percentages more than anything. I think you mentioned before what the average district enrolment was.

**Mr Walker:** I think it is 34,000 or thereabouts.

**Mr RYAN:** I think you are right; it is about there. I take you to clause 15, which is where you propose the four per cent weighted enrolment formula for large electoral districts. What I understand is that the Electoral Commission uses this concept of notional voters in those large electoral districts.

**Mr Walker:** That is correct.

**Mr RYAN:** Applying your four per cent formula, how many notional voters would there be in a seat like Mount Isa?

**Mr Walker:** If it stayed the same size and if the commission wanted to go that way, they could go up to four per cent of 500,000 square kilometres, which is 20,000 voters—or the fact that the four per cent applied, more to the point, could allow them to have a smaller electorate and still stay within the limits because of the four per cent weightage. It allows the commission that extreme. They may believe that 20,000 is too much. Bearing in mind that we are setting in place here a continuing regime, I tried to pick a range that I thought would allow sufficient flexibility to the commission that, if they decided they needed to ensure seats did not get any bigger, gave them the possibility of doing that. Two per cent to four per cent was what I thought was a reasonable range that would give them more flexibility. They may, of course, decide not to move from two per cent.

**Mr RYAN:** I guess the difficulty with having a prescribed range which potentially goes to four per cent and potentially allows an electorate like Mount Isa to have, on my calculation, 22,820 notional voters is that you get to a position where the actual voters in an electorate like Mount Isa, on current boundaries, applying the four per cent formula, is 10,680, on my calculation, which would be a third of the actual voters in Mansfield, Morayfield or Ferny Grove. My question follows a comment that Dr Paul Reynolds made in 2006, before the last redistribution. It was in respect of the gerrymander under Joh Bjelke-Petersen. He said that the impact was that the rural vote was inflated by about three times the urban vote. It would be a third in Mount Isa under the four per cent formula. How do we reconcile those comments about the gerrymander under Joh Bjelke-Petersen with a potential model which will create a seat where it is a third of what it is in South-East Queensland?

**Mr Walker:** You raise what is the essential dilemma and the tension in the argument. My argument is that my bill follows the EARC principles as best it can. It allows the commission to look at exactly the things that you are saying, and if it does not want to go there it does not have to go there. By removing that from the political sphere, it takes away from any argument of favouritism in any of these calculations.

The problem you have—and this gets back to the initial point I made—is that if you do not do anything what you can say for sure is that Mount Isa will have to find 20,000 people next time. That makes it a huge seat. The time after that it will probably have to find another 10,000. If you say, 'I'm not going to go there,' the consequence of that is that you are condemning those seats to become

bigger and fewer. That does not seem to me at the end to be a fair outcome. To me, the fairest way to do it is to give the commission the tools to do it if it wishes and then to stand back. It does not resolve the dilemmas that you have put here. I cannot disagree with the principle you have put.

The question then is: what do we, as practical people, do about that? In my view, this bill allows the commission room to move. It presently has a straitjacket on it that I think, unless it is given some room to move, will result in those seats becoming bigger and fewer. On balance, in my mind, the better thing to do is to allow the commission the discretion to look at that. You will notice, Mr Ryan, that the bill does require the commission, if it does decide to increase the weightage, to apply uniform weightage across the seats. I did toss that around in my mind and discussed this with my colleagues before we settled the bill. But if the community is looking for confidence that there have been no special deals done for any seat then I think it is appropriate that the figure be uniform across the seats. The bill proposes that so there is no jiggery-pokery. I think that is the word that is frequently used.

**Mr RYAN:** Whatever that may mean.

**Mr Walker:** I will not go there.

**Mr RYAN:** Further to the point you made about giving some flexibility to the commission, some people may view that with some difficulty. The reason is that they may say that you are actually turning the Redistribution Commission, which sits within the ECQ for these purposes, into a policymaker. EARC was a separate process. EARC made recommendations to government and then the parliament adopted which recommendations it saw fit. So the difficulty here is that we are giving a policymaker role to an independent commission. How do you respond to that? Do you think it would be more appropriate to have an independent process which makes recommendations to the government and parliament and then government and parliament adopt them?

