

Woden Valley 
Community Council Inc.

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Secretary
Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure
ACT Legislative Assembly

Email: janice.rafferty@parliament.act.gov.au

Dear Secretary

***Review of the Australian Capital Territory (Self-Government) Act 1988
(Cwlth)***

The Woden Valley Community Council (WVCC) appreciates the opportunity to provide comment on the review of the *Australian Capital Territory (Self-Government) Act 1988* (the ACT Self-Government Act).

Introduction

WVCC considers the review and amendment of the ACT Self-Government Act as an essential step towards improving the representation of ACT citizens, and improving governance structures for greater community engagement and accountability. It would also be a step towards giving ACT citizens the same democratic rights and entitlements as other Australians.

However, in the Council's view, improving the representation of ACT citizens also requires the review and amendment of ACT legislation such as the ACT *Proportional Representation (Hare-Clark) Entrenchment Act 1994* and the ACT *Electoral Act 1992*.

Size of ACT Legislative Assembly

WVCC contends that both Sections 8 and 41 of the ACT Self-Government Act need to be amended to enable the ACT Legislative Assembly to determine its own size and the number of ministers. Section 8 limits the number of members in the Assembly to 17 and Section 41 limits the size of the ministry to five.

WVCC strongly supports an increase in the number of members in the Legislative Assembly. More members would increase the representation of ACT citizens; allow members to serve their constituents better; have the potential of improving governance structures; and permit a larger ministry.

As Allan Hawke shows in his recent review, 'Governing the City State', with just 17 MLAs for a population of more than 350,000, the ACT has a high-level of under-representativeness compared to local and state representations. He argues (p. 33) there is an 'overwhelming sound case' for increasing the size of the ACT Legislative Assembly.

The Hawke review favours 25 members for the ACT Legislative Assembly, as in the Northern Territory with a population of around 230,000 and which also would reflect the proportionality of the five member electorates in the Tasmanian House of Assembly (p. 32).

While the WVCC supports an increase in the number of Assembly members and increasing the number of electorates, the boundaries of electorates should align with the towns of Canberra. This would address a long-standing concern of WVCC of having the Woden Valley split across the electorate of Molonglo and Brindabella. The WVCC has found the bifurcation of Woden has resulted in, with few exceptions, inadequate representation by elected members of the Legislative Assembly, and the issues facing Woden being 'off the radar'.

WVCC considers increasing the size of the Assembly and the number of electorates is long overdue. But nothing will be achieved without political will. WVCC understands a twenty-five member Assembly (five from each of the five electorates) might be acceptable to the political parties, but to achieve that, Section 34(i) of the ACT *Electoral Act 1992* would need to be amended to increase the number of electorates from three to at least five.

However an increase in the number of MLAs and the size of the ministry will not by themselves ensure better governance, accountability and responsiveness of elected representatives.

Broader issues

A difficulty with the ACT system of government is that the Legislative Assembly handles both municipal and state functions. Having municipal functions centralised has meant ACT citizens do not enjoy the same services normally provided to other Australians, including in regional Australia. Canberra is too large for effective consultation on local issues. Without a system of local government, the ACT government has limited capacity to have meaningful

engagement with citizens on local issues that directly affect them. WVCC contends there is a need for consideration to be given to some form of improved local governance.

WVCC considers it important for ACT citizens to have direct input in determining the ACT's system of government for the future. It should not be left just to the political parties or elected representatives to determine how Canberrans govern themselves.

WVCC supports Professor George William's suggestion in his submission of the ACT holding a convention to enable citizens to consider the ACT's long-term governance arrangements. Such a convention could consider issues such as the role of the Commonwealth Government in the ACT, the ACT's electoral system and how the ACT should govern itself. Depending on the outcome, a referendum may be required.

If the Standing Committee wishes to discuss the issues I raise, I can be contacted on 0418 139 102.

Yours sincerely

Dr Jenny Stewart
President