




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR LOGAN

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**ELECTORAL (REDISTRIBUTION COMMISSION) AND ANOTHER ACT
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr POWER** (Logan—ALP) (10.17 pm): For me democracy is not academic. The disenfranchisement of the Irish people was one of the direct causes of the Irish famine which led to my family leaving West Clare and coming to Australia. My family never cast a vote in the Northern Hemisphere. Australia was the place that offered a fair say in a fair democracy. Fair Australian democracy was the cause for which my ancestor and many other Australians took a stand at Eureka to ensure that all Australians had their voices equally heard. It is the cause for which striking shearers stood under the tree at Barcaldine. It is the reason that I joined the Labor Party to fight against the National's gerrymander and malapportionment.

Opposition members interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Grace): Order! Members on my left have had a fairly good hearing in silence. I ask that the same courtesy be afforded to those on my right. I ask members to cease interjecting.

Mr POWER: The democratic cause is threatened by this really disappointing bill put forward by the member for Mansfield. The history of the British-style House of Commons, which shares the tradition of this place, is one of extending franchise to more and more citizens, ending gerrymanders—or Johmanders, as we know them in this state—and, just as importantly, ending malapportionment of electoral seats. As many in this House would know, the British parliament suffered terribly from seats that were grossly different from the number of voters, which meant that the British parliament could not be truly called democratic. One hundred and fifty-two seats in the British parliament out of 406 were determined by fewer than 100 votes and 88 seats were determined by fewer than 50 votes. A seat based on the medieval town of Dunwich had only 32 voters. The once-prosperous town had slowly been eroded by the North Sea and had fallen into the ocean, yet it still maintained its boundaries and its member, despite all of the townspeople leaving. No doubt the member for Mansfield would approve of that travesty.

However, in the 1820s and 1830s, far more enlightened members of the British parliament took the party name of 'the Liberals'—a name since disgraced by the hyphenated charade of the Liberal Party here in Queensland. Those Liberals fought against the unfair apportionment of electoral seats. In 1832, they passed the great electoral Reform Act, moving along the journey of fair electoral rules that reflect the value we hold of one vote, one value.

Mr Bennett interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Grace): Order! Just a moment, member for Logan. Member for Burnett, I warn you that at your next interjection I will give you a formal warning under standing order 253A and I then I will take further action after that. The member for Logan has the call. I have given you great latitude.

Mr POWER: As I said, in 1832 they passed the great electoral Reform Act, moving along the journey to fair electoral rules that reflect the value of one person, one vote and one value. In all of this long and proud history of reform, we have seen a shameful backsliding. Members will be happy to hear this: I include what happened in 1946 as a shameful piece of backsliding, only topped by the rorts of 1985 which saw the redistribution under which the member for Southern Downs was elected. In this new millennia, we have seen no backsliding in British democracies, that is, until today as the stated aim of this bill is to distort the democracy of this state, which would bring shame to the Liberals of 1832.

Why should the opinions of voters in Longreach carry more weight than those in Logan Village? The member for Gregory knows of my passion for the fantastic town of Barcaldine. The member needs to go to the streets of Browns Plains and explain to electors why their vote is worth less.

An opposition member interjected.

Mr POWER: I take the interjection. I have spent time in Barcaldine and I intend to be there for the next May Day. I love the town and I continue to support it, especially its fantastic Workers' Heritage Centre.

Mr Hart interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Burleigh, I have also given you quite a bit of latitude. The next warning will be under standing order 253A.

Mr POWER: The member for Mansfield needs to explain why the electors of Warrego are somehow more worthwhile than the electors of Wishart.

Mr Hart interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Burleigh, order! I warn you under standing order 253A.

Mr POWER: There are great Queenslanders in Quilpie, but democracy means that they should not have a say that is greater than that of Queenslanders living in other areas of Queensland. In fact, this weekend LNP members should be out with a sandwich board strapped to their chest stating, 'I just made your voice weaker. I didn't stand up for you, at all. In fact, I sold you out.'

Those coming from the five seats that are affected need to know that their constituents do not want an unfair advantage from the rules. This legislation is changing the rules to unfairly weight one Queensland voter's voice to be worth more than others. It is like the rules of Rugby League giving New South Wales a four-point start in any State of Origin game. No-one wants to gain an unfair advantage from the rules and I am sure western Queenslanders do not, either. I was moved by the member for Mount Isa's passion for his electorate—very moved.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr POWER: I can see that others were moved, too. I am passionate, too. People keep moving into my electorate. They move into Logan Reserve, into Yarrabilba just outside and into Greenbank and Flagstone. In total, there will be a city the size of Cairns and a city the size of Toowoomba growing within the electorate. Every day I struggle to fight for the services that those future residents of Logan will need. I know they will need those services. They are not rich people; they are not rich city dwellers. They are people who struggle to put food on the table and to educate their kids. I know they need great schools, I know they need fire stations, I know they need ambulances. I know they need the schools that will educate their kids for the jobs of the future. I have to fight for that and I will continue to fight for it.

In 1991 in this place we debated this principle. At that time the chamber and, unfortunately, Labor looked at placing some sort of weightage, which was limited to two per cent. I have heard from some of those opposite that it is more difficult for people in regional areas to contact their local member. For some Queenslanders living in remote areas, it certainly is. However, since 1946 and even since 1991, we have seen incredible changes in telecommunications. Many more people now have telephones with which to contact their local member. Although not all have the internet, many in rural areas use satellite internet to communicate. Also, we try to make up for some of those difficulties by providing a second office for members of parliament. For instance, the member for Warrego has an office in St George and another office in the great town of Roma.

Ms Barton interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Grace): Order! Member for Broadwater, at your next interjection you will be warned under standing order 253A. Let us settle down, members. It is late at night. I understand you are passionate, but let us get through this. The member for Logan has the call. All I ask is for respect in the House.

Mr POWER: Presumably, the 7,000 residents of Roma have reasonably easy access to their member of parliament's office. However, I see no claim that the residents of St George or Roma should gain less of a say than those residents living further from their member of parliament's office.

In my electorate of Logan, there are those who have real difficulty explaining their needs to their member of parliament. Two weeks ago, I sat with a mother of six, a refugee from Africa. She was in tears as she failed to express herself. No-one is suggesting that she should have an extra weight. I have a strong deaf-signing society in my electorate. At times they might have difficulty communicating with me as their member of parliament, but they would not seek extra votes to make up for this.

We know only one thing: every Queenslander should have an equal voice through one vote. Whenever we mess with this principle, we undermine our precious democracy. In the debate in 1991, Liberal leader Denver Beanland made this absolutely clear when he stated that EARC said on page 169 of its report—

... that a 1 per cent arbitrary rule would make little difference but a 3 per cent allowance would overcompensate and produce unfairness.

That was the ruling of EARC and today I urge the House to do as Denver Beanland proposed on that day in 1991. I make the same call. If there are any Liberals left on that side of the House, I urge them to do as the former member for Toowong, Denver Beanland, said and cross the floor to bring electoral justice to Queensland.