




Speech By
Hon. Yvette D'Ath

MEMBER FOR REDCLIFFE

Record of Proceedings, 21 April 2016

**ELECTORAL (IMPROVING REPRESENTATION) AND OTHER LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Hon. YM D'ATH** (Redcliffe—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister for Training and Skills) (3.11 pm): I rise to speak against the bill before the House. As the member for Mansfield said, it is a serious debate and it is something that we need to give serious consideration to—but we have twice before. This is the third time that this matter has been before this House. The question does have to be asked where the priorities are of the opposition that they are coming back to debate this issue for a third time. This is their top priority. We are not here for the third time having a debate on health funding or infrastructure or education or training or jobs. We are not back here for the third time having a debate on those important issues. What are we here for the third time for? To debate whether we should have four extra members in this parliament. That is a serious issue, but it is such a serious issue that it should not be brought in here and rammed through in the same week when we have already had the debate twice before.

We heard the shadow Attorney-General say, 'This is a simple change. It is for extra seats. It is not that complicated.' It is complicated. It is significant. It has been decades since we have increased the number of seats in this chamber. To increase the number of members in Queensland is significant. It comes at a significant cost. The number four might seem really small but it comes at a significant cost to the people of Queensland—four new members, the salaries that attach to those members, the new offices that would be established for those members, the staff that would work in those offices, the servicing of those members, the allowance those members would be entitled to. That is what would come with those four. It comes at a significant cost.

The question has to be asked: is now really the time, when we are seeing job losses across this state, when we are seeing people struggling in the resources sector and other sectors, that we should be saying that is where the money should be spent—on more politicians? I am working hard for the \$240 million Skilling Queenslanders for Work program to help 32,000 people across this state get jobs. Yet we are standing here debating four new politicians and the significant cost of that. That money could go towards training in my portfolios and helping people who are unemployed and other people who need to be skilled and re-skilled.

These are important issues. The member for Mansfield did not go into any detail about anything in the bill, to be honest, but specifically on the proposed changes to the Redistribution Commission and the intention if this bill is supported by a majority in this parliament today. That would mean significant changes—again, that have not occurred for many years—to the appointments to the Redistribution Commission and how those appointments are made. Currently under the act, as the Attorney-General, I am to consult with the Leader of the Opposition. I am also consulting with the leader of the Katter party and I am also consulting with the chair of the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee. Interestingly enough, I wrote to all of those people on Tuesday morning with my nominees for the new Redistribution Commission so that we can get the process underway. This process has already been

delayed. It has been delayed as a consequence of the local government election and the referendum, so we need to get this moving right now—to have these appointments made and get the redistribution happening so submissions can be open, so a draft report can be released later in the year and a final report released well before the next election.

What these changes do is guarantee a delay in that happening, because it means that the nominees I have put forward already I will need to step back from. I will need to find additional nominees. I will need to write to all of the parties again. I have to give them at least 14 days to respond. I am speaking to the member's amendments; I appreciate that. It requires me to write to the parties and wait for their response, and I know that the proposed amendments include a mechanism to come back to the parliament. These are significant delays in the process—delays that I believe we cannot afford. If these amendments go through, what we will see is that the redistribution in this term of parliament is at great risk of not happening, which means we go to the next election on the current boundaries that are not proportional. When we look at seats like Murrumba that are well over their quota—

Mr Whiting: Sixty-five thousand.

Mrs D'ATH: Sixty-five thousand constituents. We will be going to the next election without the redistribution finishing, which means that the vote of the people in Murrumba does not count as much as the vote of the people elsewhere in this state. That redistribution needs to occur and we need that parity and equity happening. That is what the redistribution is supposed to do and it needs to happen. This will seriously put that at risk. I cannot even start this process until the bill is assented to. Then I write to the parties and then we go through the rest of the process. I would like to think I would get quick support, but there is no guarantee. We had that conversation last night in relation to the CCC. We have had that issue with the PCCC. I cannot guarantee that we will get a quick resolution as to who those individual appointments should be.

We need to give serious consideration to these clauses and the changes. I do not believe that a case has been properly made out to change the way that the Redistribution Commission is currently appointed. I do not believe even when the bill was last considered that there was sufficient evidence to say that there was a problem with the way the system currently works. For a party that claims they are all about removing red tape, this creates a whole lot of process for a system that currently there is no evidence was having a problem to begin with as far as the appointments and determinations of who goes on to the Redistribution Commission are concerned.

We certainly oppose the changes to the Redistribution Commission. We have consistently said we do not believe that this parliament should increase its numbers at this point in time. This is not the time to arbitrarily say, 'We need an extra four seats. That is what we are going to do.' By tonight it is highly possible that that is exactly what this parliament will do—it will choose to have four extra politicians, and that comes at a cost to the community. We will stand by our position. We do not support the amendments to increase the number of electoral districts to 93. We make that very clear and our position remains unchanged on that.

We ask members of the parliament to think long and hard about these changes and to oppose both of the key elements in this bill: the increase of electoral districts from 89 to 93 and the changes to the Redistribution Commission. Do it on the basis of the arguments that have been put forward that it would significantly delay and disadvantage voters and constituents across the state to progress that.

I will continue to argue my point that I get that it is a challenge whether you are in a city, metropolitan or regional electorate—we all have our challenges—to try to engage with all of our constituents. It is a challenge, but I do not necessarily accept that 89 members cannot represent all of the voters in this state. I have been a federal member for six years and have represented over 90,000 voters. I do not hear the LNP at a federal level saying they are going to reduce the size of the federal seats. It can be done. We do it. That is our job. That is what we are voted to do. We should just get on with our job. I ask members of this chamber to think seriously about this bill and to oppose it. This is not the right time. This is not where we should be spending our money. The case has not been made by the opposition to justify this bill.