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The Commissioners,
Northern Territory Boundary Redistribution

Dear Commissioners,

I wish to make comments on proposals submitted for the Northern Territory.

I had earlier made a submission for the entire territory.

Observations

The electoral legislation of the Northern Territory allows greater latitude in terms of elector tolerances than other jurisdictions. However, it is good practice and electoral fairness to ensure that tolerances do not become a means of malapportionment and electoral unfairness.

I note that the CLP has identified an error in the allocation of electors between seats according to its submission. I note that several submissions raise issues about reliability of enrolments. I had also raised issues more about the allocation of SA1's between seats, rather than questioning the actual enrolments, although I am surprised by the size of some movements in relatively short periods.

Submissions

Constructive

I note that some submissions were particularly constructive, including from some MP's. These include Collins (the Fong Lim MP), Guyula ((the Nhulunbuy MP), Jeff Waddell, Lambley (Araluen MP), the CLP (Alice Springs), McConnell (Stuart MP), Purick (Goyder MP).

Numbers

Several submissions were constructive and proposing solutions more or less in line with my own submissions but seemed to not take sufficient account of elector numbers. These include the White, Ryan's, MacDonnell Regional Council. Alice Springs requires additional electors to make up 3 seats, and the MacDonnell Council surrounds Alice Springs and accordingly at least part of MacDonnell Council needs to be included with a portion of Alice Springs to make up any electorate as it now does.

Some suburbs are moved in successive redistributions, and for those residents the amount of dealings with their federal, state or territory member is quite small. I have rarely encountered many people who have found having to deal with new members an issue, retirements as much as anything might add to electoral boundary changes but all of this is quite minor.

Naming Stuart – Battarbee – Gwoya

The renaming of the Stuart electorate is suggested by the ALP, Alice Springs CLP and Stuart MP. It seems that both Battarbee and Gwoya are appropriate regional and Alice Springs connected names and losing the name Stuart (which is represented in the South Australian Parliament and many other places) is reasonable.

Many people may think the link of a name needs to be closely associated with a physical site, or renaming electorates to honour former members etc, given how boundaries change over time, names may well cease to have the geographical connection. A broadly geographical connection may be enough. Another factor that came up in recent Victorian Redistribution was selecting appropriate names, i.e. avoiding suggestive or inappropriate names. Whilst this is not the case now, the two alternative names seem quite reasonable.

CLP

The CLP has offered a series of electorate specific changes which are both minimalist but also resolve slight under and over enrolments without wholesale changes. There are some changes that are like those proposed by the ALP. The CLP has ordered its changes in change order which logically connects changes.

The suggestions for Fannie Bay, Nightcliff and Johnston are like my suggestions. Karama is identical between ALP and CLP proposals and is a reversion of boundaries. The modifications to Sanderson and Wanguri move both electorates towards quota, and shift electors to Nelson to enable changes elsewhere. The changes around Palmerston in effect concentrate the four electorates already there. Similarly, there is a high degree of correlation of the CLP and ALP proposals here.

Alternatively placing Holmes (from Wanguri) into Karama, might make more sense than creating the awkward projection separating the airport from the remainder of the proposed Nelson. I note the ALP proposes the airport which has minimal electors be placed in Sanderson and retaining Holmes in Wanguri. In any event the nature of the CLP changes creates a compact and reasonably logical (in toto) Nelson. Goyder is proposed to become a more compact seat and helping create solutions to under quota Daly and Arafura. The proposals are both reasonable and workable.

The proposed Arafura maintains the odd projection of Arnhem into Kakadu and appears a little odd. Whilst this is at odds with my own suggestions it is an arguable proposition. Nhulunbuy is proposed to be subject to no changes, I suggest this is unsustainable, and that some change is necessary to bring Nhulunbuy closer to quota and assist Arafura and Arnhem also do this. Daly gaining some rural areas towards Darwin from Goyder is quite a reasonable solution to its elector shortfalls.

With regards Katherine I am inclined towards reducing Katherine's enrolment as it is 10% in excess of quota and other electorates nearby are well under quota. I propose changes with Daly and Arnhem.

With regards central Australia. I propose that Namatjira take in parts of Alice Springs and with a minor difference to the CLP that it be in the southern eastern corner of MacDonnell Council. On what I am aware of about Alice Springs the CLP proposal seems reasonable. I have relied upon local government wards in respect of MacDonnell Council, whereas the CLP has relied upon SA1's.

In summary I found a lot of the CLP proposal quite reasonable, and where I have disagreed, I have canvassed it above.

