

AUSCRIPT AUSTRALASIA PTY LIMITED

ACN 110 028 825

T: 1800 AUSCRIPT (1800 287 274)

E: clientservices@auscript.com.au

W: www.auscript.com.au

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

O/N H-629670

AUSTRALIAN ELECTORAL COMMISSION

NEW SOUTH WALES

REDISTRIBUTION PUBLIC HEARING

PRESIDING: **THE HON D COWDROY OAM QC**
 (Chairperson of the Australian Electoral Commission)
MR T ROGERS
 (Electoral Commissioner, Australian Electoral Commission)
MR D ORR
 (Australian Electoral Officer for New South Wales, Australian
 Electoral Commission)
MR T WHITFIELD PSM
 (Acting Auditor-General of New South Wales)
MR D MOONEY
 (Surveyor General of New South Wales)

LOCATION: **GLASSHOUSE**
 CORNER OF CLARENCE AND HAY STREETS
 PORT MACQUARIE, NEW SOUTH WALES

DATE: **10.32 AM, FRIDAY, 18 DECEMBER 2015**

Continued from 16.12.15

DAY 2

CHAIRPERSON: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Can I welcome you to this hearing of the augmented Electoral Commission for New South Wales. The augmented Electoral Commission comprises persons who are – some of them are part of the distribution – Redistribution Committee, but it comprises more people
5 than the Redistribution Committee. So our function as the augmented Commission is to review what has been done and proposed, to consider all the objections and the comments on objections and to hear the oral submissions of anyone who wishes to address us so that we will understand exactly what you think about the proposal put up by the Redistribution Committee.

10 Can I indicate to you that this is the second of two hearings into the proposed redistribution for the State of New South Wales. A hearing was held last Wednesday on 16 December in Sydney. And we meet here today to continue the hearing into the proposed redistribution. May I introduce to you the people here. My name is Dennis
15 Cowdroy. I'm the chairman of the Australian Electoral Commission. The other persons who are members of the Australian Electoral Commission are Mr David Kalisch, who is the Australian or the Commonwealth Statistician. He could not be with us today, but we can contact him by telephone if required. On my right is Mr Tom Rogers, who is the Electoral Commissioner.

20 The other members who make up the augmented Electoral Commission are: Mr Tony Whitfield, the Acting Auditor-General for New South Wales on Mr Tom Rogers' right; Mr Doug Orr, who is on my left, the Australian Electoral Commissioner for New South Wales; and Mr Des Mooney on his left, who is the
25 Surveyor General for New South Wales. So those are the nucleus of the augmented Commission, including myself. And present here today are also members of the New South Wales Secretariat, who have assisted in the arrangements for today's hearing.

30 Can I briefly describe to you the framework within which we must work. The guiding Act is the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*, and this governs effectively every step of the process of redistribution, and we must follow that to make sure that what we do is in accordance with the statutory requirements of the law. Part IV of that Act sets out the requirements to be followed when conducting redistributions,
35 and this redistribution of New South Wales is required as the number of members for the House of Representatives to be chosen by New South Wales for the next general election has fallen from 48 to 47. This has resulted from shifts in population.

40 In accordance with section 66 of the Act, the Redistribution Committee prepared a proposal for the redistribution of New South Wales into 47 federal electoral divisions, and the proposal, together with the written reasons for that proposal, as required by section 67 of the Act, was released by the Redistribution Committee on 16 October of this year.

45 In accordance with section 68 of the Electoral Act, interested persons and organisations are invited – were invited to make written objections to the proposed

redistribution and to provide comments on those objections. And both, I might add, the objections and the comments on the objections were put on the website. There were, in fact, 791 objections raised state-wide and there were 26 comments on objections also which were received within the appropriate timeframes.

5

As we are the augmented Electoral Commission, we are required by section 72, subparagraph (1) of the Act to consider all objections lodged in relation to the redistribution proposal and all comments on objections. The inquiry here today, together with the one in Sydney, provides opportunity for members of the public to come and inform us what their beliefs are concerning the redistribution. The Act specifies how the redistribution process is to be conducted and the factors that are to be taken into account.

10

Section 73, subparagraph (4) of the Act stated the primary consideration for the augmented Electoral Commission is that each electoral division meet certain numerical requirements in the form of the current enrolment quota, that is, the enrolment quotas as of today, and the projected enrolment quota and permissible ranges within these two quotas. Subject to an electoral division satisfying the numerical requirements, section 73, subsection (4) also requires that we have regard to communities of interest. Communities of interest are the words used in the Act.

15

20

What it means is we have to have regard to the economic, social and regional interests. We have regard to the means of communication and travel and physical features and geographic areas. The boundaries of existing electoral divisions are also considered, although that is of lesser importance to the ones I've already mentioned, which are, in order of priority, numerical requirements and communities of interest. Boundaries may change and often there has to be compensating adjustments to make sure the electoral divisions are within the numerical requirements.

25

The inquiry is being recorded and the transcripts of the proceedings will be made available as part of our report, and they will also be on the Commission's website for you to view. There are a number of people who have indicated today that they would like to address us orally and I will ask each person who wishes to speak to come forward to the table and simply state their name at the outset and any particular interest they represent or group or their particular locality in which they are interested.

30

35

We are here essentially to hear what you say, and it is most important that we hear you. And for that reason, we won't involve in – we won't ask you questions or we don't propose to interrupt your thought processes because we would rather hear what you've got to say, so that we can take that into account. And so we won't be debating any issue today, but rather listening to what you have to say.

40

When we close the inquiry, we will deliberate and we will finalise our consideration and objections by Australia Day, 26 January 2016, at the latest. And thereafter there will be a public announcement made, as soon as practicable. In respect of the speakers, I would simply ask that once you've stated your name and your particular

45

interest, we would welcome hearing from you and if – because there are many speakers, we would ask you, if possible, confine your remarks to the essential matter you want to get across to us, so that we will understand it readily.

5 Now, I think the first person who has indicated they would like to address the augmented Commission is Mr David Gillespie, MP. Is Mr Gillespie available? Mr Gillespie, come forward, please, and just have a seat here in front. And for the record, for the formal record, would you mind please stating your full name and your title.

10

DR D. GILLESPIE: Yes. Dr David Gillespie, Federal Member for the electorate of Lyne.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you.

15

DR GILLESPIE: Okay. Well, first of all, I would like to welcome the augmented Commission to Port Macquarie and the Glasshouse and thank you for listening to, I suppose, the many contacts you've had about the difficult issue of the current redistribution. At the outset, I would give you the summary first, there's – an awful lot of people in the electorate have contacted me, totally perplexed as to the proposed redistribution, to which I've had to explain the difficult situation that you find yourselves in, turning basically a case of musical chairs, someone misses out when all the redistribution happens.

20

25 And I appreciate of the remaining seats, there's only six across the whole state that haven't had a significant redistribution, so the old case of the elbow's connected to the shoulder's connected to the – I mean, or like dominos, yes. Once you move one electorate one way, it affects another one. But the take-home message I would like the Commission to understand is a lot of my current electors are (1) puzzled by it and, (2) not happy because of the basic principle of community of interest, that is, in essence, the message I would like to deliver to you. I'm sure there are many of my constituents that will give you their own words, but I just thought I would convey that to you.

30

35 CHAIRPERSON: Thank you.

DR GILLESPIE: But I appreciate the difficult situation you're in. You can't please everyone. If you try to please everyone, you don't – if you try to please one lot, you alienate another, so I will leave it up to your wisdom. And thank you, once again, for listening because we are all very pleased that you took the time to come up here and hear the voices.

40

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you.

45 DR GILLESPIE: Thanks very much.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you very much, Dr Gillespie. The next person, Joyce Bilish, please. Good. Ms Bilish, would you state please your full name for the record.

5 MS J.I. BILISH: Joyce Irene Bilish.

CHAIRPERSON: Yes. Thank you.

10 MS BILISH: I have lived here for 31 years, coming from Sydney. And when we first came to Port, Settlement City had just been opened, and our town in Central looked as though – well, it was many shops closed, it looked very sad. And I said to my husband, “This town hasn’t got a heart” but when they opened up Port Central and then we got the Glasshouse – and things improved. The last eight years, I would say, that Port Macquarie and the surroundings have been very content to what it was
15 when we first came. I am fortunate to live with the koala corridor – be right on my back alignment. So I have the delight of forest and then I have the delight of having a look at the ocean when I feel like going to the beach, which is nice.

20 But I do resent being chopped off and being put in to another electorate. I think Port Macquarie – we’ve always looked at Wauchope as one of our places. And, of course, going right down to the – Camden Haven. You could always go down there – when we first came, we could go down there and get fresh fish from the fishermen and prepare them on the wharf. And it was just a delight. But that is still operable. And then, of course, Tele Point – that’s always – that’s Telegraph Point – has always
25 been another outlet for we people. So I think it – psychologically, it does make a great difference of how the electorates are placed, and I can’t see why we need a change at all. Thank you.

30 CHAIRPERSON: Thank you very much for your attendance, Ms Bilish. The – there are now three speakers who would like to come up – Anne Phillips, Jenny Hutchinson and Joy Corben. I think Jenny Hutchinson is not speaking, but I gather Anne Phillips and Joy would like to.

