

# Shire of Pingelly

## Submission to the Electoral Boundaries Review



### Overview

The Shire of Pingelly is extremely concerned regarding the proposal to reduce regional representation to the Western Australian Parliament. While the Shire understands that representation is based partially on enrolment statistics, the erosion of regional representation is a loss to the entirety of WA.

While enrolment statistics are an important matrix to consider in this review, it should be tempered by consideration of various other equally important matters. These matters include;

- Size of electoral areas;
- Number of individual communities represented;
- Common community interests; and
- Aboriginal representation.

### Population

Enrolment statistics are considered inaccurate due fly in, fly out workers inaccurately recording their residence to be Perth metro area rather than a regional area. This reflects their mindset, but not the reality. This is particularly demonstrated by the number of jobs in the Pilbara/Kimberly regions which far exceeds the number of residents measured by the ABS. There is a lesser, but similar issue for the Wheatbelt with drive in, drive out workers from the Perth metro area. This artificially increases the enrolment statistics of the Perth metro area while simultaneously artificially reducing the regional enrolment statistics.

### Size of Electoral Areas

Consideration of the size of electoral areas is highly important as this makes it exponentially more difficult for elected representatives to adequately communicate and be present in their electorate. At times there are 6 - 8 hours drive between towns in some electorates. This means time lost for the currently 16 regional elected representatives in addition to the time lost to commuting to their electorate from the WA Legislative Assembly in Perth. This are real and severe barriers to representation in the regions which are not experienced by the 43 representatives in the Perth Metro area. The Perth Metro area is 6,418km<sup>2</sup> compared to the regional areas of 2.640 million km<sup>2</sup>. Metro elected representatives cover 149km<sup>2</sup> on average, while regional elected representatives averages 165,375km<sup>2</sup> – or 25 times the size of the Perth Metro Area, 1,075 times the size of their metro colleagues. As a result, it would be irresponsible to reduce representation to the regions. It is recommended that regional representation is increased commensurate with the size of the electoral areas.

### Number of Individual Communities

In addition to the size of electoral areas, another factor is the number of individual communities represented. Regional representatives represent numerous individual communities and towns. This is indicated by the fact that there are 30 metro local governments and 107 regional local governments. Many of these have individual communities within them but have been established as they represent distinct districts. Each of these individual communities have diverse needs. Elected representatives must be aware of these needs and balance them with the needs of other communities that they represent. Currently metro elected representatives cover 0.7 of a local government area on average, while regional elected representatives averages 6.7 of a local government area. This increases the difficulty of adequately representing these communities and demonstrates that the regions are underrepresented in the WA Legislative Assembly.

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### Common Community Interests

Any proposal to include peri-urban areas and regional areas together within electoral boundaries reduces the representation of both as they have different and sometimes conflicting community interests. This means that representation will only reflect a portion of the electorate while the remainder is ignored. Given the comparative population density of some of the peri-urban areas, the regional portion of the electoral area will be entirely without representation. This is clearly inappropriate and against the democratic principles that we value so highly. The appropriate course of action at a minimum is to ensure that there is no reduction in the number of seats that genuinely represent regional Western Australians.

### Aboriginal Representation

There are approximately 89,000 Aboriginal Australians that live in Western Australia. Approximately 42,000 of these live in the Perth metro area. The remainder (47,000) live in regional Western Australia. (Note that it is understood that Aboriginal people are undercounted in the Census data, particularly in regional areas.) This means that the ratio of representation for Aboriginal Western Australians in the Perth metro area is 977 Aboriginal people for each elected representative while in regional WA it is 2,938 Aboriginal people for each elected representative. At a time when there is a national conversation relating to hearing and listening to Aboriginal people, it is clearly unacceptable to reduce their participation to the WA Legislative Assembly. To do so would undermine the efforts of countless people at all levels to bring justice and equality to our First Nations Peoples and would perpetuate systemic racism in our country.

Extract from *Pathways To Justice—Inquiry Into The Incarceration Rate Of Aboriginal And Torres Strait Islander Peoples* (ALRC Report 133)

*In 1991, the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) found that the Aboriginal population was grossly over-represented in custody. It noted that 'Aboriginal people are in gross disproportionate numbers, compared with non-Aboriginal people, in both police and prison custody and it is this fact that provides the immediate explanation for the disturbing number of Aboriginal deaths in custody'.*

*The RCIADIC looked at indicators of disadvantage that contributed to this disproportionate representation, including that 'Aboriginal people were dispossessed of their land without benefit of treaty, agreement or compensation'.*

*Other indicators identified by the RCIADIC were*

*the economic position of Aboriginal people, the health situation, their housing requirements, their access or non-access to an economic base including land and employment, their situation in relation to education; the part played by alcohol and other drugs—and its effects.*

*Over the 26 years since the RCIADIC, multiple resources have been dedicated to remedying the factors identified by the RCIADIC and to reducing the disproportionate incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.*

*However, in 2016, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were 12.5 times more likely to be in prison than non-Indigenous people, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women were 21.2 times more likely to be in prison than non-Indigenous women.*

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To tackle the economic disadvantage, health care, housing, education and access to land and employment, Aboriginal people need more representation in WA Legislative Assembly and not less. The majority of Aboriginal people live in regional WA. Reducing representation in regional WA reduces the voice Aboriginal people and is a step in the wrong direction.

Many of the issues facing Aboriginal people (as listed above) are issues also faced in regional communities but to lesser extent. It is essential that the Electoral Commission retains (at a minimum) or increases regional representation, to advocate for economic development, health care, housing, education and access to land and employment in regional communities, where Aboriginal people live. Electoral Commission has an opportunity to made a substantial difference where it is most needed.

## Conclusion

There are many factors that must be considered when reviewing electoral boundaries. While weight should be given to enrolment statistics, consideration of the size of electoral areas; the number of individual communities represented; common community interests; and Aboriginal representation. These factors outweigh any disparity in the ratio of enrolled voters to elected representatives. As a result, the 16 'regional seats' should remain or be increased to ensure equity.

If current districts are outside the permissible legislative limits for enrolment, and this cannot be rectified by amending boundaries to retain regional representation at current levels, it is suggested that the appropriate action is to report this matter the WA Legislative Assembly for a correction to be made to the legislative limits.

Signed for the Shire of Pingelly and on behalf of the residents of Pingelly:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "A. Dover", written over a horizontal line.

Mr. Andrew Dover  
**Chief Executive Officer**  
12 May 2023

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "W. Mulrone", written over a horizontal line.

Mr. William Mulroney ESM  
**Shire President**  
12 May 2023