ALP

The ALP has compiled its changes in alphabetical order. As a general proposition the ALP has proposed some worthwhile ideas. With regards Arafura, the ALP has proposed that Arafura be a western Arnhem seat with Kakadu and rural areas to Kakadu's west. Whilst I have canvassed exchanges between Arnhem and Nhulunbuy, I am not sure that what the ALP has proposed are the better options. As well the proposed changes with Katherine create these peculiar projections into the existing Katherine the logic for which are not immediately obvious. A more logical continuous line would make more sense. As would using areas east of the Stuart Highway in Arnhem or areas in the north of Katherine in either Daly or Arnhem. A reduction in the elector numbers of Katherine is necessary, to assist redress the shortfalls in Arnhem etc.

Barkly and Stuart need to be addressed together as whilst there is a slight southerly displacement of Barkly into Namatjira, Stuart continues to suffer from elongation which impacts its communities of interest. The Tanami Desert dividing the electorate becomes even more pronounced, with more electors in the south in Alice Springs. The dominance of the Walpiri people as the rationale for the renaming of the electorate to Gwoya is less evident due to the removal of much of the Walpiri area to Namatjira. I had discussed ending this elongation by seeking to place Barkly further north and Stuart (or Gwoya) further south, with both electorates having substantial east-west orientations, consistent with local government boundaries.

Stuart (Gwoya) as the ALP proposes includes portions of the Victoria Daly Council together with a large portion of Alice Springs. For an electorate of 5,604 electors this seems to be literally quite a stretch. The ALP says, "Stuart unfortunately has to become a bit of hybrid seat for this redistribution to help provide the link between the Central Australian and Top End Remote seats." If there is a time for a realignment of seats, a more east west orientation of seats, it might be now. Stuart (Gwoya) as proposed by the ALP will be a 'urban Alice Springs'/Walpiri central Australia/northern Tanami/Victoria-Daly seat. I don't think this is either sustainable or desirable, let alone easily represented. Stuart (Gwoya) will incorporate electors from Alice Springs into an electorate that stretches approximately 80% of the way to Darwin, and nearly reaches Katherine. Barkly is similar. The fact that Stuart has two electorate offices, one in Alice Springs and the other in Katherine rather makes the point about the elongation.

The town of Alice Springs is not quite 3 quotas. It is currently split into 3 seats (Araluen, Braitling and Namatjira). I proposed it still be split into 3 seats, with a south eastern portion of Namatjira combined with the remainder of Alice Springs that does not form Araluen and Braitling. It is based on existing MacDonnell Council Ward boundaries which reflect the regional interests of the MacDonnell Council. This makes for better representation than the ALP proposal which suggests a four-way split of Alice Springs is better. The effect of which is the extreme elongation of Stuart (Gwoya). My proposals in Central Australia would involve five roughly equal sized seats, which would be centred in Alice Springs in 3 cases, and otherwise Walpiri lands to the south west, west and north of Alice Springs in Stuart (Gwoya) and a more northerly but central Australian seats of Barkly, which would still be centred on Tennant Creek.

The ALP proposal includes only 2996 electors from the existing Stuart in its proposed Stuart (Gwoya), a further 639 come from Araluen, 1875 come from Braitling, 94 from Namatjira, whilst 234 are placed in Daly and 1684 in Namatjira. The scale of the changes is extraordinary.

In respect of Palmerston both the CLP and ALP have proposed relatively similar changes, including incorporating Spillett within Palmerston.

Like the CLP changes with either no change such as Casuarina, Nightcliff, (which seems to be cases where additional electors are warranted), or relatively minor such as Daly, Fannie Bay, Goyder and Nelson (to facilitate changes with Arafura), Johnston, Karama (identical to the CLP), Sanderson (which includes the airport and a very small number of electors). Wanguri with some minor changes would be ideal to redress elector shortfalls in Casuarina and Nightcliff, but the opportunity is not taken.

Paech

Many MP's may make submissions which are at odds with their party proposals or amplify the strengths or weaknesses of certain boundaries or inclusions or exclusions to their electorate. These are usually quite reasonably expressed and responsible.

Mr Paech amplifies the theme of hybrid divisions (electorates) in the ALP submission, which is quite reasonable. In his submission he amplifies the theme that by making Stuart (Gwoya) a hybrid division that it will increase the voice of Alice Springs and makes a statement to the effect Alice Springs will have four voices in the Northern Territory Parliament. This is a reasonable point to make, whether it is entirely true or not is another matter, but it is entirely arguable.

In making my submission I have no personal interest, but I make contributions to various states and territories to ensure outcomes are fair, and that the interests of electors are looked after. I have been in local government and understand that local government, is an important building block of our society and much more critical to peoples lives than they may realise. In the case of the Northern Territory many local government areas in regional and rural areas, form very significant blocks with which to form electorates. In the case of the Northern Territory I note that many local government boundaries seem at odds with Territory electorates. In many non-urban settings they are quite useful building blocks, why there is this divergence I don't know, but with Stuart in the past it was orientated east-west in a 19 member Assembly.