35 MS A. PHILLIPS: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON: Who would like to speak first?

MS PHILLIPS: I would. And I am Anne Phillips.

40 CHAIRPERSON: Thank you. Thank you.

MS PHILLIPS: And thank you for the opportunity for us to - - -

45 CHAIRPERSON: Yes.

MS PHILLIPS: - - - speak to our – I’m going to read our submission, and actually
- - -

CHAIRPERSON: Yes.

MS PHILLIPS: - - - correct some of the spelling mistakes - - -

5 CHAIRPERSON: Thank you.

MS PHILLIPS: - - - that came through we, as long-term and committed residents to the Port Macquarie-Hastings Local Government Area seriously question the logic of the proposal to bisect our thriving community in the proposed
10 redistribution of the federal electorates. The main towns with the Port Macquarie LGA, part of the Lyne electorate – sorry – are Port Macquarie, Wauchope, Laurieton, North Haven, Dunbogan, Comboyne, Kendall, Kew, Bonny Hills and Lake Cathie.

All these towns and the other localities within the LGA are economically and
15 socially connected with the main centre, Port Macquarie, which the redistribution proposed inexplicably dissects the electorate of Lyne. These connections are dependent on coherent political representation and planning within the key federal policy and program areas such as regional infrastructure, airports and highways, water resources, higher education, and health. Port Macquarie is the regional
20 transport hub for the LGA and wider Lyne electorate in the south, with highways and major roads radiating to and from Port Macquarie into other centres.

Port Macquarie provides the busy regional airport for both passenger and freight for all areas within the LGA and the Lyne electorate. The Port Macquarie Bus
25 Transition Centre is the hub for intra-town, inter-town, intercity and interstate services for all centres within the Lyne electorate. This transit centre also provides a regular coach service to the regional major rail service at Wauchope. The infrastructure connections between Port Macquarie and the rest of the LGA also include those for water resources, such as the water and sewerage treatment plants,
30 dams, reservoirs, and the major reticulation systems that would be bisected by the new boundaries proposed in the redistribution.

Through a decade of advocacy and support from successive federal members, the Lyne electorate has attracted significant federal funds to address a low tertiary
35 education participation rate that historically has been well below the national rate. This understanding of local needs and focused federal advocacy has helped establish Port Macquarie as a higher education hub for the Lyne electorate. There's Charles Sturt University, University of Newcastle, and then University of New South Wales Rural Clinical School; each have a significant presence.
40

As well as the federal funding of the New South Wales Uni Rural Clinical School and the joint health education facility, our federal members have successfully convincing cases for the federal funds required for the major expansion of Port Macquarie Base Hospital, which serves both the Macquarie LGA, other parts of the
45 electorate to the south, and the wider region. The continued expansion of health services in the Lyne electorate is critical to meet the needs of both an aging and rapidly growing population in the electorate.

5 The 2014 population for people residing in the Port Macquarie-Hastings LGA is 77,481 persons. Over the past five years, the population of the LGA has been growing at an average rate of 1.62 per cent per annum. This rate is significantly higher than the growth rate for both the Mid North Coast, which is 1.1 per cent, and for New South Wales, which is 0.8 per cent over the same period. The Port Macquarie-Hastings Council area population cards for 2015 is 78,053, and is forecast to grow to 102,926 in 2013 – 2036 probably would be better, instead of going backwards. Right.

10 It is also important to note that the proposed move of Port Macquarie to the electorate of Cowper means that the new electorate would have a growth rate far outstripping the rest of the region. Coffs Harbour city population forecast for 2015 is 73,237. Given the rapid population growth across the region, combining Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour in the same electorate would necessitate – this is one
15 of my spelling mistakes here another redistribution within a few years.

For this reason and the points addressed above in relation to Port Macquarie LGA, we have a compelling case to remain one electorate and we recommend that the entire LGA remain in Lyne. We also understand that there is a need to change and
20 we are not saying no change is the only option and Joy would like to look at a couple of the other options.

CHAIRPERSON: Yes. Thank you. Could you state your name just for the transcript record, please?
25

MS J.I. CORBEN: Yes. My name is Joy Irene Corben. I live at Redbank which is near Wauchope, so I don't live in Port Macquarie. I have been involved on the – sorry, I have been involved on the council's Economic Development Committee for quite some time but also, during my working life, did a lot of travel across the north
30 coast region and I feel as though I've got a fairly keen understanding of communities of interest across that region that are impacted by this proposal. All I wanted to do was to respectfully make some suggestions or pose some questions that the inquiry might like to consider based on that – those insights into those communities of interest.
35

Pushing Port Macquarie into the Cowper electorate, as I understand it, then requires part of the Cowper electorate to be excised and pushed further north into, is it, Page? Sorry, I haven't got that on my map. I'm working on memory there. And that's what people in Coffs Harbour would call some of the northern beaches of Coffs
40 Harbour. So I'm sure the people of that electorate could speak for themselves but anyone who knows that region would say that that doesn't make any sense either. Those northern beaches of Coffs Harbour look to Coffs Harbour for the same sort of community of interest and economic and social connections as Anne has just described occur in this local government area.
45

So that's the other impacts of pushing Port Macquarie further north. The other area is if we look to the south of the proposed new Lyne electorate and that's the parts of

the old Paterson electorate. Again, I'm sure people in Gloucester, Gresford, Dungog, Paterson, Karuah and Hawks Nest and Bulahdelah and Stroud – and they're all reasonably sized rural centres – can make their arguments about what makes sense for them.

5

But from my insights into this area, I would say all of those areas that I've just named look more to the Hunter and I am wondering whether the inquiry had considered looking at the western boundary of the proposed new Lyne electorate and where it abuts with Hunter and New England, to look at whether it makes more sense to have those areas – including Gloucester which is currently in Lyne – move into a Hunter electorate.

I'm sure the people further south in Karuah and Hawks Nest would be very much questioning the separation in electoral terms from the Port Stephens area and Raymond Terrace. I regularly holiday there, have done for 20 years. And, again, look, if you think about the tourism bodies, the industry, the transport routes, again, that southern boundary of this new Lyne electorate doesn't make sense.

So, I suppose, I'm adding to our written submission by saying it's not just about Lyne and the communities of interest within this Port Macquarie-Hastings LGA which was the focus of our submission. But if you have a look in totality at the impact on communities of interest on the Mid North Coast from Port Stephens through till the northern beaches of Coffs Harbour and out to the west are two areas such as Gloucester, Dungog, etcetera, areas which have much more in common economically with New England.

They – mining, agricultural centres and so on. The same with, you know, Gresford, Dungog, that sort of area. So that's all I would like to say. I think it needs to be looked at in the totality. We understand that your numerical quotas and so on and that, ultimately, it's about lines on maps but we would respectfully request that there be a review of this proposal to take some of those considerations into account.

CHAIRPERSON: Well, thank you – thank you very much. You've both clearly gone to a lot of trouble to formulate that and it has all been recorded and every bit of it will be considered.

MS CORBEN: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you. The next speaker, Mr Kenneth Williams. Is Mr Williams available? Mr Williams, if you would just be good enough to state your full name please for the record.

MR K.L. WILLIAMS: My full name is Kenneth Lloyd Williams.

CHAIRPERSON: Yes.

MR WILLIAMS: I'm a resident of Port Macquarie and I'm a member of an informal news watch group that has spent some time recently discussing these matters and a couple of other members of that group, I think, are scheduled to speak this morning. So, I've opted not to speak about individual objections as such. I believe they've been comprehensively compiled, their nature is readily understandable. If I may, I would like to refer to just a couple of lines from the Commission's existing report - - -

CHAIRPERSON: Yes,

MR WILLIAMS: - - - as publicised on the website:

The Committee considers its proposed redistribution of New South Wales will result in electoral divisions which:

(1) *meet the requirements of the Electoral Act to the extent possible –*

and that's a very critical part of it:

(2) *reflect the population trends identified by the Australian Bureau of Statistics;*

(3) *maintain and/or unite communities of interest;*

(4) *make use of LGA boundaries, particularly in rural areas; and*

(5) *provide strong and readily identifiable electoral division boundaries.*

On a personal basis, I would take issue with (3) and (4). I don't believe that the proposed boundaries do adequately maintain and/or unite communities of interest and I don't believe that they make good use of LGA boundaries in that in the specific cases of Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour, the LGA boundaries have been slashed right across the middle. Having said that, let me say that one recognises immediately that in drawing up these boundaries, the Commission has been very, very much constrained by numerical requirements. The idea of the average being common to all electoral boundaries within a permissible flexibility range, I think lies at fault.

The government statistician, were he here, would not need to be reminded of the story of the man who drowned in a river with an average depth of six inches and I challenge the very concept that all electorates – electoral divisions in the whole of the country or the whole of the State in this case, should necessarily approach very closely to a common average figure. The approach to the average figure – it has been recognised in the past that there are problems there. Some years ago the pre-existing – what I think of as the flexibility was increased to two per cent – plus or minus two per cent to plus or minus three and a half per cent.

