




Speech By
Hon. Dr Steven Miles
MEMBER FOR MOUNT COOT-THA

Record of Proceedings, 28 October 2015

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

 **Hon. SJ MILES** (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef) (8.07 pm): I rise to make a contribution in opposition to the Electoral (Redistribution Commission) and Another Act Amendment Bill. It is an innocent enough sounding name for a bill that is nothing but a disgraceful attempt by the LNP to diminish democracy in our great state. I want to focus my comments particularly on the proposal in this bill to increase the malapportionment: the proposition to amend the so-called large district weighting from two per cent to four per cent.

In short, this is a proposal to increase the bias in favour of rural seats in the Queensland electoral system. It is a return to the unfair electoral system that was in place before the Goss government changed the laws in the aftermath of the Fitzgerald inquiry. Yet we are here actually debating a bill from the LNP to bring back a form of gerrymander. In my inaugural speech I observed how lucky we are in Queensland to enjoy a strong, robust democracy and how much I value that. We have universal suffrage, rule of law, free and fair elections, independent media and a vibrant civil society. Of course, during their stint in government those opposite did their very best to diminish our democracy. They gagged civil society organisations, they disenfranchised vulnerable groups with unnecessary voter ID laws and they opened up the flood gates for large, anonymous political donations. Queenslanders rejected these anti-democratic measures. But the member for Mansfield—

Mr Rickuss interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Lockyer, if you continue to interject, I will warn you under standing order 253A.

Dr MILES: But the member for Mansfield is not satisfied. He is having another crack, and this time the target is equal suffrage—the concept of one vote, one value. There is no more important principle of democracy than the notion that each of our votes should have equal weight in determining which party forms government. I expect that most Queenslanders would be surprised to know that in Queensland not every vote does have equal value. There are five seats in which a vote is actually worth more than one. It is a reflection of our geography—a measure designed to ensure that residents in the most remote parts of Queensland have access to their elected representatives.

I accept that there are difficulties in servicing large geographic constituencies. I know that the members in those seats work really hard and travel enormous distances in their electorates. I was in Mount Isa recently and heard from the honourable member just how far he had travelled in that week alone. I support them having additional resources and support to make that task easier, but there is absolutely no good reason to increase the bias in favour of regional seats and diminish our democracy—not at a time when technology is decreasing the tyranny of distance in ways not even contemplated when this rule was first introduced.

Right now, a rural vote could be worth as much as 1.8 times a city vote—nearly twice as much. Under the proposal of the member for Mansfield, we could see a situation where a country vote was worth more than 4½ times as much as a vote in the electorate of Brisbane Central.

What it comes down to is this: I cannot and will not say to the voters of Mount Coot-tha who put me here, 'Your vote is worth a quarter of the vote of another Queensland.' I will not say to them, 'In our democracy you are worth less than a Queensland from Warrego or Gregory.' It is not a reflection at all on the members or the people they represent; it is me defending the rights of my constituents. I could not in good conscience claim to be representing my constituents and support this bill. I could not go back to my electorate and tell them that I supported a bill to further reduce the value of their vote relative to others. I cannot believe that the member for Mansfield has sold out his constituents by bringing this bill, which only serves to diminish the democratic power of the people who elected him.

The motives are obvious. So desperate are they to claw back power, so desperate are they to finally make the member for Southern Downs Premier, that they will sell out their constituents in urban and coastal seats to curry favour with the crossbench and give themselves a chance of picking up an additional malapportioned seat.

The result of these changes is obvious if we consider what would have happened if these rules had been in place at the last election. The LNP would have gained an extra seat. It would have changed the outcome of the election. That is the motive here: if you cannot win, change the rules.

Mr Watts interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Toowoomba North, I understand that you have already been warned today by the Speaker. I would ask you to cease interjecting.

Dr MILES: I challenge the member for Mansfield to stand with me at the Toowong Village shops on Saturday morning and explain to my constituents why he wants their vote to be worth less. In fact, I challenge the member for Mansfield to stand at the Bunnings on Wecker Road on Saturday morning and explain to his constituents why he is proposing a bill that diminishes the value of their votes. I will even come, too. I do love those sausages!

What I find truly extraordinary is that the LNP opposition persists in bringing bills to parliament just like they did during their days in government. They bring bills to parliament that propose significant changes without undertaking a hint of public consultation. There was no attempt to gauge the support of their constituencies. They had no interest in a public discussion about the problems they claim to be fixing. They certainly have no mandate from the people of Queensland at an election. It is as though they have learned nothing. Their attitude is arrogant and anti-democratic, just like this bill.