




Speech By
Ann Leahy

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

Record of Proceedings, 28 October 2015

ELECTORAL (REDISTRIBUTION COMMISSION) AND ANOTHER ACT AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms LEAHY** (Warrego—LNP) (9.02 pm): I rise to support the Electoral (Redistribution Commission) and Another Act Amendment Bill 2015. I will outline what the current outdated electoral distribution formula will do to the electorate of Warrego and why there is therefore the need for this legislation for rural and regional representation right across Queensland.

A fundamental principle of our system of government is representative democracy and that all citizens have reasonable access to their elected representative or the opportunity to question their local member. As a representative of the third largest electoral district in Queensland, the Warrego electorate—an electorate larger than the state of Victoria; the only district in Queensland that has both a New South Wales postcode and a South Australian postcode—I am speaking from firsthand knowledge of the people and the communities.

In 1991 Warrego amalgamated with the former electorate of Balonne that was abolished at the same time the electorate of Roma was abolished and merged with the electorate of Western Downs. In 1999 Warrego assumed almost two-thirds of the Western Downs electorate and in 2008 the Murweh shire was returned to the electorate, and it expanded eastward toward the Condamine River and Jimbour Creek to gain an area, including the town of Jandowae, from the Condamine electorate. This cumulative expansion of electorates occurred well after PEARC and EARC reforms and well beyond expectations. So let us look at the number of members who represented the area of Warrego prior to 1991. There was Howard Hobbs, Don Neal, Russell Cooper and Brian Littleproud. Now one member is doing the representation work of four previous outstanding members of this House.

We have heard earlier speakers talk about what has not happened in the last 30 years in relation to the periodic reviews of the number of members of parliament and the increase in the average number of electors in each district. There has also been growth in the Public Service. In fact, under this state Labor government the predicted number of public servants is increasing at a rate of about 20 per day. The whole-of-government expense for each of these public servants is approximately \$93,000. Therefore, it is costing the taxpayer approximately \$1.8 million per day. If Queenslanders are worried about the cost of a few more members of parliament, then they should be shocked and they should be shaking in their shoes about what it is costing them per day for the increase in the number of public servants under this Labor government.

The Warrego electorate expands from Jimbour Creek in the east to Cameron Corner in the west, where the South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland borders meet. A King Air aeroplane can fly from two hours from one side of Warrego to the other and you will be closer to Adelaide than Brisbane when you reach the western boundary. If this legislation is defeated, who knows how long it could take. It could take four hours to fly a King Air from one side of Warrego to the other after the next redistribution.

I ask the question: would the residents of Brisbane tolerate it if they had to drive seven hours to see their local member face to face? That is how long it takes the residents of Thargomindah to drive now to see their local member or for their local member to drive to see them. People only work for eight hours a day. If this legislation is voted down tonight, those constituents and many others across rural and regional Queensland will have the current unacceptable drive time doubled or trebled or worse.

Telecommunication improvements and staffing should not be taken as an excuse to take away a constituent's fundamental right to speak with or question their local member in person. Telecommunications have improved. However, there is much more work to do across the Warrego electorate to reach the metropolitan telecommunication standards.

I often compare with my great advocate for central Western Queensland the member for Gregory, my neighbour to the north, and I know that other members of the five large seats also face similar electoral challenges. Warrego comprises 5½ local government areas; two different hospital boards; 17 hospitals and clinics—one major regional hospital being that of Roma Hospital, which is desperately in need of replacement; 57 schools, including the School of Distance Education; 26 police stations; 16 ambulance stations; 17 fire stations; numerous state government employee houses and major departmental regional offices; thousands of kilometres of highways, state controlled roads and local government roads; and two key railway lines.

In recent times in the Surat Basin there has also been the experience of the development across the resources industry. At the peak of construction there was an extra 30,000 people in my electorate, placing pressure on infrastructure that was not designed for those population increases. Even after many of the resource workers have returned home, there is the added complexity of dealing with the downsizing issues. This could happen in any regional electorate. Without the support of this legislation, the larger electorates will have to contend with more square kilometres, more distance—

Honourable members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Warrego, we will wait a couple of moments because your own members, the member for Gaven and the member for Albert, are interjecting on your speech.

Mrs Frecklington interjected.

Mr Rickuss interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Nanango and member for Lockyer, I have already issued a warning to the entire House that the next person who interjects will be warned under the standing orders. I call the member for Warrego.

Ms LEAHY: They will have to contend with more distance between constituents and the member and more infrastructure to maintain, and they will also have to deal with the peaks and troughs of the resource industry development as they come and go.

I also want to raise the issue of forced council amalgamations that decimated elected council representatives in rural and regional Queensland under the Beattie Labor government. Prior to 2008, across Warrego there were 104 elected councillors who did that job not for the pay but for the fact that they wanted to improve their community. There are now 41 councillors elected across the electorate of Warrego. There is a clear trend here and, unless this legislation is supported, history will continue to repeat itself, and rural and regional Queenslanders will receive the Labor style second-class democracy.