I would like to suggest that plus or minus three and a half per cent is nowhere adequate and I would like to ask the Commission, if it so sees fit, to once again approach the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters to have this question reviewed yet again. Review the concept of the average number and of
5 the required flexibility. If we had been dealing in this case with plus or minus five per cent instead of plus or minus three and a half per cent, it would have given you, the Commission, much more flexibility to approach more closely the matters that I've suggested. It didn't come out very well. Thank you. Thank you for taking the time to join us.

10 CHAIRPERSON: Yes. Thank you. Thank you, Mr Williams.

MR WILLIAMS: Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON: Your views will be certainly considered and thank you for your attendance. I think next is Mr Harry Creamer, please. Mr Creamer, please come forward.

20 MR H. CREAMER: Mr Chairman, may I stand. I find that my projection – you will sympathise as a QC.

CHAIRPERSON: I think - - -

25 MR CREAMER: I'm sure you will be able to hear me.

CHAIRPERSON: I think there was some problem at the back. Is there some issue with Mr Creamer standing?

30 AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yes, we get his back turned. We would like to - - -

MR CREAMER: You will get my back if I sit.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: No, I know, but just to hear your voice.

35 CHAIRPERSON: All right. If you think it's more effective standing, please go ahead.

MR CREAMER: Thank you. I do.

40 CHAIRPERSON: Would you mind stating your full name, Mr Creamer.

MR CREAMER: Yes, I also have a copy of my speech, as well. I've given it to the
- - -

45 CHAIRPERSON: Thank you. Yes. Thank you.

MR CREAMER: My name is Harry Creamer and I'm the president of Climate Change Australia based in the Hastings.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you.

5

MR CREAMER: Thank you for the opportunity to address this inquiry into the location of the boundary between the Division of Cowper and the Division of Lyne. My name is Harry Creamer, as I've said, and I'm a retired New South Wales Public Servant. I've lived in Port Macquarie for over 12 years, having moved here from
10 Armidale on the Northern Tablelands. I now spend most of my retirement leading the local safe climate and clean energy group called Climate Change Australia, Hastings.

My objections relate to the proposed relocating of Port Macquarie to the far south-east corner of a new Division of Cowper. My thinking on this comes from how I
15 perceive the geography, demography, culture and politics in this region. My career took me out and about a lot as a national parks community ranger, mainly to locations south of here and the climate and energy group started in Taree until we established a branch here in Port Macquarie. Most of our members either live in Port
20 Macquarie or to the south of here. The question I ask is, Port Macquarie or Wauchope – in the next section.

My first point is that the community of interest for people living in Port Macquarie tends to be more to the south than to the north. The most obvious examples of this
25 are the dormitory towns of Lake Cathie and Bonny Hills and the community of Laurieton. For reasons of history and geography, Wauchope – human geography – Wauchope is different. It was an important regional centre long before the 1970s when Port Macquarie started to grow from a sleepy fishing and holiday destination to the major population centre it is now. In making this point, I agree with parts of the
30 National Party submission. I don't often agree with the National Party, but I do on this. The Camden – I quote:

*The Camden Haven region is very strongly connected to Port Macquarie in a way that Wauchope despite its closer proximity is not. The Camden Haven
35 communities of Lake Cathie, Bonny Hills, Laurieton are very much residential satellites of Port Macquarie. They have developed and grown as Port Macquarie has expanded whereas Wauchope was established in 1836 and has existed as a town in its own right since that time.*

40 While I do not like the prospect of Port Macquarie-Hastings Council being divided across two federal divisions, if it has to happen I would rather see Wauchope going into Cowper than Port Macquarie going into Cowper. This would also reflect the political reality that already exists with the state seat of Oxley, which includes both
45 Wauchope and Kempsey, but not Port Macquarie. Many people who take an interest in these matters want to see Port Macquarie remaining in the Division of Lyne and continue as the largest town in Lyne. It does not seem good electoral policy to have

the two largest coastal towns between Newcastle and Tweed Head – that is, Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour – in the same federal electorate – one vote, one value.

5 I very much respect the principle of one vote, one value and I regret that the proposal to enshrine this principle in the constitution was lost in the 1988 referendum due to opposition from the Coalition Party, I might add. I realise this puts the Commission in a difficult position. However, I'm aware that the Liberal Party has raised the possibility of including Tenterfield in a federal division to the north of here. Thus changing the numbers in Cowper and allowing Port Macquarie to remain in Lyne.
10 The proposal is not as far-fetched as it seems and raises the question, how do people living on the Northern Tablelands view the coast?

15 Actually, we used to gaze longingly towards the east, almost every day, hoping for a chance to escape for a few days to the sea and the sand. The Great Divide may be a real physical feature, but it is also a construct of the mind. It's a fact that the Great Dividing Range is not as pronounced, a physical barrier along the Bruxner Highway from Casino to Tenterfield as it is if you drive from Grafton to Glen Innes along the Gwydir Highway or up the Waterfall Way from Urunga to Dorrigo or up the Oxley Highway from Wauchope to Walcha.

20 I encourage the Commission to consider this possibility: enlarging the more northern division westwards, so that the proposed disruption to Lyne does not have to happen and to maintain the one vote, one value principle. I come now to the political – to the politics of the proposed boundary changes. Seen from my perspective – and
25 many people think the same way – it is a threat to the effective working of democracy in this area of the Mid North Coast to have one federal MP representing both the major towns of Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour.

30 MPs are only human – I might dispute that sometimes, but it is human nature to devote more time and energy to the local community to which you belong. Since it is likely that the proposed boundary changes will result in the sitting MP for Cowper gaining pre-selection for Cowper, those of us who live in Port Macquarie will become second-class citizens in relation to the federal level of our democracy and that concerns me greatly. The group I run must of necessity deal more with Federal
35 policy issues than with state and local issues.

40 Currently, we have a working relationship with the sitting MP for Lyne. I find it difficult to imagine how we would get a fair go – and by that I mean being taken seriously with regular access, regular meetings – if our federal MP lived in Coffs Harbour? Beyond my group, it is hard to see how any person or group from Port Macquarie would benefit from the proposed changes. An MP based at Coffs Harbour will inevitably find it hard, even at an unconscious level, to be even-handed when it comes to important issues, such as constituent access, location visits, funding and grants and policy making. I respectfully request the Commission take another
45 look at this proposal. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr Creamer. That has been very useful as well. Thank you for your attendance. The next is Mr – sorry Karen Clifford, please. Ms Clifford, would you please state your full name for the record.

5 MS K.S. CLIFFORD: Yes, it's Karen Sue Clifford.

CHAIRPERSON: Yes.

10 MS CLIFFORD: Sorry my voice is a bit raspy with all the stuff in the air – allergies. My name is Karen Sue Clifford. I've been in Port Macquarie for 12 years now and I'm a concerned citizen – resident about the proposed boundary changes.

CHAIRPERSON: Okay.

15 MS CLIFFORD: As well as supporting the others and their objections, I would like to also add that in my opinion it shows an incredible lack of foresight to change the boundaries of the federal electorates of Lyne and Cowper in the manner proposed for the following reasons: number 1, the Port Macquarie-Hastings Council area will be split into two federal electorates making the efficient delivery of local services to the
20 whole council area much more complicated or possibly put at risk.

For example, Port Macquarie's water supply, the Cowarra Dam and the pumping station are located in the Wauchope area and would be in a different federal electorate besides all of the other services that the council provides to residents;
25 number 2, with the proposed boundaries, Cowper will contain the two largest and fastest-growing regional centres on the Mid North Coast and in New South Wales, which will necessitate another redistribution sooner rather than later. There's absolutely no common sense in this recommendation. It's just based on numbers to fit a model and has not considered the people and the communities of interest.

30 Item 3: communities of interest will be split from the major regional and financial centres and social, as well. Port Macquarie has much more in common with Lake Cathie, Bonny Hills, the Camden Haven area and Wauchope as communities of interest than with Coffs Harbour and Kempsey. The cohesiveness that currently
35 exists within the Lyne electorate will be destroyed, but the same will be true in Cowper, as well.

4: should Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour both be forced into the electorate of Cowper, it will create a situation whereby both regional centres will be competing
40 for the same federal funding dollars and grants, resulting in neither centre receiving sufficient funds to keep up with demographic requirements and growth and, in particular, necessary infrastructure.

5: it will be very difficult, if not impossible, for the federal Member of Parliament
45 for Cowper to fairly represent both regional centres because of their competing interests. There's only ever a finite amount of funding available to electorates and, either, (a) the funding will be split between the two major regional centres, which

will be insufficient for either, or, (b) one will miss out completely, resulting in deteriorating infrastructure for the one that misses out, which will likely be Port Macquarie, given that the Member for Cowper is located in Coffs Harbour.

5 In summary, the proposed changes in electoral boundaries will be destructive to the regional centres of Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour and both regional centres will suffer. I strongly urge the Electoral Commission Redistribution Committee to rethink their proposed recommendation to change the electoral boundaries of Cowper and Lyne, as proposed, and the negative impact it will certainly have on the
10 communities of interest in both current electorates. It is stated on page 40 of the Proposed Redistribution of New South Wales into electoral divisions October 2015, paragraph 181, under Proposed Division of Cowper, and I quote:

15 *...as a result, there are less than optimal outcomes in terms of communities of interest.*

This could well be the understatement of the year. There's no win/win outcome in the proposed boundary changes for Lyne and Cowper. It's a lose/lose situation for both electorates, in my opinion. Thank you very much for the opportunities.