**Mr Walker:** The proposal I put does not offend, I do not think, the principles that you are enunciating. If we go back to EARC's recommendation, which was 7.64, the commission recommended that a periodic review of the number of members of the Legislative Assembly be undertaken by an independent electoral authority every seven years. That has not happened for 30 years. I think what I am proposing does that. Parliament remains supreme in that it has set the scope for this body to operate. The determination is then made by an independent body. I can see the argument—and I have heard it before—that that abrogates the role of the parliament. I do not believe it does, given that the parliament has set firstly the scope for an increase or potential increase and of course the requirement of the appointment of what I would call the mini EARC for this purpose signed off by the leader of each party in the parliament. I think that sufficiently ties the matter to the parliament and yet takes away the objection that it is the politicians deciding upon the number of politicians. To me it resolves that in an acceptable way.

**Mr RYAN:** It is just that the commission, by its virtue of being independent and also unelected—it is appointed by proper processes—is unaccountable to the public. So the issue of how many MPs you have does become an issue for a body which is unaccountable.

**Mr Walker:** Yes, but the parliament has put a cap on that, and I think that is appropriate for the public interest. Bear in mind that the Redistribution Commission, of its nature, will make decisions that ruffle feathers. We have seen that in the recent Brisbane City Council redistribution. You will no doubt see it, even if this bill does not happen, in the next redistribution. It is the nature of those bodies. I think there are important safeguards therefore in respect of the commission's decisions and its proper accountability that need to be built in. I believe we have covered that by (a) expanding the number of commissioners to get those extra skill sets in and (b) ensuring that they are not just appointed by the government of the day but that they require the agreement of all political parties.

**Mr McEACHAN:** My understanding—and I am new to this committee today—is that we are talking about representative democracy here and how best to make that happen. I have an electorate which has several communities of interest that are separated by water—probably the most of any electorate in Australia. I get feedback from my communities that they enjoy seeing their local member come to their events and be their representative. I understand that there have been some voices in the media saying that no-one wants more politicians. I accept that, but I think it is also fair to say that communities want representation.

I have spoken with the member for Gregory, for instance, and he has more than 50 primary schools. I could reasonably presume that the teachers, the parents, the children and the principals of those primary schools would like to see their representative in state parliament on a reasonably regular basis. I do not see how you could possibly, as hardworking and as decent as the members out there are, reasonably represent those communities with that many schools, with that many Anzac

parades, with that many different communities of interest, with different newspapers. As we all know, it is a full-time job representing our electorates as they are, and the member for Beaudesert, with the largest electorate of us here, would know that more than most. I guess my question is: is there feedback from the communities and the members that they would like to be able to better represent their communities because of the sheer size and complexity of those electorates, which is ultimately what I think we are trying to discuss here?

**Mr Walker:** I certainly get that feedback from the members that I talk to. I suppose going from the microscopic to the macroscopic within my own electorate, I, like I am sure all members of the committee, know how much people like to see you face to face. Nothing beats that. A telephone call, an email, a discussion with your staff does not beat the fact that they can put a position directly to you. I think we all know that. That is part and parcel of the daily business of being a member of parliament and representing people. Taking it to the macro level, I think it is difficult for the members who are representing the larger electorates to say that they can adequately and reasonably do that. To travel through these electorates, even getting to the major centres is a big effort and then of course getting to the smaller ones multiplies that again. So I do not think it takes too much imagination to understand the difficulties of those members. I am sure many of the committee members have been out to those electorates on committee business or otherwise and know that firsthand.

Bear in mind that this bill will not remedy the existing situation. The best it will do is stop it getting worse. It means that the current seats that we have will be able to be held by this, but if we do not have a bill like this or some other similar measure then we are only facing one consequence, and that is that those big seats will get bigger. That is a real question. If you are a believer in proper representative democracy, you have to start resolving those tensions between the pure one-vote, one-value position, which is something that is of value to all of us, and the position that a person deserves to be able to have contact with his or her representative so that they in turn can be properly represented. I think the issues that both you and Mr Ryan referred to set out the dilemma. There is an ideological answer at each end of the spectrum that is, in the end, not an acceptable answer, I do not think. You have to temper ideology with a practical outcome here.

**Mr MADDEN:** I just wanted to talk about mathematics in your proposal. You said in answer to my question before that with this proposal there may be no recommendation for an increase in the number of seats, but in your bill you are proposing a maximum of five electoral seats. You mentioned you have spoken to your colleagues in the drafting of this bill. If it is the case that the number of electors in Queensland doubled between 1986 and 2015 and there was an increase of seven in 1985, where did that figure of five come from?

