

## **Flying Minute: Objection to 2023 WA Electoral Distribution Commission Proposed Boundaries**

*By Tony Brown, Executive Director Member Services*

**That the objection to the 2023 Western Australian Distribution Commission’s proposed boundaries be endorsed.**

### **RESOLUTION 230.FM/2023**

**CARRIED**

#### **Executive Summary**

- The WA Electoral Commission recently published their proposed electoral boundaries to be used at the next State election in 2025.
- A key proposal from the Commissioners is to amalgamate two non-metropolitan districts.
- Objections to the proposed boundaries can be submitted to the Commissioners by Monday, 21 August.
- Based on existing advocacy positions as well as discussions with State Council at the August Information Forum, the Association has drafted an objection on behalf of Local Government Members.
- The objection primarily focuses on the impact of reduced political representation for non-metropolitan communities, and asks for increased resourcing for regional electorate offices, particularly those in districts of large geographical size.

#### **Attachment**

- WALGA’s objection to the 2023 WA Electoral Distribution Commission Proposed Boundaries

#### **Policy Implications**

The objection aligns with relevant WALGA [Advocacy Positions](#), namely:

##### ***2.4.7 Regional, Rural and Remote Representation***

*The Local Government sector recognises the importance of political representation for rural and regional Western Australia.*

##### ***2.7 Whole State Electorate***

*In relation to electing members of the Legislative Council, the Local Government sector:*

- 1. supports the retention of a regional system; and*
- 2. opposes the introduction of a whole state electorate option.*

##### ***2.4.5 Legislative Council Member Allowances – Regional Representation***

*Additional allowances should be provided to Members of the Legislative Council provided they have a staffed office in a non-metropolitan location to ensure a regional presence of Parliamentarians.*

#### **Background**

The WA Electoral Commission recently published their proposed electoral boundaries to be used at the next State election in 2025. The [Electoral Distribution Commissioners’ Explanatory Statement](#) lays out the proposed boundaries and explains the approach taken by the Commissioners.

The *Constitutional and Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Equality) Act 2021* requires the Commissioners to calculate the appropriate number of electors in each of the 59 Legislative Assembly districts. The proposed boundaries are based primarily on the distribution of electors within the state.



The Commissioners may consider other factors, including community of interest, land use patterns and existing Local Government boundaries, however elector numbers is the paramount consideration.

The key proposal from the Commissioners is to amalgamate two non-metropolitan districts to allow the creation of a new metropolitan district. This was based on a number of factors, including:

- a high rate of population growth in the expanding northern, eastern and southern areas of the greater Perth region;
- an ongoing trend of elector population within the metropolitan area growing at a significantly faster rate than the elector population located outside the metropolitan area; and
- population reports forecasting the continuation of the above growth trends.

Objections to the proposed boundaries can be submitted to the Commissioners by Monday, 21 August.

### **Comment**

WALGA President Cr Karen Chappel discussed the possibility of submitting an objection with State Council at the most recent Information Forum on Wednesday, 2 August. There was general support from State Councillors for the Association to prepare an objection on behalf of Members, with regards to the proposal to reduce the number of non-metropolitan Legislative Assembly districts by one.

The draft objection has been shaped by WALGA's existing advocacy positions, the Association's previous submission to the Ministerial Expert Committee on Electoral Reform back in 2021, and comments from State Councillors at the August Information Forum.

The focus of the objection is the proposal to amalgamate two non-metropolitan districts and thereby reduce the political representation for regional communities in WA at the State level.

The objection also calls for increased resourcing for regional electorate offices, particularly those located in districts covering vast distances.