20

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you, Ms Clifford. Your remarks will also be noted, and thank you for your attendance.

MS CLIFFORD: Okay.

25

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you.

MS CLIFFORD: Would you like a copy or - - -

30 CHAIRPERSON: You can sit or depart, whatever you wish – the copy will be helpful, yes, please, if you would. Mr John Burman, please. Mr Burman, if you just state, please, your full name.

35 DR J.E. BURMAN: My name is Dr John Edmund Burman. Good morning, Mr Chairman and Commissioners and staff of AEC. My wife and I moved to Port Macquarie in 2005 and had visited over many years. We do not have any political or organisational affiliation to this submission, which is a personal one. In carrying out a redistribution, the redistribution must take into account not just the number of electors, but also community interests, as you've elaborated earlier, Chairman.

40

The proposed alteration to the Lyne and Cowper boundary may satisfy the objective numbers test, but falls well short on the other, more subjective tests. I believe that the proposal, as it affects Port Macquarie, the city itself, the local government area and the specific and general community of interest tests is a very clumsy outcome. It
45 shows a lack of understanding of our area in particular, and perhaps of regional areas in general. It might have been a hard job, as we've heard, but it has given us here in Port Macquarie a very, very poor result.

My wife and I made an objection, which was numbered 101, which set out our thinking in some detail. As you've said, there were 791 objections received in respect of the New South Wales proposals. I had wished to analyse these to see what other people had been saying about Lyne and Cowper but found this was a very time consuming task in the absence of any index or key words on the website.

So I simply looked down the names or affiliations of the objections and I recognise several here – names I recognise from individuals, associations and authorities. On reading all of these, I saw a universal rejection of the proposal for many reasons. You've probably already – well, I know you've already read the proposals and you're hearing about them again today, but I have not in my circle of friends or acquaintances found anyone who thinks that this proposal is a good or acceptable idea.

The common theme which is coming through here too is that the expedience of excising just the city area of Port Macquarie will in every way diminish the community of interest felt by people in the Hastings area. Port Macquarie is the hub of the Hastings district. There are many important, common and shared interests between the people in and around Port Macquarie in Wauchope, Lake Cathie, Bonny Hills, Laurieton, Kendall and further afield.

Port Macquarie and its LGA is where many key activities are found. These include the hospital and medical services, airport, water supply, university campuses, policing, tourist services, business activities, shops and personal services, administrative activities and social and cultural activities. I also believe generally that people should be in the same electorate as their major service centre.

The new Cowper electorate along the proposed lines will be about 70 per cent old Cowper and 30 per cent old Lyne by numbers, but I would estimate about 90 old Cowper and 10 per cent old Lyne by area. It is not at all difficult to see where the attention of the new Cowper Member will fall. Cowper will remain a Coffs Harbour-focused electorate, with Port Macquarie a distant appendix, often with competing needs which are less likely to be addressed, given those mathematics of 70/30 and 90/10.

There is another sensitivity in the proposal which merits perhaps reconsideration. For many decades, Wauchope was the lead town in the Hastings area, but the growth and development of Port Macquarie and its role now as the preeminent city in the LGA mean that many Wauchopians feel they do not get enough attention. At least in the old Lyne, they could maintain a powerful and proximate voice in local, state and federal matters.

In the proposed new Lyne, Wauchope may feel almost inconsequentially distant from its local federal member and likely to suffer some actual or perceived disenfranchisement. Lack of local knowledge or empathy on the part of the redistribution committee seems to have resulted in this very strange outcome. Coffs

Harbour is okay, but to the people of Port Macquarie, it is less a friendly rival, as some submissions have suggested, than somewhere completely different.

5 For many of us, it simply does not feature. It's just a place which is further north, hotter and has the highway through its centre. I urge the augmented Electoral Commission for New South Wales to carefully consider the comments and concerns raised by me and other contributors to this inquiry and to come up with a new and better proposal for settling this redistribution.

10 I will just conclude by saying if you have not visited Port Macquarie before, I hope you can take some time to see some of the most beautiful and geologically interesting coastline in New South Wales, as well as getting a feel for this location and its history and community. Chairman, I have my words here on paper. I will give it to the secretariat.

15

CHAIRPERSON: If you could provide that - - -

DR BURMAN: Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON: - - - to us, that would be very helpful.

DR BURMAN: Thank you.

25 CHAIRPERSON: And, Dr Burman, thank you very much for your attendance, and for your views. Thank you. I think – is the Mayor – Mayor Peter Besseling available? Good morning, Mr Mayor. Would you like to - - -

MR P. BESSELING: Good morning, and - - -

30 CHAIRPERSON: - - - just state for the record your name, please.

MR BESSELING: For the record, my name is Peter Besseling. I'm the Mayor of Port Macquarie-Hastings.

35 CHAIRPERSON: Thank you.

40 MR BESSELING: First of all, I would like to welcome you all, and when I say all, I mean absolutely everyone to our beautiful area. Hopefully, you get an opportunity to have a look around whilst you're here. And I think it's in relation to the passion that locals have for this area that I address you today, and particularly in relation to a community of interest.

45 Port Macquarie-Hastings Council resolved at a recent council meeting to submit an objection to the Australian Electoral Commission to the proposed bifurcation of Port Macquarie-Hastings Local Government Area into different electorates. That was carried unanimously, which is not always the case, anyone who has had any experience with local government. So it was carried eight-nil. And it was the clear

objective of council to put that objection forward to you today also, off the back of you coming to Port Macquarie and we thank you very much for hosting it here today and giving everyone the opportunity.

5 I just want to read a couple of aspects of the objection – the written objection that was lodged. Port Macquarie-Hastings Council does not believe the draft boundaries of Lyne and Cowper proposed by the AEC as part of the federal redistribution in New South Wales makes any practical sense, especially when this redistribution brings together the two largest centres on the Mid North Coast being Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie.

10 One of the key considerations when undertaking such reviews must take into account communities of interest and the growth that is projected for the Mid North Coast region of New South Wales. Port Macquarie has vastly more in common with Lake Cathie and Wauchope than Coffs Harbour. However, the redistribution effectively splits Port Macquarie from the rest of its local government area. This means that Port Macquarie will become part of Cowper, and the rest of the local government area to the south and west of Port Macquarie will remain as part of Lyne.

15
20 In addition to this, by placing Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie together in the one electorate, the AEC is largely ignoring the fact that both centres are set for substantial growth in the coming years, which may see the two centres needing to be separated into two different electorates again into the future. Under the proposal, around half of the Port Macquarie-Hastings Local Government will be in Lyne, yet will continue to rely heavily on the services of Port Macquarie, which will sit in the seat of Cowper. It is logical to think that residents may feel that they should be in the same electorate as the major service centre, and Council supports this notion.

25
30 In light of the above points, Council objects to the proposed redistribution for Lyne and Cowper, and asks that the AEC consider the redistribution based on communities of interest. In terms of the communities of interest, historically the communities of interest have relied upon the river systems that we have. In the Hastings River system to the south we have the Manning.

35 We consider the Camden Haven as part of the Hastings here locally. And also to the north we have the Macleay – the Macleay Valley. So all those valleys tend to have a very close and tight community of interest. The Port Macquarie-Hastings Local Government Area services around 78,000 people – 76,000, depending on which statistic you decide to use at the point in time. And that includes – that heads out west, up sort of west of Gingers Creek, heads down south to Kew, just south of Kew, and north beyond Telegraph Point.

40
45 The community of interest – we work very well together. We work closely together. And from a council perspective, we try and make sure that everyone is included when we deal with the local government area. We don't separate ourselves into Port Macquarie and the rest. We try and – in everything we do, we host council meetings outside of Port Macquarie as well, into Laurieton and Wauchope as well. It is a very

well-connected community in a lot of – in a lot of ways. To split that makes it very difficult for us as a council, and I think it would put offside a lot of people in the community that feel the connection locally that we have.

5 Coffs Harbour has around about 73,000 people in their local government area. And we feel that the primary consideration that has been given at this point in time has been the numerical requirement. That is fairly obvious. “We need to get a certain number of people into the Lyne area and the Cowper, and we will jam those people in where it fits nicely.” It really splits those communities of interest.

10 When dealing with Coffs Harbour, Port Macquarie has always had a rather friendly rivalry, particularly when it comes to trying to attract funding. The difficulty we will see with these boundaries as they exist is there will be competing interests within the same electorate of two large regional centres. And when I say large regional centres,
15 outside of Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong, we are the third and fourth-largest regional centre when you take into account the local government areas and the population statistics.

20 So to have the third and fourth-largest regional areas by local government competing within the same electorate makes it very difficult for us to see that we will get a fair opportunity at the limited federal funding that needs to go right across Australia, particularly in light of each member wanting to fly their own flag and say what they’ve bought for their own electorate. When we’re doing that here locally, there is a feeling from Port Macquarie’s end that, you know, Port Macquarie may miss out
25 on that, and I’m sure if you spoke to Coffs Harbour, people in Coffs Harbour feel that they would not want the same thing where we’re competing within the electorate for a limited amount of funding that’s available.