The Central Regional Council is split between MacDonnell, Stuart and Barkly currently and will remain so with the ALP proposals. MacDonnell Regional Council is split between Stuart and Namatjira and the ALP proposal continues this in a much different arrangement. Barkly Regional Council is currently split between Stuart, Barkly and Namatjira, and Stuart will no longer figure in this under the ALP proposals. However, Stuart will gain a massive portion of electors (2,514) from Alice Springs Council under the ALP changes and still reach the Arafura Sea.

I mention these changes as Barkly might seem a more likely candidate to represent electors on the Arafura Sea and the Gulf of Carpentaria, than Stuart.

Mr Paech whom I have never met, made several comments which surprised me as he is an elected member for and also as a prospective member for electors around Alice Springs.

I have extracted Mr Paech's comments from his submission and presented them in Attachment A below.

Whilst Mr Paech appears to support the inclusion of Alice Springs electors in Stuart (Gwoya), he seems to be quite hostile to them been included in the Namatjira electorate. I have to say I was quite amazed when I read the comments. Sometimes people may believe things, but they are sufficiently aware as to not say them, whereas, Mr Paech seems to think certain things, say them, and mean them.

The fact that the current enrolments of Araluen and Braitling are considerably in excess of quota requires that an adjustment be made to electoral boundaries. It is not to suit these constituents but to ensure they are adequately represented in accord with their numbers. This is not to place any unfairness or disadvantage on electors within the Namatjira electorate but out of fairness to all electors.

The belief that "There are no common communities of interest between the bush communities and Alice Springs..." is a pretty sweeping comment to make and a simple fact any elector is entitled to be heard and which elected representative deal with and which the member for Lingiari federally, and members and Senators, legislative councillors everywhere deal with daily.

As Mr Paech is the member of the Northern Territory Government Party I am fairly confident they (the government) would not argue anywhere they are 'diminishing democracy in the bush', and conducting 'urban centric models of governing'. I am sure they seek to represent all members of the public such that whether they live in urban or remote divisions they are equally represented, contrary to what Mr Paech appears to infer.

It is impossible to place all of the MacDonnell Regional Council in one electorate, but in seeking to do so creates a number of problems, which include extreme elongation of the Stuart (Gwoya) electorate, or inclusion of significant numbers of Alice Springs electors in at least one seat which covers areas outside Alice Springs which I have noted above.

Whilst Mr Paech might desire that the residents of Kintore, Hermannsburg, Papunya, Haasts Bluff, Areyonga, and Mount Leibig be incorporated in Namatjira and be their representative; he might like to spare a thought for the current Namatjira residents who live in Alice Springs rural areas, Town Camps, the Old Timers aged care facility, Kilgariff Estate, Heavitree Gap's Sienna Village and surrounding remote communities, of Namatjira, who are as entitled to representation as any other resident of an electorate. They should not be disregarded by he or anyone.

Mr Paech appears to believe that a considerable number of people are not on the electoral roll, who should be. I understand the Northern Territory has suffered some economic difficulties and the trends in enrolments in many areas have been very persistent for sometime. The decline, static or strong growth in some elector numbers have been persistent over Territory, Federal and local government elections for some time. Overall I am inclined to the view that elector numbers are probably fairly accurate despite what he might believe.

Conclusion

I wish the Commissioners well in their endeavours.

The issues of adjusting boundaries can fortunately be relatively easily dealt with. There is no need for massive boundary changes, but surprisingly in many cases simple intra-electorate transfers are sufficient to remedy elector differences.

Martin Gordon

2 April 2019

Attachment A

Extract from Mr Paech's earlier submission. I have added emphasis.

"....My concern stems from the belief that any further boundary changes that increase the number of urban constituents in Namatjira to suit the Braitling and Araluen electorates will place an unfair disadvantage on the people living in the Namatjira division. There are no common communities of interest between the bush communities and Alice Springs, the interests of urban and remote areas are often competing rather than complementing, there is no commonality of service providers and the services delivered to the areas by local government are significantly different.

I do not advocate for any remote seats in the Northern Territory to be abolished as I believe that this would further diminish democracy in the bush and would only reinforce urban centric models of governing. It is crucial that we maintain a balance of urban and remote divisions in the Northern Territory to ensure that equal representation is achieved.

In the case of the 2019 Northern Territory Electoral Boundary Redistribution I believe that changing the boundaries of all five Central Australian electoral divisions would most adequately ensure effective representation for our region.

My Recommendations - Namatjira

I recommend that the division of Namatjira receive no change to three of its four boundaries as these are currently state borders. As for the northern boundary, I recommend that consideration be given for the communities of Kintore, Hermannsburg, Papunya, Haasts Bluff, Areyonga and Mount Liebig to be incorporated back into the electorate of Namatjira.