## FLYING MINUTE OUTCOME

Poll created: 09/08/2023 at 15:19

Poll closed: 16/08/2023 at 23:59

Total invited to survey: 24

Total finished survey: 19

Endorse the Recommendation: 12

Endorse the Recommendation subject to comment below: 6

Do not endorse: 1

First Name	Last Name	Completed Date
Carol	Adams OAM	13/08/2023 4:19
Phillip	Blight	15/08/2023 20:25
Laurene	Bonza	16/08/2023 19:16
Ruth	Butterfield	Not completed
Cheryl	Cowell	Not completed
Frank	Cvitan	14/08/2023 14:47
John	Daw	15/08/2023 17:17
Tony	Dean	14/08/2023 14:27
Catherine	Ehrhardt	Not completed
Russ	Fishwick JP	09/08/2023 17:22
Moira	Girando JP	15/08/2023 15:14
Patrick	Hall	09/08/2023 15:53
Logan	Howlett JP	10/08/2023 11:22
Paul	Kelly	14/08/2023 22:04
David	Lagan	Not completed
Peter	Long	16/08/2023 12:22
Chris	Mitchell JP	10/08/2023 22:16
Chris	Pavlovich	Not completed
Les	Price	15/08/2023 23:33
Michelle	Rich	16/08/2023 7:57
Helen	Sadler	14/08/2023 15:27
Ken	Seymour	16/08/2023 14:01
Stephen	Strange	15/08/2023 13:00
Doug	Thompson	14/08/2023 22:01

## Responses

(12) Endorse the Recommendation: Mayor Patrick Hall, Cr Russ Fishwick JP, Mayor Logan Howlett JP, Cr John Daw, Cr Chris Mitchell JP, Mayor Carol Adams OAM, Cr Paul Kelly, President Cr Stephen Strange, Cr John Daw, President Cr Michelle Rich, Cr Ken Seymour, Mayor Peter Long

(6) Endorse the Recommendation subject to comment below: President Cr Tony Dean, Cr Doug Thompson, Cr Les Price, President Cr Moira Girando JP, President Cr Phillip Blight, President Cr Laurene Bonza

(1) Do not endorse: Cr Helen Sadler

## Comments

### President Cr Tony Dean

*Agree with points 1 and 2 but point three is very subjective. More of a matter of opinion than fact. I feel very much appreciated here in this region.*

### Cr Helen Sadler

*I fully support the increased resourcing of non-metropolitan electorates to assist the elected representative to effectively represent areas that cover a large and/or diverse geographic area. I am not opposed to the amalgamation of non-metropolitan districts, as I believe democracy is best served by the principle of each vote being of equal value. Electorates need have equivalent numbers of electors. I therefore endorse the resourcing issue, but not WALGA's objection to proposed boundaries.*

### Cr Doug Thompson

*Support the increased resourcing of non-metropolitan electorates to assist the elected representative to effectively represent areas that cover a large and/or diverse geographic area. I am not opposed to the amalgamation of non-metropolitan districts as the issue is one of representation which is best served by both adequate resourcing and, to a lesser extent, the quality skills and aptitude of the person elected. The argument that Regional Areas lose one representative is not one that can be justified when you apply the principle of one vote one value.*

### Cr Les Price

*The balance between representation and population is difficult given the boundaries set down by the State Government when it comes to the one vote one vote philosophy. To ignore the geographical impacts and the economic contribution of the mining and agriculture to the State's economy is politically self-serving.*

*I would like WALGA to consider the impacts of FIFO and DIDO workers within the regions. The objection does reference some 300,000 workers within the regions which represents some 25% of the State's workforce however no consideration is given to including these numbers in the statistical data when defining boundaries. FIFO and DIDO workers essentially 'reside' within the Local Government boundaries and town centres and, in most cases, spend more time living and working in the regions than they do in the electorate in which they are registered. I suspect if an analysis were to be done to include these numbers within the current electoral boundaries we would see a completely different picture of how our population is dispersed, particularly within the electorates of Moore and North West Central.*

*It is therefore important that WALGA continue to make the State Government aware of the need to consider all aspects of an electorate and not just focus on numbers of registered voters. Representation should be available to all and in light of the size of our State and its diversity both economically and geographically, special consideration should be made when casting the net to capture population numbers.*

*A further consideration is that there are many thousands of eligible voters on the Owners and Occupiers Rolls of Local Governments across the State who are eligible to have say at the local level. Why therefore, should we not incorporate these statistics when considering population numbers within an electorate. I am not referring to FIFO or DIDO workers but to those who own say, mining tenements or tend property interests in many electorates.*

*The most significant change proposed by the Commissioners is the amalgamation of two non-metropolitan districts of North West Central and Moore to accommodate the creation of an*

*additional district in the growing outer metropolitan area. The proposed new Mid West district will stretch from Muchea just north of Perth to just south of Newman, covering an estimated 70 townsites and a broad spectrum of land use patterns, from urban fringe development, remote communities, livestock farming, broad acre cropping, pastoral and mining operations.*

*Section 16I of the Electoral Act 1907 requires the Commissioners to give due consideration to the following factors when determining district boundaries:*