30 We must have regard to community of interest. At the moment, there is little interaction with Nambucca, Bellingen and Coffs Harbour if we look to the north, and there will be little interaction from Camden Haven’s perspective, from Lake Cathie and Wauchope as well, with areas further down south when we’re taking all the way down to Port Stephens.

35 There is a concern within Council that those council areas that have local government boundaries wholly within the federal electorate will be at an advantage, dealing with one particular elected member rather than splitting them and having to deal with two. And I think there would rightly be a concern from the Camden Haven and from the Wauchope and hinterland areas that, being a smaller area within a large
40 electorate that holds bigger regional centres such as Taree and the like, they will be pushed to the bottom of the barrel when it comes to funding opportunities as well.

45 As a local government area, we have the opportunity at the moment to lobby effectively one member that we deal with, and I think that makes it a lot easier in terms of funding in the future. For us, it probably comes as no surprise to you all sitting there, but local government is always about trying to get more money and

dollars to bring to the local government area in order to provide the services and the infrastructure required by the community.

5 That becomes a very big consideration from us – for us if we have half of our electorate split into an area where we think they would be seen as of lesser importance, potentially, and the other half in competition with another large regional centre for very limited funding. It is our belief that due to the community of interest that we have, we should remain together as much as we possibly can. I understand the numbers required for you guys and the difficulty you have; however, the third and fourth-largest regional centre outside those other – outside Newcastle, Sydney and Wollongong, should not have to compete for the same slice of the pie. Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr Mayor, for your very, very incisive remarks and for your attendance. Is Ms Colleen Parker available, please? Ms Parker, if you would be good enough to state your full name for the transcript.

20 MS C.A. PARKER: My full name is Colleen Anne Parker. At the outset, I want to say I support 100 per cent every single word I've heard here this morning. By the time you're getting to me, a lot of it is going to be repetitive, but this is from my heart. I'm the moderator of the aforementioned NewsWatch discussion group, which meets every week at the Port Macquarie City Bowling Club to discuss the news of the week. And I am speaking in support of my written objection to the boundary proposal between Cowper and Lyne on the Mid North Coast.

25 The discussion group consists of concerned residents of Port Macquarie who have discussed the many problems that will arise if there were to be two major towns with identical needs together in the one electorate. We discuss the importance of any federal issues, but in this case it is our home, and the concern that funding or planning proposals will be diluted in the attempt to placate too many constituents who will be competing for the same attractions to bring funds into our towns for retirement living, for tourism, for sporting facilities, and fair access to our coastline, and the very important medical facilities.

35 We believe we are fair-minded – we are a fair-minded community here, but the proposal will hurt both towns through competing with each other, through our federal member, instead of working in harmony. It will be impossible for him to be impartial, as he will be responsible for both communities. I take into account your primary criteria, which is the numbers. I get that. There is a tolerance currently of 40 10 per cent variation, and the proposal attempts to bring that to a 3.5 per cent tolerance. But for the proposals, those numbers are just data. For the community, though, those numbers are living people.

45 Granted, I accept that many of the proposals will merge and transfer fairly seamlessly. So thumbs up for that. However, in relation to your secondary criteria, to those of us living here that is our first criteria. For Cowper to gain a second major town and, therefore, the member will be expected to divide his loyalties. That

dismays me. They're people in Coffs Harbour, as well. And Lyne loses its major town. So disappointing. We have a natural boundary, the Hastings River. So what I consider is a confected boundary at Lake Innes, should be dropped and Port Macquarie major township with all of its infrastructure which was worked and paid for by the community of people living here should be left in Lyne.

We need ready access to our elected representative. We vote him in and we disagree that he can just be taken away by others. We have a high representation of the grey army in our port city confines and we are not in a position to drive 200 kilometres on the most dangerous highway in the State to gain access to him in Coffs Harbour, or even 50 kilometres for that matter, if he were to set up an office in Kempsey, which would be the halfway point, virtually. I must state that we are devastated by this proposal but at the same time we do thank you very much for listening to us by giving us this opportunity to speak about it to you. I wish you all have a safe return to Sydney and we wish you a very happy Christmas.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you very much, Mrs Parker. I'm sure we all reciprocate your very kind wishes.

MS PARKER: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you. The next speaker is Janette Hyde, please.

MS J. HYDE: Good morning.

CHAIRPERSON: If you could just state your name. Good morning, Ms Hyde.

MS HYDE: My name is Janette Hyde.

CHAIRPERSON: Yes.

MS HYDE: And I actually represent the Greater Port Macquarie Tourism Association.

CHAIRPERSON: Yes.

MS HYDE: We've got 140 businesses in our association and the association is spread over the local LGA. So I have to say that we're extremely concerned – that is, Port Macquarie is growing faster than Coffs Harbour – the projections support this statement. How long will it be before the numerical requirements, once redistributed, will be relevant? The – now, a lot of what I was going to say has already been said so I don't want to bore you. We believe the proposal is not practical and would likely result in many tourism businesses and residents being disaffected in both Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour, the two major tourism destinations if the change is implemented; community interest and social cohesion.

Both Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie act as regional centres for tourism, business, health and government services and, particularly, tourism. We are natural competitors. Within the context the proposed boundary change incorporating Port Macquarie within Cowper, if implemented, we believe would be disastrous for
5 tourism. We both compete for the same business. We both compete for conferencing, sporting activities, and we need a local federal member who's going to support our goals. No longer will our federal representative be able to act as a community champion for Port Macquarie if its interests are in conflict with those in Coffs Harbour.

10 The rivalry between the two towns is friendly but very real. There's always competition for everything that we do. The Electoral Commission has, in effect, built a barrier and is asking the elected representative to straddle it. The proposal needs to be looked at seriously and take into consideration all of the comments that
15 have been made this morning and I have to be very complimentary. The comments have been fantastic and, obviously, there's a common thread through it all. So thank you for listening.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you very much, Mrs Hyde. Next is Mr Hawkins. Mr
20 Hawkins, would you like to come forward, please? Thank you.

MR G.R.G. HAWKINS: Good morning.

CHAIRPERSON: Good morning.
25

MR HAWKINS: My name is Geoffrey Raleigh Gordon Hawkins.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you.

30 MR HAWKINS: I'm a resident of Port Macquarie and I am speaking to you in that capacity. I am also a councillor of Port Macquarie-Hastings Council and I'm also chairman of the Port Macquarie Town Centre Master Planning Sub-Committee but I'm speaking to you in my personal capacity.

35 CHAIRPERSON: Thank you.

MR HAWKINS: I advised the Committee of that because it enables me to move around the LGA and, obviously, get an appreciation of what people are saying and thinking and what is concerning them. Thank you for the opportunity to present to
40 you today. To make sure I stay on track and be as brief as possible, if you don't mind I will read - - -

CHAIRPERSON: Yes.

45 MR HAWKINS: - - - what I've written for you.

CHAIRPERSON: Certainly.

MR HAWKINS: And I'm happy to electronically send it through afterwards. The matter I wish to comment upon is the location of the boundary between the divisions of Cowper and Lyne. Let me begin by stating that our great respect for and understanding of the difficulty of the task that the redistribution committee

5 undertakes when reviewing federal electoral boundaries. The realities of the set requirements contained within section 66 of the Electoral Act and specifically the numerical criteria are clear and I acknowledge up front the huge effort that the Committee has clearly made to carry out its responsibilities professionally, impartially and with transparency.

10 I ask that the Committee members consider my following comments in that context. It is my understanding that the guiding principles of boundary delimitation are standard around the world and Australia is, therefore, no exception. Even though countries can and do disagree on fundamental issues, such as how impartial and

15 independent the process can and should be from legislative and political concerns, there are nevertheless five generally accepted principles: representativeness; equality of voting strength; independent, impartial boundary authority; transparency; non-discrimination. I only wish to focus on the first, representativeness, because I feel that it is this principle that is compromised as a

20 result of the Cowper-Lyne boundary redistribution recommendation.

The principle of representativeness holds that divisional boundaries should be drawn such that constituents have an opportunity to elect candidates that they feel truly represent them. As Committee members are clearly very well aware, this usually

25 means that divisional boundaries should coincide with communities of interest as far as possible. It's also well accepted that if electoral divisions are not composed of communities of interest, however it's defined, it will at best be challenging for representatives to serve their constituency well, and we've heard a lot about that already today. None of this is, of course, new news and the appropriate processes, checks and balances are built into the system to manage such challenges.

30

However, what happens when adjoining areas where there is zero or minimal community of interest are thrust together? The answer is if the numerical criteria means that they must be combined, then the numerical imperative prevails and they

35 will be put within the same electoral division. This appears to be the basis of the underlying logic to combine Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour within the newly defined Division of Cowper. However, what if the adjoining areas not only fail the community of interest "test" but, in fact, are the exact opposite? Direct, aggressive competitors with negative community of interest. Furthermore, what if this

40 competition is at its highest, most intense level in the key areas of economic, social and regional interests?

And I got those words directly from your own documentation. It is my submission that Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour are in exactly this situation. One is at the

45 extreme south of the proposed divisional boundary and the other around 170 kilometres away by road at the extreme north. Both are large towns, in fact small cities. Both have very significant infrastructure: airports, hospitals, schools,

universities, etcetera. And both also have substantial directly competitive industrial bases, such as tourism and construction. The prime CBD cores of both compete vigorously for major national retail chains and regional headquarters for large corporates, government and semi-government entities.