**Mr Walker:** There is nothing magical about the figure of five. To go back to the point I made in answer to I think your earlier question, I certainly do not start from the point of double the number of people means double the number of seats. I am aware of resistance in the community to the number of politicians growing exponentially, and I also accept that for many of us it is possible to service a lot more people with no great inconvenience because of communication and the sorts of issues I spoke about earlier.

I suppose the way I was thinking about it was that I really wanted to look at a combination of extra seats and a margin that I believe would be sufficient to save those five rural and regional seats. The advice that I had back from the people who looked at it for me was that this was a modest proposal that would do that. So to that extent it is a position that does one thing that I think needs to be done as an immediate thing—that is, to stop the possibility of those rural and regional seats collapsing. This would empower the commission to do that if it wished. If the commission in the end does not want to do that or believes that the existing arrangement is satisfactory, it can of course stay with that. So there was nothing magical about the five or the margin other than that, to me, they were a modest way of achieving the result that I think all of us would like to achieve if we could, within reasonable bounds of those electorates not getting bigger and bigger and bigger.

**Mr MADDEN:** So it is something you consider appropriate rather than evolving from a mathematical calculation.

**Mr Walker:** The only sense in which it evolves from a mathematical calculation is that the people who looked at the number of seats and the population growth said to me that you would need that flexibility if you wanted to empower the commission to save those big seats. Otherwise, if they do not have that flexibility, those seats are under severe threat.

**Mr MADDEN:** Thanks.

**CHAIR:** Mr Walker, in your development of the bill, did you have any dialogue with your federal counterparts?

**Mr Walker:** I am trying to think. I do not recall that I did—other than casual conversations, no.

**CHAIR:** As you would know, there are 30 federal seats in this state as opposed to 89 state seats. We moved from 29 to 30 in the 2007 election I think, with the development of the seat of Wright.

**Mr Walker:** Your memory is better than mine.

**Mr KRAUSE:** It was 2010.

**CHAIR:** Okay, 2010.

**Mr Walker:** You probably had an interest in watching that closely.

**CHAIR:** The seat of Wright was one of my five duty seats. I bumped into Mr Krause on many occasions.

**Mr KRAUSE:** I met you at the Beechmont State School when you opened the hall.

**Mr Walker:** And it would have been a pleasant occasion for both of you.

**CHAIR:** It was. With the concept of increasing from 89 to possibly 94, I am just wondering about the federal position. I have not heard anything about increasing the federal seats from 30. Maranoa and Kennedy are very large seats—bigger than some of our state seats, of course.

**Mr Walker:** They are, but I must admit that I have not had the discussion. I accept what you say: the same sort of challenge exists there. Federally, of course, there are bigger issues to settle in relation to the complete size of that parliament and the relationship to the Senate if increases were to be made. So the mathematics is even more complex than for our situation.

**CHAIR:** I am sure they face the same issue about travel and with the population growth moving to the coast—whether the bill that you have presented will even stop that occurring.

**Mr Walker:** I do not think this would have any federal implication, if that is what you are saying. Our remit is to look at appropriate representation here in the state, and I certainly believe that this bill gives the commission the tools to make such changes as it thinks necessary, if it shares my view that there is a problem.

**Mr RYAN:** You mentioned before that one of the goals of the bill is to save those five large electoral districts at the next redistribution. Where does it say in your draft bill that those five large electorates are protected?

**Mr Walker:** It does not say that. As I said, it leaves it deliberately to the discretion of the commissioners. I think it would be too direct for the parliament to do that. You are really then moving to a sort of zonal system, which is something we shied away from before. While that is my desired outcome, I think I have to accept that we need an indirect way of getting there, because I think people need to have confidence that the decision has not been made by us but has been made one removed under guidelines by an independent commission. So you are right that it does not say that that is what is to happen. It does allow the commission that independence, but I believe that when the commission looks at it there will be a compelling argument that something has to be done so those seats do not get bigger. I also accept that for public confidence in the process I need to leave that decision to someone else.

**Mr KRAUSE:** I want to clarify something that was spoken about before—that is, the option of a four per cent notional weighting based on area. The bill proposes that the commission have an option to move from two per cent to a maximum of four per cent, doesn't it?

**Mr Walker:** That is correct

**Mr KRAUSE:** Or it could be somewhere in between.

**Mr Walker:** It could be somewhere in between, yes.

**Mr KRAUSE:** Thanks for clarifying that.

**Mr Walker:** The only requirement, as I said before, is that it has to be one-size-fits-all; it cannot say that 'for one electorate I want it to be four per cent and for another I want it to be two'.

