

Submission to Parliamentary Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee  
14/08/15

Electoral (Redistribution Commission) and Another Act Amendment Bill 2015

In my opinion, the three main elements of this Bill are the following:

1. Expanding the resources available to the Redistribution Commission

Moving the electoral redistribution decision to an independent body that is appointed with the approval of all political parties provides the transparency and accountability that the Fitzgerald Inquiry report and subsequent EARC process – demanded.

This is a huge job and the Redistribution Commission needs the man-power, ability, resources and tools to act in the best interest of all Queenslanders. Denying these essential resources to the Commission for partisan purposes acts against the best interests of all Queenslanders.

2. Implementing the recommendation by EARC providing that the independent Redistribution Commission has the ability to determine the number of electoral districts in the Legislative Assembly

It has been almost 30 years since the last increase in the Queensland Legislative Assembly, with the seats rising from 82 to 89, serving a population of 2.5 million. Today there are over 4.8 million Queenslanders.

The proportionate increase in major urban areas have led to an expansion in many rural seats which can least afford it.

The replacement of the role of an Upper House with an enhanced committee system has increased the workload for many Members of Parliament, reducing the time available for constituent matters. Many Ministers and Shadow Ministers are away from their electorates a substantial part of their time. Additionally the growth in electronic communications has expanded the workload of Members, with an increased expectation and a diminished timeframe for replies. This is not healthy for parliamentary members, their families, or good governance.

Electorates over 1,500 km<sup>2</sup> represent a massive amount of time spent travelling, and due to their size have limitations on the options for travel.

If, in the Electoral Commission's opinion an expansion in the number of seats is warranted for good governance in Queensland, it needs to be given the opportunity to deliver.

3. More equitable access to representation in the Parliament

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The Redistribution Commission needs to have the capacity, at its discretion, to amend the additional large district number, currently set at 2%, up to 4%.

The seat of Mt Isa is 570,502 km<sup>2</sup> while the smallest is South Brisbane at only 17 km<sup>2</sup>. Mt Isa is twice the size of the state of Victoria – which has 88 representatives in its Lower House and also has an Upper House.

The seat of Glass House, for example, is one of 23 seats over 1500 km<sup>2</sup>. Servicing individual communities with this electorate is so much more time consuming than urban electorates with the same number of electors.

To deny constituents access to their elected representatives is to deny them good representation, good government and accountability.

Increasingly this cannot be met through an increase in resources for mail, websites and social media. Only 80 percent of the Glass House electorate has internet and in the electorate of Cook it is only 62 percent.

The lack of access to Members has partially contributed to the decline in the political environment and the level of respect Members are held in.

Can a Member of Parliament adequately represent their electorate if they can't overcome the enormous distances and time required to travel from one community to another?

I urge the Members of the Queensland Parliament to pass this Bill enabling the Redistribution Commission to be set up with reasonable resources and guidelines before the Electoral Boundary Review commences next year. It is in Queensland's best interests to provide a transparent, open and fair solution without being dragged along by the shadow of partisan politics.

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