5

Both are also direct competitors for the retiree market. Furthermore, both are not just substantial small cities in their own right, they are regional centres of significance and core drivers and sources of influence within their own immediate regions.

10 Lastly, and very importantly, as has been noted as recently as the past week, both compete vigorously for State and Federal government loans, grants, concessions and investments. Invariably, there's only one winner. In this situation, how does a single Federal representative serve his or her constituency well? How does such a person successfully manage a constant, untenable conflict of interest? The answer is they can't.

15

It is noted that the difficulties with the primacy of the numerical criteria and the limited capacity of the Committee to allow "due consideration" of qualitative factors is not a new phenomenon. Indeed, in 1987, the three-and-a-half-year rule was relaxed to allow consideration to the qualitative factors. Perhaps it is appropriate to again review a further relaxation or even a more substantial review. Notwithstanding the above, it is also instructive to note comments made by the Committee in several places that "to the extent possible proposed electoral boundaries should not cross the major geographic features of the Great Dividing Range." On page 68, point 375, when referring to Page, the Committee noted:

25

The Committee had no option but to split the Coffs Harbour LGA to satisfy the numerical requirements of the Electoral Act.

30 The Committee considered this more preferable – a more preferable approach to the alternative of crossing the Great Dividing Range. Earlier, point 301, when referring to Lyne, the Committee noted:

The Committee having already established that it did not want to cross the Dividing Range on the North Coast.

35

In the context of the foregoing, it is submission that – and there are three points – number 1, the criteria of community of interest is too broad and/or too narrowly viewed and interpreted insofar as it appears not to effectively factor in a situation such as currently appears between Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour where not only is there zero community of interest, but, in fact, there is a very real negative competitive community of interest. Combining competing regional centres in such a situation should be strongly avoided, almost at any cost.

40

45 Expressed another way, what this means is that I am suggesting the current two-part continuum should be reviewed. Currently, at one poll – let us say the far left – is, "Conglomerations of arbitrary random groups of individuals". And at the other extreme poll – let us say the extreme right – is, "Cohesive groups with strong defined

relevant community of interest. It's my view that the opposite of cohesive groups with strong defined relevant common interest is not, in fact, statistically random groups of individuals, but rather groups of competitive or diametrically opposed individuals. It's a different concept. The current model does not appear to address this factor at all.

Point 2, to my knowledge no arguments have been presented as to why crossing the Great Divide was treated in the high-priority way that it has been treated. Third, combining points 2 and 3 above in a logical, factored manner would, I submit, lead to a better, different, more workable outcome in multiple ways. The most important of which is to maintain the long-term separate core relationships that both Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour have with their own well-defined regions. In conclusion, I believe that the Committee should acknowledge the fact that Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie being in the same proposed electoral division is more than "a significant change", which is point 71.

It creates, in fact, an unworkable situation for both constituents and the elected member. The harsh reality is that Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie compete with each other every day, just like Coke and Pepsi, Telstra and Optus, Qantas and Virgin. The other harsh reality is for the elected federal member. How does such a superman or superwoman MP successfully compete with other electorates when two directly competing regional centres both expect high-level treatment, single-minded advocacy and eventual success?

In the circumstances that I've outlined, I believe that the proposed Cowper-Lyne divisional boundary adjustment should be reviewed and that consideration should be included over and above other points made today, which I agree with, of crossing the Great Dividing Range. I am mindful that such a change would almost certainly have significant flow-on effects, but if representativeness, as I defined earlier, is accepted as a core guiding principle then what I am suggesting is more than appropriate. I think it's very, very necessary. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you very much, Mr Hawkins. You've raised many, many matters and they will all be considered. Yes, Hadyn Oriti, please. Is Mr Hadyn Oriti about or – good morning, Mr Oriti.

MR H. ORITI: Good morning.

CHAIRPERSON: If you would be good enough to just state your full name for the record.

MR ORITI: Hadyn Oriti, I'm the president of the Port Macquarie Chamber of Commerce. Certainly, as others have done this morning, I would certainly like to thank you for convening this session today. As other speakers have said, also, we understand the nature of the challenge you face. I certainly don't envy you your jobs. As president of the chamber of commerce, we represent about 350 members in various arms of the chamber. There are some 6000 – in excess of 6000 businesses in

Port Macquarie-Hastings. I'm also a partner of Donovan Oates Hannaford Lawyers and obviously represent a number of those businesses as well.

5 My personal history is that I moved to the region about eight years ago. Prior to that, I lived in Brisbane, Sydney, Auckland, Melbourne, so I've done a tour of duty in a number of the major centres in the Pacific. I can quite clearly state that in my experience there is a distinct difference between electors in city electorates and those in regional areas. There are different dynamics at play. Your attachment to a particular community is most definitely stronger in a small place like this. Your
10 networks, social and business and economic, are all within this particular little community. So there's a strong identity for people operating in Port Macquarie.

I think I can say – and I've got no evidence for this, but I think city voters are more than happy to vote for a particular party that represents your interests and regional
15 voters will do the same, but also in the background of the regional-voter mind is a champion, somebody who will be their champion for regional interests. And in that respect, I refer to people like Katter, Oakeshott, Windsor and McGowan, who have traditionally had strong backing from their various electorates outside of the major parties. So regions, in our submission, need champions. They need a strong voice to
20 be heard above the numerical weight of city electorates.

Now, in Port Macquarie, the local champion has been able to deliver in the past – things like our airport upgrade, the fourth pod to the base hospital, Charles Sturt University establishing a campus here, Oxley Highway upgrade. They're just a few
25 of the concrete examples that a strong local champion is able to deliver. The current proposal will effectively deny Port Macquarie a champion. It will divide Port Macquarie so that it becomes a rump in the Cowper electorate. It will be cut off from its satellite towns and villages. They will be spread, if I may say so, in a
30 higgledy-piggledy fashion throughout the amorphous Lyne electorate.

Cowper will be dominated by Coffs Harbour, a town that, as others have said, is a rival of Port Macquarie for pre-eminence in the Mid North Coast. There is real competition for business, tourists, investment, government funding for infrastructure. So the Lyne electorate, however, becomes an electorate with no apparent centre, a
35 collection of towns and villages without a unifying community of interest. In our submission, the proposal should be shelved and redrawn.

Paragraph 310 of the report shows how the problem arose and there seems to be a concertina effect coming down from the north. As that wise Irishman said, when
40 giving directions to Dublin, "If I wanted to get there, I wouldn't be starting from here." So the starting point, in our submission, should actually be the centres of the communities of interest and work from there. Port Macquarie has real engagement with Wauchope, Lake Cathie, Telegraph Point, Laurieton, and to some extent with Harrington, Taree and Kempsey. Port should form the centre of its own electorate.
45

Once those regional centres are identified – and obviously, in our submission, the Commission would then work to include, where possible, its satellites. To do

otherwise, in our submission, the Commission has effectively disenfranchised Port Macquarie residents and businesses as the concerns of Coffs Harbour or, for that matter, the Central Coast would overwhelm those electorate – sorry, electors in the redistributed electorates. So those are my submissions. Thank you.

5

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you very much for those submissions, Mr Oriti. They're very helpful as well. Mr John Ainsworth, please. Good morning, Mr Ainsworth.

MR J. AINSWORTH: Yes.

10

CHAIRPERSON: Have a seat. And if you would like to, just for the record, indicate your full name.

MR AINSWORTH: John McDonald Ainsworth. I'm an elected member of New South Wales Farmers, a member of the Executive Council, past board member and chair of region surveying, which goes from Wauchope to the Queensland border.

15

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you.

MR AINSWORTH: And I would like to put a submission to you on behalf of New South Wales Farmers. I understand you've already had one, but this is a sort of backup to our original submission.

20

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you.

25

MR AINSWORTH: I'm also deputy mayor of Nambucca, but this has got nothing to do with that particular hat that I was wearing. And I would like to thank you for this opportunity. New South Wales Farmers is opposed to the redistribution of electorates in New South Wales as proposed by the Australian Electoral Commission in its report dated October 2015. This position was formalised by our executive council a couple of months ago. New South Wales Farmers made an objection to the proposed redistribution on 13 November.

30

Key to this objection was the concern that the redistribution had failed in the statutory obligation to facilitate the organisation of regional New South Wales into communities of interest to enable effective representation to the Australian farmer. The major concerns arise from the creation of large electoral divisions where the means of communication and travel impede effective representation, and where the electors from a rural locality have been subjected to a series of transfers across consecutive redistributions. The following electorates provide examples of the concerns of New South Wales Farmers.

35

40

Parke: New South Wales Farmers notes the proposed redistribution of the Division of Parke sees an expansion of the geographical area from 256,640 square kilometres to 402,513 square kilometres. New South Wales Farmers notes that at the present, the Division of Parke electorate already covers a greater area than the entire State of Victoria. To further increase the size of the division carries with it the inevitable

45

consequences of detrimental impact upon the ability of its electorates to have full and ready access to their local Members for Parliament.