**Mr KRAUSE:** And it remains that the notional electors proposition would only apply to electorates over the size of 100,000 square kilometres?

**Mr Walker:** That is correct.

**Mr KRAUSE:** Another issue I want to raise is representation for areas with significant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations. My reckoning is that the electorate of Cook would be one where there is a significant representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. With the expansion of the electorate of Cook—and perhaps Dalrymple, Mount Isa, Gregory and

Warrego if they keep getting bigger and bigger—it would actually lessen the ability of those people to have access to their representatives on a state basis. Have you undertaken any consultation or had any talks with people in relation to this issue?

**Mr Walker:** In relation to Indigenous matters particularly?

**Mr KRAUSE:** Yes.

**Mr Walker:** I have not. I expect what you say is correct but I have not made a particular investigation into that. I must say that I am heartened by the fact that the committee is going to visit some of those areas. I think that is a great idea and it will be interesting to see what feedback you get there. The isolation of those communities in the cape is clearly, I expect, something that feeds into the broader problem of the difficulty of the members in those areas representing them. It is great that you will hear that firsthand but I cannot assist the committee anymore myself.

**Mr KRAUSE:** On another issue, you mentioned previously words to the effect that the west will pay the price for more electorates in South-East Queensland, and I want to compare something with you. Queensland, as you know, is a unicameral parliament—we only have one House and at the moment it has 89 seats. As I see it, Queensland actually has the least amount of politicians in the nation—as in, members of parliament in the state legislature compared to comparable states, and comparable states being New South Wales and Victoria. New South Wales has about 95 members of their Legislative Assembly and I think 42 members of their upper house, so that is 137 representatives in total. Victoria has 88 members of their Legislative Assembly and I think approximately 40 members of their upper house, so that is 128 in total. That compares to 89 in Queensland. That ties in, I think, to what we are talking about in terms of representative democracy and the weighting being applied to rural and regional seats.

I do have a question for you but I just want to make a point first—that is, there is a seat in New South Wales which takes up pretty much all of western New South Wales from the Queensland border to the Victorian border which is represented by one member in the lower house, but those people also have access to members of the upper house elected on a statewide basis to represent their interests who are not directly accountable to a particular electorate. Residents in Western Queensland and North Western Queensland do not have that option. They do not have any other member of parliament to contact, other than the one who represents their particular electorate. In that respect, I think there is an issue with representative democracy if those members of parliament in our Legislative Assembly are not practically accessible to those residents. Would you like to make any comment about that—given that Queensland is a unicameral parliament and has very, very large land mass in it represented by single-member electorates in one house of parliament?

**Mr Walker:** I will just comment, firstly, on your premise and quote an impeccable authority—namely, myself—from my first reading speech. I think the figures that I had there were much the same as yours—that is, at 33,430 electors per member at present, Queensland has the second highest ratio in the Commonwealth, exceeded only by New South Wales at 34,339. The other three states range from about 29,000 to about 14,800 per member. So you are right: we are presently at the higher end of the range.

You are also correct in pointing out the fact that an upper house gives another option for an elector. I suppose it is even more important than that, in that if that person is of a different political colour from the other it gives them a greater sense of choice as well. If they want to go to a government member or a non-government member, they have that extra choice. So to some extent the benefit is magnified because of the possibility that there is a government and opposition person to go to, whereas in a single-member electorate with a unicameral system you only have the person you have got. So I think that is a good point. I am not advocating anything at the moment other than what is in the bill, but the point you make is a good one. Again, it exacerbates the issue that there is particularly for those in far-flung areas having only one member amongst a very wide area of the state.

**Mr KRAUSE:** Thank you.

**CHAIR:** If there are no other questions, we will close the hearing. Mr Walker, I would like to thank you for your attendance. As it is a private member's bill, you are our only primary source of advice about the policy and intent behind this bill so this briefing is important to us and to stakeholders who may wish to make a submission on the bill. Submissions will be accepted until 4 pm on 14 August 2015, and details of how to make one are on the committee's webpage. I thank Hansard, the secretariat, committee members and you, Mr Walker, for your attendance here at today's hearing.

**Mr Walker:** Thank you.

**CHAIR:** I now declare this briefing closed.

**Committee adjourned at 3.57 pm**