Allowing these communities to be incorporated back into the Namatjira electorate would have several benefits, including:

- ☑ having the MacDonnell Regional Council area within one NT electoral division;
- ☑ reuniting communities of cultural and spiritual interest; and
- ☑ ensuring that these communities have their economic, social and regional interests well represented.
- ☑ Reunifying communities who share the similar languages and beliefs

The communities of Kintore, Hermannsburg, Papunya, Haasts Bluff, Areyonga and Mount Liebig have existing strong kinship links with many communities already in Namatjira leading to high mobility between the communities. By reunifying these communities within the Namatjira electorate, the division could be serviced alongside similar communities within the same council region.

By advocating for these communities to be incorporated into the Namatjira electorate, I acknowledge and understand that other areas of the division's northern boundary may be subject to change and would recommend that the local government area of the Barkly be taken into consideration as such the communities of Ampilatwatja and Arlparra could be incorporated into the division of Barkly also allowing the electoral divisions to reach quota.

As already mentioned, under usual circumstances I would not support the creation of a new hybrid division. However, in the case of Central Australia, where there is no possibility of a quota being reached in order to achieve an additional seat for Alice Springs, I can see no other option short of legislative change than to recommend that the Stuart division undergo changes to its southern boundary. This would allow for a portion of the Alice Springs population to be incorporated into the division so that all electorates may reach an equal quota of representation.

I am aware of the unique challenges that occur when representing such a seat; however, given that the boundaries of the Stuart electoral division have historically encompassed a geographical area within Alice Springs, I believe that this can be achieved and would result in the Alice Springs community having an additional voice in Parliament.

By allowing the electorate of Stuart to regain its historical boundary in the northern region and potentially the western region of Alice Springs by acquiring the northern half of Braitling or the suburb of Larapinta, the division of Stuart would have a significant population in one location. This consolidation would allow for a future member to service a significant portion of their constituency in one location and at a greater frequency. Whilst the division of Stuart would of course remain geographically large in size, the division's serviceability would be improved due to the concentrated number of constituents in Alice Springs and the presence of larger population communities. It is also important to note that the division of Stuart is already provided significant resources by the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly with the allocation of two electorate offices: one in Alice Springs and another office currently located in Katherine. This would allow for these proposed boundary changes to take effect with little to no additional cost to the Northern Territory.

Ensuring that people residing in remote and regional locations of the Northern Territory have a strong and reflective voice in Parliament is important. I strongly believe that the best way for this to be achieved in this redistribution cycle is by allowing the division of Stuart to become a hybrid as Namatjira has done. Under this proposal, Namatjira and Stuart would both be hybrid electorates.

Namatjira would be required to retain the Alice Springs rural areas, Town Camps, the Old Timers aged care facility, Kilgariff Estate, Heavitree Gap's Sienna Village and surrounding remote communities. The electorate would then acquire the communities of Kintore, Hermannsburg, Papunya, Haasts Bluff, Areyonga and Mount Liebig, providing the Namatjira electorate with a satisfactory quota and would be restored to the take in the communities of interest.

Stuart would gain the potential areas of Northern Braitling and the suburb of Larapinta. It may also then be required to undergo boundary re-adjustment in the northern region of the division based on achieving the allocated quota.

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It would also be a reasonable time to consider renaming the division of Stuart with the name of Gwoya. Gwoya Tjungurrayi was a Walpiri-Anmatyerre man of the Northern Territory and a survivor of the Coniston Massacre, he is featured today on the Australian two dollar coin.

I would have concerns if the division of Namatjira was the only division continuously required to have to absorb the growing number of urban residents, as I believe it would further dilute the voices of people living remotely in the Namatjira electorate.

I feel that it is also important to acknowledge that automatic enrolment of people living in regional and remote parts of the Northern Territory is not currently occurring as it does in the urban and municipal centres. This causes an imbalance and does not provide for accurate representation of Territorians, disenfranchising people living in remote locations.

I suggest that this be taken into account when reviewing the Northern Territory electoral divisions and a plan to rectify this imbalance is needed to ensure that future redistributions are accurate and representative, it's also important when considering the number of people residing in the bush may be not accurate due to this imbalance.

It is my view that a large number of people in the electorates of Namatjira, Stuart and Barkly have been either removed from the electoral roll or not enrolled due to current enrolment processes such as the Australian Electoral Commission's automatic enrolment. I believe that a significant proportion of people in the divisions of Namatjira, Stuart and Barkly are not currently on the roll and believe that this will have a significant impact on the 2019 redistribution.

I welcome the opportunity to further discuss this matter with the Redistribution Committee if required.

Yours Faithfully

Chansey Paech
Member for Namatjira"