5 As part of the 2005 redistribution of the New South Wales Electoral Division, the Australian Electoral Commission identified the difficulties of the physical features and areas, and means of communication and travel to forming communities of interest across and over large electoral divisions. In arriving at this position, the augmented Commission rejected the Committee's earlier proposal to redistribute the boundaries of the Parkes division in a manner that would result in a division covering
10 an area of 376,206 square kilometres.

The difficulties of representation created by the sheer area of an electorate of the size proposed by the Committee for the Division of Parkes are amplified by the poor telecommunication infrastructure that services more remote areas of the State.
15 Evidence of the poor state of telecommunications in the area may be found in the Australian Government's 2015 Regional Telecommunications Review. Further, as part of its 2005 decision, the augmented Commission also recognised the alignment of the communities of interest between Broken Hill LGA and to the southwest of New South Wales, not to the north-east, towards Dubbo LGA.

20 Based on this rationale, Broken Hill was included within the electoral Division of Farrer, given the strong alignment of the Central Darling LGA and Unincorporated New South Wales to Broken Hill. These areas were also brought into the electoral Division of Farrer. New South Wales Farmers believe that this remains the
25 appropriate way to construct these communities of interest. Specifically, it is the experience of New South Wales Farmers that our members living in these LGAs confirm our view that the connections between Broken Hill and Central Darling LGAs and Unincorporated New South Wales lie to the southwest, with, for example, children of these families attending school in Adelaide and Western Victoria.

30 Hume: New South Wales Farmers has been in contact with its members located within the LGA of the Weddin Shire. Since the 1998 Federal Election, electors located within the Weddin Shire have been subjected to the transfer in the following consecutive redistributions: 1999, from Hume to Parkes; 2005, from Parkes to
35 Calare; and in 2009, from Calare back to Hume. Electors in this region have communicated to New South Wales Farmers that the consecutive movements between the electorates, combined with the location of the outskirts of these electorates and the larger distances of travel within rural electorates has hampered their ability to engage with elected representations and representatives.

40 On this basis, New South Wales Farmers recommends that a principle of seeking suitable within the community of interest should be sought to enable members in the outer-lying regions to better engage with their democratic representatives. Further, with regard to the community of interest, these members have indicated that the
45 connection from Weddin Shire is towards the east, towards Cowra and Sydney, and southeast towards Young and Canberra.

These community connections are formed by the following. Health: the Young Hospital is a primary point of minor medical and maternity services. More major medical issues are directed towards Canberra, with emergency helicopter services. And also the Snowy Hydro SouthCare scheme directs emergency patients to the
5 Canberra Hospital. Sport: Weddin Shire has a long affiliation with towns from neighbouring Young through to Canberra through the major sporting codes of rugby union, rugby league and cricket. Agriculture businesses: major dealers of farm machinery that service farmers in the Weddin Shire are located within Young, while livestock commodities are connected to wool brokers and advertisers based in
10 Goulburn. So, thank you, Commission.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you very much, Mr Ainsworth.

MR AINSWORTH: Thank you very much for that.
15

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you. Well, all your comments, as with all the other speakers, are all recorded for our consideration. Thank you for your attendance. Next we have Mr Doug Heagney. Is Mr Doug Heagney here? Good morning, Mr Heagney.
20

MR D.J. HEAGNEY: Yes. Thank you, Mr Chairman and gentlemen. My name is Douglas John Heagney. I'm a resident in the past four years – well, the present four years of being in Port Macquarie; prior to that time was in the Northern Tables at Uralla. I've been listening with great interest to what has been said this morning, and
25 I disagree – I'm here protesting your – supporting the protest that the excursion of Port Macquarie business section, town into Cowper electorate from Lyne.

I'm one of the number of people that were in the group, the news group – NewsWatch group, as we called ourselves. We're all – at that group, all of different
30 past professions, all retired or semi-retired, but very involved and very interested in the welfare of, you know, our district and town and so on. I don't believe that – I have a few notes here, but I don't believe that I could contribute more or emphasise more the main points that they've made. Particularly we mention community of interest being destroyed by shifting Port Macquarie into a new electorate. Lots of
35 loyalties are tested and stressed because of this sort of thing.

And competition, I think, is good, but if it gets too personal, too hostile, too competitive, it's not a good thing. And I think two big cities, virtually cities, in the one electorate, so far apart in that electorate, is not a wise and really acceptable
40 decision for the Commission to have taken. I recognise the – you know, the difficulties of this. I hope that you will take these submissions that you've received on that matter into consideration and seriously consider it. I hope you will. I believe you will find a solution if that's possible.

45 I have had experience in a state boundary commission where I represented the town of Uralla which was proposed in the state electorate to be separated from Armidale a town 20 kilometres away. Our submission in that case was successful because

we were – talked about community of interest. And, actually, I was criticised for calling Uralla a dormitory suburb of Armidale. I said, “We’re proud to be a dormitory suburb of Armidale providing service to our district” and so on. Now, that’s about all I have to say.

5

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you.

MR HEAGNEY: As I say, not much point in me repeating the things that you already heard, but I know you will take notice.

10

CHAIRPERSON: That’s been very helpful.

MR HEAGNEY: Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON: Thank you. Thank you for your attendance, Mr Heagney.

MR HEAGNEY: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you for your views.

20

MR HEAGNEY: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON: Next is Ms Jenny Hurrell, please. Good morning.

25 MS J. HURRELL: Good morning. Yes. Jenny Hurrell from the Comboyne Plateau. This is not my usual thing. I’m a dairy farmer. And to front up to an inquiry – I felt – I’m a little bit out of my depth. But I felt strongly enough that I needed to come, to let you know how the people in the outlying areas felt about having our federal electorate split.

30

My main concerns are to do with our local government area and our – with our council being centred in Port Macquarie. It is very difficult at the present time to get any work done on our outlying roads and infrastructure because of funding restraints for council. We are in two state electorates at the moment in the area where we live, and a lot of this local government area has two state electorates, being Oxley and Port Macquarie and that disadvantages council because of trying to obtain funding.

35

So all I can say is that if the Lyne electorate was to be changed so that Port Macquarie were into Coffs Harbour, I can’t see how the rural areas west of the Pacific Highway would be able to get – obtain funding to help with any of their works that they would need to be done. The urban growth of Port Macquarie is strongly linked to the outlying environs and any reduced spending – because if this were to happen, it would have a strong impact on Port Macquarie’s growth. There is a lot of interaction between the city and the country in the Lyne electorate, as all the previous speakers have indicated. And this would be seriously disengaged if there were two federal electorates for our local government area.

45

Our local council has worked very hard to engage with community to get things happening. We didn't have a council for many years. It was in the hands of administration. And I'm not on council. I just have an interest in what happens in our local area. But our council is one of the few that has been deemed fit for the future, if you take much with that. But they haven't been asked to merge with another council.

So I can't understand why splitting the federal electorate of Lyne is even being thought about because this would seriously disadvantage our local government area after all the hard work that they have done. I'm not going to repeat a lot of the suggestions that previous speakers have made because I don't think you need me here to tell you over and over again what they've said. But I'm here to let you know that the people in the rural and outlying areas would be seriously disadvantaged if this boundary redistribution were to go ahead. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON: Yes. Thank you very much, Ms Hurrell. Thank you. Next, Mr Peter Alley, please. Good morning, Mr Alley.

MR P. ALLEY: Yes. Good morning. My name is Peter Lloyd Alley. I'm a resident of Dunbogan, a coastal village in the Camden Haven about 30 kilometres south of here.

CHAIRPERSON: Yes.

MR ALLEY: In the interests of full disclosure, let me state that I'm a member of the Australian Labor Party and was the Labor candidate for Lyne at the 2013 federal election. I am, however, writing as a private citizen and not on behalf of any branch or in capacity that I serve within the Australian Labor Party.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you.

MR ALLEY: I'm the author of CS 26, comments to suggestions 26, where I wrote about the need to keep Wauchope and Port Macquarie together. I wrote because I was concerned that at stage 3 of the redistribution process, all of the major parties had proposed the separation of Wauchope and Port Macquarie and this was a major concern then and it still is now. However, I'm a realist. I value our democracy and the need for one vote, one value. The task before you is to divide New South Wales into 47 electorates of approximately 103,481 voters. On the canvas of the north coast, we have a rigid border of the Pacific Ocean, to the north is a rigid border with Queensland and to the west is an arbitrary but eminently commonsense boundary of the Great Dividing Range.

I recognise that you cannot draw lines to divide regional areas into equal size electorates without many of these electoral boundaries falling on major population centres, which is what has occurred on the east coast at 31 degrees, 26 minutes south. And this was the view of almost everyone of the proposals that has taken a wholistic approach to the whole problem. I fear I'm in a minority in this room because I want

to endorse the recommendations of the Redistribution Committee in so much as it covers the Mid North Coast. While I am disappointed that Wauchope is separated from Port Macquarie, it is the best recommendations of any other reasonable sort of alternative that I can see.

5

I note that there are no objections from either the – New South Wales Labor in objection 487, nor from the National Party, surprisingly, in objection 704 to this plan. I think it is how you deal with widowed and orphaned communities that need to be the focus and the recommendations of the Redistribution Committee to properly address this in this region that is important. The major towns and cities are large enough to attract the ready attention of the federal representative. It is the access of the smaller communities to which I am particularly concerned.