- 1. Community of interest;*
- 2. Land use patterns;*
- 3. Means of communication, means of travel and distance from the capital;*
- 4. Physical features;*
- 5. Existing boundaries of districts;*
- 6. Existing local government boundaries; and*
- 7. The trend of demographic changes.*

*These factors do not seem to have been taken into account when incorporating urban fringes (peri urban) with regional and remote communities.*

**President Cr Moira Girando JP**

*If the proposed changes are to go ahead, then the State Government must invest in more regional electoral offices and Ministerial outreach to regional WA. Holistically the State's electoral methodology needs to be reviewed with a terms of reference to focus on equality of representation and services based on more than just population, to account for the value proposition of regional WA.*

**President Cr Phillip Blight**

*Having consulted within my zone I share that there is support for the submission. This restructuring shifts the balance of power even further away from the economic power house of Australia. The economic benefit derived from the regions is vastly underestimated in this report as most mining companies have their registered office in a city, not where the mining activity takes place. No amount of additional resources will substitute for the loss of voices at the table when and where political decisions are made. One vote one value is only reasonable if services are equally delivered to all people. When regional WA gets tertiary hospitals, universities, public infrastructure, police, public transport, and the vast array of commercial services within same the easy access demanded by metropolitan WA, then vote equality is rational. What is most concerning is the loss of volunteers in regional WA. These volunteers are the people that hundreds of thousands of metropolitan tourists expect to call upon should they be unfortunate to have an incident when exploring the regions beyond the scarp. Cr Price's points re FIFO also accentuates this problem as these workers contribute little to regional communities but consume similar volunteer resources provided by the few live in locals.*

**President Cr Laurene Bonza**

*The method for adjusting electoral boundaries is fundamentally flawed if the major basis for such is the number of electors. Regional WA will be stripped of State representation at the next election after the electoral reforms introduced by the McGowan Government. Any further reduction of our representation will make it even more difficult for our voices to be heard. The stripping of services, and now representation, from our regional areas becomes a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' due to the movement of people out of the regions to access services previously provided in those regions.*



## **Secretariat Comment**

The comments are noted.

The submission has been amended to include the comments related to the impacts of FIFO and DIDO workers within the regions. The submission has also been amended to highlight the significant effect of the proposal to amalgamate the North West Central and Moore electorates and how this is not in line with the factors to be considered by section 16I of the *Electoral Act 1907* (WA).

**Objection**  
**Proposed Boundaries**  
**for the 2025 State General**  
**Election**

**August 2023**

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## About WALGA

The Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA or 'the Association') is the peak organisation for Local Government in Western Australia. The Association is an independent, membership-based group representing and supporting the work and interests of 137 mainland Local Governments in Western Australia, plus the Indian Ocean Territories of Christmas Island and Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

The Association provides an essential voice for more than 1,200 Elected Members, more than 22,000 Local Government employees, and the 2.6 million constituents that they serve and represent. The Association also provides professional advice and offers services that provide financial benefits to Local Governments.

## Contacts

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## Overview

WALGA and its Members object to the proposal to reduce the number of non-metropolitan districts by one as the reduction in political representation will negatively impact rural and regional communities.

## Basis of Objection

### Diminished political representation

As an Association representing Local Government across the breadth of the vast state of Western Australia, WALGA recognises the importance of political representation. With demographic and other forces pulling people and resources away from some regions towards the metropolitan area, political representation becomes increasingly important.

The Commissioners' proposal to reduce the number of non-metropolitan districts by one, will significantly reduce the political representation of regional communities. This reduction in representation is compounded by the 2021 change to the Legislative Council regions to create a whole of state electorate. WALGA also made a submission at the time of the 2021 review opposing the 'one vote, one value' reform on the basis that the voice of regional, rural, and remote communities would be overwhelmed by the relative number of voters in metropolitan Perth and more populous towns.



The perspective of many regional communities is that, without sufficient political representation, their concerns will be “out of sight, out of mind”, swamped by the sheer weight of voters in metropolitan Perth and large regional centres. Regional communities need effective representation to ensure that the unique needs and challenges of people living outside the metropolitan area are adequately addressed at a State level.

### **Increased pressure on regional Local Governments**

As political representation of non-metropolitan communities at the State level is diminished, the political representation provided by Local Governments will become even more important. This additional responsibility will be challenging for many non-metropolitan Local Governments, already stretched beyond their current capacity and resourcing.

