

SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY TO THE ELECTORAL ACT 1992 (ACT)

This submission comes in two parts: - **Gerrymanders**, and, **the Necessity of Single Member Electorates**

Gerrymanders

The electorate of Molonglo is a Gerrymander. If you follow the inhabited areas only, it starts at Weston Creek, then shoots to the right, and continues up north to Gungahlin.

A sure sign of an electorate gerrymander is the wriggle. Gungahlin wriggles like a worm if you look at the inhabited areas only.

The obvious and indeed most honest distribution of the electorates would have been three compact ones – the Ginninderra electorate to include Gungahlin. With 7 candidates it could have reached as far as the lake. The Molonglo electorate to include districts south of the lake down to Woden and Weston Creek; and then the Brindabella electorate to include the rest of the ACT to the south.

In that setup, Ginninderra would always vote majority Labor, Molonglo always majority Liberal, and the marginal votes would be in Tuggeranong. Government would shift with the majority of total votes in the ACT.

Currently, winning Gungahlin is the key to winning the Molonglo electorate, and therefore government. Gungahlin is the marginal part of the Molonglo electorate and has always been fed chocolates by the successive Labor Governments in the form of swimming pools, libraries, light rail, etc, while Weston Creek, a Liberal voting part of the electorate, has always been neglected.

What amazes me is that back in 1995 the Liberal Government at the time accepted these proposed electoral boundaries from the Electoral Commission, with the result that the Libs slid from power and have never managed to regain it. Previously when the electorate was the whole ACT, the Liberals always won comfortably. So much for “This is a Labor city”. Labor wins in the ACT even when the voting is tight because the electoral boundaries are gerrymandered. It also wins both Federal seats in the ACT because of a gerrymander. (If the excessively large Federal ACT electorates were split compactly into three, the Liberals would win two seats and Labor one).

But what has this gerrymandering got to do with this Inquiry?

Obviously the outcome we are heading for is five electorates with five members each.

Not so apparent to the Liberals, but it should be blindingly obvious to them, is that they are already being done for a dinner. It is likely that the Labor Party, with much study, has already defined the electorate boundaries they want, and these boundaries are going to be proposed to the Electoral Commission. And no doubt accepted.

How can the Liberals prevent this?

As I said, not only should each of these electorates be tightly defined in terms of population numbers (in the ACT a 5% leeway is far too much), but they should be compact. They should not wriggle for 'similar interest' reasons or 'geographical' reasons.

Ideally all electorates should have circular boundaries, or more precisely fit together as hexagons. Though due to population density differences, some hexagons would have a greater land area than others.

I suggest the following model. You will be amazed how well it works. A hexagon should be drawn round the center of Canberra, Capital Hill, large enough to contain the necessary population. Any geographical objects, lakes, hills, parks, etc, should be totally ignored. Then to each of the edges should be attached other hexagons. Yes there will be six outer hexagons, and including the central one, seven. But two of the hexagons will have relatively little population, and can be divided among their neighbors (with straight lines!). You will then have a set of five minimum area electorates (without the wriggle!).

Yes they will 'cut through communities', 'ignore major geographical features' etc. But they will be fair. And if the Liberals at least could be bothered to run the figures, you will find that the party with the most votes in the ACT will win the most seats in the Assembly. Always.

So my advice to the Liberals at least is 'Don't be Ditzey!' Seize back what was given away by Kate Carnell. Be professional politicians for once. Tighten up the wriggling electoral boundaries. This way the government of the ACT will be vastly improved, as the government will swing with the total votes.

The Necessity of Single Member Electorates

As discussed above, the Weston Creek district, though longer established and though until recently it had a larger population than Gungahlin, has been severely neglected. No swimming pool, library, inferior number of bus routes and less frequent times of the buses. Just recently Weston Creek has had a major development imposed on them to its north without any expansion of its transport facilities, such as widening the Parkway with an extra lane. The planned expansion of its shopping centre comes with no increase in the number of parking spaces.

What is the cause of this neglect? The reason is that even though the Molonglo electorate has seven Assembly members, none of them have responsibility for Weston Creek. No single Assembly member can be held responsible. Approaching any one of them about some complaint leads to an immediate denial of responsibility, and suggestion that the complainant approaches the ACT administration.

All the members for Molonglo care about is playing politics in the Assembly and racking up time for their pension.

The only way for members to have direct responsibility is to have single member electorates. In that situation the member cannot evade responsibility, and any elector approaching them would have a far greater expectation of getting things done.

I know all the ACT politicians would avoid single member electorates because, quite rightly, they would have to do a lot more work! But there would be benefits for the Liberals at least from introducing single member electorates. If ACT is drawn into 25 tightly drawn single member electorates (remember watch that gerrymandering), then they would have a chance to win government in the ACT. The results from fairly drawn electorates would be that the Party with the most votes in the ACT would win government.

In addition no minor Parties could win election. The ACT would avoid the major cost of arboretums and electric railway lines!

Back on the question of gerrymandering. In the case of 25 single member electorates, it should be remembered that the ideal gerrymander would be to give your own side mainly somewhat marginal electorates, while giving the other side only electorates with large majorities. That way you will be guaranteed to win the most electorates even when you don't win the most votes.

Again I suggest that the method of hexagons proposed above should be used. It is arbitrary, but there will be no wriggles for 'similar interests' or 'geographic constraints'.

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