10

I note that there are a number of objections regarding the boundary between Lyne and Cowper, objections 61, 62, 66, 138, to name a few. Many argue that Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie cannot be in the same electorate as it will be impossible for Port Macquarie to get adequate attention from their federal representative. I find this argument to be repugnant because it is based on the premise that large towns and cities are more deserving on a per capita basis of federal attention than of smaller towns and villages.

15

20

Taree may be a smaller town than Port Macquarie but it is not lesser. It deserves federal representation and access to the resources of government, as is appropriate for its size, as does every little town and village, whether it is Hilldale, Marshdale, Wauchope, the Comboyne Plateau or even Dunbogan. I note also that the Commonwealth Electoral Act, section 66(3)(b) does not provide exclusion of other major population centres as a reason for deciding electoral divisions. I would urge you to reject those arguments.

25

The idea of having an electoral boundary down Gordon Street, Lake Road and Oxley Highway, Port Macquarie, and then dividing north and south down High Street, Wauchope, is also a repugnant sort of suggestion. I think the – dividing the – these two towns between north and south should also be rejected. I wish to refer to objection 721 from the Liberal Party of Australia and its impact on the Cowper-Lyne border. It has been referred to already today.

30

35

The effect is to swap – the effect is to swap Port Macquarie for Wauchope. Swapping one community for another achieves nothing in addressing many of the arguments regarding – that you've heard today regarding local government boundaries or of keeping community interests together. If Wauchope is to be orphaned from Port Macquarie, then I believe it is critical that Wauchope and the Camden Haven be kept together. They are in the same LGA.

40

Other towns in Lyne, notably Wingham, share the same sorts of values as Wauchope, both being rural townships serviced by large regional centres, and in towns servicing their own hinterland of small villages. Wauchope and its hinterland of Beechwood, Long Flat, Huntington, Ellenborough and Byabarra staying in Lyne is far preferable

45

than being part of Cowper. I therefore urge you to reject this objection from the Liberal Party insofar as it relates to the North Coast of New South Wales.

5 Finally, I would like to make a comment on electorate names. I want to commend the views expressed by New South Wales Labor in objection 487 regarding the retirement of the electorate name Lyne. I note this view has also been expressed by Councillor Jan Williams, Mayor of Great Lakes Council, in objection 405. Thank you for the opportunity to speak, and I wish you the best for your considerations. And if you came here by vehicle, I would encourage you to drive down the Ocean Drive and enjoy the Camden Haven – stop at a coffee at North Haven on the way – on the way back to Sydney. Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON: Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr Alley, very much for your contribution. The next speaker is Justin Levido, please.

MR J. LEVIDO: Thank you, Mr Chairman. My name is Justin Levido. I'm a resident of Port Macquarie, and I have lodged a personal objection to the boundary change, particularly relating to the excising of Port Macquarie from the seat of Lyne and adding it to the seat of Cowper. I'm a resident of Port Macquarie, having lived 20 in the town since 1987, which is almost 30 years.

I've been in business in Port Macquarie since 1991, and am currently the managing partner of a local law firm. I have been active in the local community through service clubs such as Apex and Rotary, past chair of the Mid North Coast Life 25 Education Centre, currently involved in the local chamber of commerce and Business Enterprise Network. I'm currently a councillor on Port Macquarie-Hastings Council and was deputy mayor from September 2014 to September 2015.

30 I put this to you not because I'm applying for a job, but to create a narrative that I've been in this area for some 30 years, involved in the community both on a business and community level. I wish to object in the strongest possible terms to the proposed redrawing of the electoral divisions insofar as it relates to the electoral Division of Lyne, namely the excising of the town of Port Macquarie and adding it into the adjoining electorate of Cowper. The redrawn electoral Division of Cowper will 35 contain the two major regional centres of Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour, and you've heard from our mayor that these are the third and fourth-biggest regional centres in New South Wales.

40 This is problematic and detrimental to the town of Port Macquarie and its current hinterland for a number of reasons: (1) the Mid North Coast of New South Wales has very well-established communities of interest which have developed through a combination of historical, geographical, Local Government and socioeconomic factors. (2) in this part of New South Wales, a community of interest is 45 predominantly determined by the coastal river valleys. With respect to Port Macquarie, this involves both the Hastings River Valley and the Camden Haven River Valley to the immediate north.

And I would also like to just pick up on this issue that there is a strong difference between what I call city and – a city electorate and regional electorates in their outlook, and particularly with respect to this issue of community of interest. It's my view that in our regional areas, the community of interest is a much stronger
5 argument. Port Macquarie is the administrative, population, business and financial hub of the Port Macquarie-Hastings Local Government Area. The proposal will result in a situation where approximately 90 per cent of the area of Port Macquarie-Hastings LGA and some 50 per cent of its population will be in a different electoral division to its administrative, population, business and financial hub.

10 The natural community of interest for Port Macquarie is to the west and south, namely the towns of Wauchope and the Hastings Valley, Lake Cathie, the Camden Haven, the hinterlands of those areas, and pushing into the Greater Taree LGA. In simple terms, Port Macquarie looks generally to the south and west, whilst the
15 outlying areas look to the north and east to Port Macquarie from a broader community perspective. Port Macquarie is being tacked onto an existing community of interest that focuses on Coffs Harbour. This will be significantly detrimental on a number of fronts. Particularly, two competing regional centres will be in one electoral division, and thus practically hamstrung as to access to infrastructure and
20 community development funding.

As Port Macquarie has been tacked onto the existing community of interest focused on Coffs Harbour, it is not difficult to see which regional centre will be relegated to the lower grades, so to speak. A specific example of this would be the development
25 of the airports at Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour. In the event of a Federal Government grants program, a decision would be made as to prioritising – sorry, would need to be made as to prioritising one airport over the other to realistically have a chance of obtaining such funding. In practical terms, the likelihood of the one electoral division being successful for two full grants is not encouraging. I suspect
30 that either a decision would need to be made to either prioritise one over the other, or two applications made on a 50 per cent basis each.

This scenario problem would exist with any infrastructure funding opportunity. This would substantially prejudice the region falling within the Cowper electoral district.
35 Since I wrote this objection, I can advise that there is a practical example of this: recently the Federal Government National Stronger Regional Fundings round completed, and the seat of Cowper as it currently exists was successful for three grants, one of which was \$5 million for the Coffs Harbour Airport. Lyne, believe it or not, got nothing, even though we put in an application for the upgrading of our
40 airport, and the seat of Paterson in the area around the Great Lakes received \$6 million for community development.

I suspect that the decisions were made on the basis that they were taken for granted the new boundaries and that it was more important for money to go to the Great
45 Lakes area because we would end up simply as part of Coffs Harbour or the Cowper electorate and they would be able to say that Cowper received three grants. The new electoral Division of Cowper would have an electoral population just exceeding

100,000 electors. Some 70,000 live within the natural Coffs Harbour community of interest and some 30,000 won't and be practically and politically prejudiced because of this. The opportunities for Port Macquarie to be properly represented in the new electoral division are dubious due to the bias that will exist in favour of the Coffs Harbour community of interest.

The expected significant population growth on the Mid North Coast of New South Wales will see a situation quickly arise where the electoral Division of Cowper will be above quota and further adjustment of the seat boundaries will be required in the not too distant future and which will again be unsettling and another setback for the development of the region generally and the towns of Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour specifically. Port Macquarie and the Port Macquarie-Hastings LGA will struggle to maintain momentum moving forward as a result of the town being relegated and tacked on to the natural Coffs Harbour community of interest and the LGA significantly fractured between two electoral divisions.

I suspect that excising Port Macquarie and moving it north provided the easiest solution based on the numbers only. I believe and fear that the decision has been made without regard to the important community of interest concerns and without regard to the significantly retarding effects such a change will have on Port Macquarie's continuing development as an important regional centre. I request that the proposal be abandoned and revisited with a focus on maintaining the vital communities of interest that exist in these northern parts of New South Wales. And, just finally, I would like to make a comment that I understand you are bound by law to take submissions from our political parties. I sincerely hope you treat them with the regard which they are due. I take the view that it basically – from their point of view, this is all just a strategic chess game aimed at focusing on bums in seats in Canberra. Thank you for your time. Thank you for coming to Port Macquarie. And I hope that you take our concerns here today most serious because for the town of Port Macquarie, this is a very concerning issue. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you very much, Mr Levido. Thank you. Yes. We're not sure if Mr Jaime Harrison is here? No? Yes. Right. Well, a Mr Harrison was on the list, but it appears that he is – either can't get here or he's not here. Is there anyone else who would like to address us and to talk to us about anything concerning the redistribution because while we're here, we have the opportunity to do so. If there is no one who would like to address us, I speak on my own behalf, and I'm sure on behalf of all my other colleagues, that we have found this very beneficial hearing your views this morning.

Your time has not been wasted because we are now far better informed about the issues that are concerning you and they will all be taken in to consideration to see what can be done in relation to the boundary adjustment which has been proposed. I thank you all for your attendance and I would like also to thank the Secretariat staff, some of whom have come from Canberra, and also from Sydney, to assist in the operation of this hearing. Thank you again for your attendance.

MATTER ADJOURNED at 12.29 pm INDEFINITELY