

Your local voice

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The Secretary
ACT Legislative Assembly
Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure

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Dear Secretary

**Review of the Australian Capital Territory (Self Government) Act 1988 and
Any associated regulations**

The Weston Creek Community Council (WCCC) is appreciative of the opportunity to make a late submission to the Standing Committee reviewing the Australian Capital Territory (Self Government) Act 1998 and any associated regulations.

This is a Commonwealth law. Depending on any recommendations made by The ACT Assembly to the responsible Federal Minister for that Act, it will also be necessary for the ACT Assembly to make amendments to the ACT Proportional Representation (Hare –Clark) Entrenchment Act 1994 and the ACT Electoral Act 1992 .

Understanding Self Government

The average ACT citizen is confused by the term “Self Government” as it does not clearly define where “Local Government” and “Some State Government” powers separate. Indeed to add to the confusion, there is a City of Canberra but there is no Mayor or Council buildings from which local government services emanate. Even road signs proudly proclaim that “we are a sister city” of other cities in other countries!

As the ACT population grows this anomaly becomes even more confused. It is Councils opinion that the ACT Self-Government Act should reflect this distinction between Local Government functions and State Government / Council of Australian Government functions in police, health and education to name a few examples. One of the Ministers could then be designated “Mayor of Canberra” in the same way as one of the members of the ACT Assembly is designated “Speaker”.

Size of The ACT Assembly

The Standing Committee will be well aware of the many arguments made to the ACT Electoral Commission during last year's deliberations on changing the ACT electoral boundaries. Section 8 of the Act limits the numbers of Members in the Assembly to 17. Clearly there is a need to change the size of the Assembly and the WCCC supports an increase in the number of members, provided the integrity of the unique regional nature of satellite towns [Districts] is enshrined. Weston Creek is one of these and it is essential that any electoral boundary changes continue to have all the suburbs of the District in the one electorate.

Many media discussions and formal reviews of ACT Government (eg the Hawke Review) favour a 25 member ACT Assembly. To compare the ACT Assembly to the 25 seats in the Northern Territory Parliament ignores the huge land area of that Territory, and the fact that there are also 17 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the NT. Clearly this is not a good comparison nor is it useful to compare Tasmania's 25 seats in its Lower House of its Parliament . There are a further 29 LGAs in Tasmania plus an Upper House of 15 more Council members . One wouldn't wish that overrepresentation on the electors of the ACT!

There is also an argument that there only be a 21 member ACT Assembly using the five unique regional town areas of the ACT – Gungahlin, Belconnen, Inner South & North Canberra, Woden-Weston Creek and Tuggeranong. Using the projected persons enrolled numbers listed in The Augmented ACT Electoral Commission Redistribution Report 2011 this could be achieved.

Nor have these articles/reviews looked at how their proposed five electorates of five members each be implemented . The ACT Electoral Act quite clearly works on a quota of voters per member – but this leads to the geographical imbalance of a massive area for the Molonglo members to cover ,plus ignoring the geographical green belt divisions of four suburbs of the Woden District being in Brindabella and four suburbs being in Molonglo. WCCC supports the argument of the Woden Community Council and Gungahlin Community Council that their suburbs be in their own District electorate. The only way this can be done is to amend the ACT Electoral Act to enshrine these areas with different quotas for electing members in each of the five electorates. It is awkward but the variation needs to be written into the Act. It is noted too that the variation margin in various States is much larger than that used in the ACT.

Council notes that these articles/reviews ignore the point that a 25 member Assembly would be a 47% increase over the current numbers in the Assembly, and that this has not been tested with voters opinions or even in discussions with voters as there is likely to be a large increase in cost. This could be done through a **referendum** with the chance exists to conduct one in October this year when the next ACT Election is to be held.

Size of The Ministry

WCCC does not support an increase in the size of the Ministry with the present numbers in the Assembly – Section 41 of the Act limits the size of the Ministry to five. For an increase to be contemplated there needs to be demonstrated an increase in workloads. We are unaware of any such enquiry into workloads having been conducted . It is noted that there is a Remuneration Tribunal which sets salary levels for Ministers. No comparison to salary levels achieved by State counterparts has yet been advanced to Councils knowledge.

Conclusion

There have been a number of issues raised in this this submission and a number of recommendations made as a result. If the Standing Committee wishes to further discuss these with the WCCC we would be pleased to do so.

Yours sincerely

Simon Hearder

Treasurer

Tom Anderson

Chairman