



**THE FEDERAL
REDISTRIBUTION
NEW SOUTH WALES**

Suggestion 5

Colin James Hesse

2 pages

Dear Electoral Commissioner and staff,

I write in relation to the forthcoming electoral redistribution for NSW 2023-2024.

General comments.

I appreciate and support the long standing practice of redistribution of electorates in line with changing enrolments to ensure every Australian has an equal vote in the House of Representatives subject to the limitations set by the Australian Constitution in relation to Tasmania.

Our democratic system is under significant pressure, not I believe because most people don't have confidence in the Australian Electoral Commission, but we need to note there is a small minority seeking to undermine that confidence.

It's because of that small minority, and because some in political power seek the support of those who may have lost confidence in government in general, that the electoral system must retain and be seen to retain its independence from the Government, Opposition or minor parties and independents.

With the above in mind I ask that the Commissioner exercise great care to ensure there is no gerrymandering of electorates or the perception of gerrymandering. As much as possible we need makeup of the House of Representatives to reflect the percentage of the national vote after the distribution of preferences.

In other words I'm arguing for the ongoing independence of the Australian Electoral Commission, and that the AEC be able to continue its good work of many generations.

A request

No doubt the Commissioner reports to Parliament and the relevant committees of Parliament from time to time, and I ask that in relation to the above, the following comments may be considered by the Commissioner as part of a submission to the Parliament of Australia.

I submit that due to the growing trend of citizens to cast their primary vote for a party other than the ALP or Coalition, I believe around one third of Australians voted for a candidate not part of the traditional two parties of government, that the House of Representatives decreasingly reflects the voting intentions of the Australian community.

With growing loss of confidence in government as reflected by what some characterize as the conspiracy movement(s) it seems that the dissonance from how we vote to who is elected could, if this trend continues, be a mechanism for undermining confidence in the electoral system, Parliament, and hence the government of Australia.

While the Australian voting system was very progressive at the time of Federation, I submit that it may no longer be fit for purpose, and that an electoral system that is more representative of the diversity of opinion in our society should be examined.

Being conscious of the difficulty of changing our constitution, I hope it may be possible to introduce the Hare-Clark system for the House of Representatives, with five seats being elected per electorate. This at least would (could?) resolve any constitutional issues with Tasmania (Tasmania would be one electorate).

At the same time I would argue we need to increase the number of members of the House of Representatives to take into account the very significant increase in the Australian population.

I appreciate of course this would also mean an increase in the number of Senators, but at this point Federal Electorates are so big that even in cities such as Sydney the electorates no longer reflect a community of geographical interest. For example, I currently live in the Federal Electorate of Barton. Most of Barton is in the St George area (where I spend my teenage years), and Marrickville, where I now live, has little to do with the St George area culturally, in relation to sport or economically. The Cooks River is a natural community boundary.

Similarly the Federal Electorate of Cook, which has until the last couple of elections always been south of the Georges River, has spread into the St George area. Again, and I've lived and worked in both electorates, they are socially distinct areas, where people really don't mix much. As with the Cooks River, the Georges River is a natural boundary, which significantly describes how a community lives.

I recognise of course that the AEC must act with the situation set for it by Parliament, and I believe that the AEC does so with impartiality, but I believe my few examples demonstrate the problem of not increasing the number of seats elected to the House of Representatives. By reducing the number of seats in NSW (and Victoria) the problems I've described of a lack of community identification with electorates will, I believe, only increase.

In closing, I thank staff for reading this submission, and hope that you may consider my suggestions.

Yours sincerely,

Colin Hesse