The service provision expectations and requirements of Local Governments have increased considerably, rarely with commensurate increases in funding and resourcing. This has led to Local Governments, particularly in rural and remote parts of Western Australia, providing services previously the responsibility of other spheres of government. Contemporary examples include the provision of primary health care; aged care; housing; and economic development. Diminished political representation, requiring Local Government to fill another gap, will further stretch capacity and resources.

### **The contributions of non-metropolitan regions**

In considering political representation it is important to acknowledge the economic contribution of non-metropolitan districts to the wealth and standard of living in Western Australia.

Regional Western Australia makes a significant contribution to the WA economy. As of July 2023, the regions accounted for 35 percent of Gross State Product. Regional WA is also a significant employer, with more than 300,000 jobs located in regional WA – around 25% of the state’s total workforce. Many of these jobs are located in the agriculture and mining industries.<sup>1</sup>

Regional WA is home to many of the state’s key export industries, including the mining and agriculture sectors. WA is an exports-based economy, and accounts for around half of the national goods exports total each year. Goods exports currently account for 61 percent (\$247 billion) of Western Australia’s gross state product.

As the prevalence of fly-in-fly-out (FIFO) and drive-in-drive-out (DIDO) has increased, it is crucial that the permanent residents of communities that host the bulk of WA’s export industries remain politically represented. In determining the population of districts, no consideration is given to the numbers of FIFO and DIDO workers that essentially reside within regional areas, and in most cases spend more time living and working in the regions than they do in the electorate in which they are registered. If an analysis were to be done to include these numbers of FIFO and DIDO workers within the current electorate boundaries, we would see a very different picture of how our population is dispersed, particularly within the electorates of Moore and North West Central.

In light of the size of WA, and its diversity both economically and geographically, special consideration should be made when casting the net to capture population numbers.

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<sup>1</sup> WA Economic Profile – July 2023, [Western Australia's economy and international trade \(www.wa.gov.au\)](http://www.wa.gov.au)

## Matters to consider when dividing the State

The proposed amalgamation of North West Central and Moore does not give due consideration to the factors in section 16I of the *Electoral Act 1907* (WA). The proposed new Mid West district will cover an estimated 70 townsites and a broad spectrum of land use patterns, from urban fringe development, remote communities, livestock farming, broad acre cropping, and pastoral and mining operations. Factors such as community of interest and land use patterns do not seem to have been taken into account in this proposal to amalgamate urban fringes (peri urban) with regional and remote communities. It is essential that all aspects of an electorate be considered when determining boundaries, not just the number of registered voters.

## Resourcing of electorate offices in the regions

Even before the proposed reduction of non-metropolitan Legislative Assembly districts, there was a need for additional resourcing in the regions to improve the capacity of State representatives to service their electorate. This is particularly true for those electorates that cover a large geographical area. Any reduction in overall regional representation will only exacerbate this problem.

Resourcing for electorate offices in the regions needs to be significantly increased to improve the capacity of representatives to engage with communities within their electorate. The ability for a State Member to effectively represent the interests of their electorate is reliant upon their ability to effectively communicate with and hear from their constituents. An increase in resources, including staff, is needed for electorate offices in non-metropolitan districts, particularly those covering vast distances.

## Conclusion

WALGA acknowledges the challenges and limited scope inherent to the Commissioners' task to propose electoral boundary changes. Nevertheless, as an Association representing communities all over the state through Local Government, WALGA supports strong and effective political representation for the non-metropolitan districts to ensure that regional WA is supported to continue to generate export and employment opportunities that benefit us all.

Any further reduction in political representation at the State level will necessarily lead to an expectation that regional Local Governments will expand to fill this gap, a role that may stretch Local Governments beyond their capacity and resources.

Representation for non-metropolitan districts (especially those covering large geographical areas) also needs bolstering by increased resources for electorate offices.

**WALGA's objection to the proposed boundaries are on the basis that the reduction of non-metropolitan districts will:**

- 1. Further diminish political representation for regional communities;**
- 2. Increase pressure on regional Local Governments; and**
- 3. Fail to recognise the contributions of non-metropolitan districts to the WA economy.**

**WALGA and its Members support increased resourcing for electorate offices in non-metropolitan districts, particularly those that cover a large geographical area, to ensure effective political representation at the State level.**

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