

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

**THE HONOURABLE JAMES BURCHETT QC
MR IAN CAMPBELL
MR DAVID FARRELL
MR WARWICK WATKINS
MR BOB SENDT**

**PUBLIC INQUIRY INTO OBJECTIONS AGAINST THE PROPOSED
REDISTRIBUTION OF FEDERAL ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES OF
NEW SOUTH WALES**

NARRABRI

9.05A.M., FRIDAY, 25 AUGUST 2006

Continued from 24/8/2006

PN636

MR BURCHETT: I will open the meeting sitting down in the circumstances and I will start by giving a brief explanation for those who are not experts in the details of electoral administration. I think we owe that to probably quite a few people. Under the Commonwealth Electoral Law there is an Electoral Commissioner who is Mr Ian Campbell on my right. His appointment is to administer the department that deals with the holding of elections and with a number of other related matters. There is also an Electoral Commission to determine electoral questions at an independent level. It consists of three members, firstly a chairperson who must be a Federal Court judge or former judge chosen from three persons who are nominated by the Chief Justice of the Federal Court.

PN637

I am the chairperson and my name is James Burchett. Secondly of the three is the Electoral Commissioner, Mr Campbell, and thirdly, an additional member who is the Australian Statistician, Mr Dennis Trewin. He unfortunately I cannot point out to you because he's not able to be here in person through illness but he is listening to what goes on in this meeting by telephone and from time to time you will hear me during the meeting invite him if he has anything to - can you still hear me? I can detect that it's fading. Is that any better? He is listening by telephone and will contribute if he feels he should.

PN638

When a distribution, or a redistribution I should say, is required in any state, as it is now in New South Wales because population statistics demand under the legislation that there be one less division in this state than before while Queensland picks up the one that New South Wales loses, that's inexorable law of the numbers. The legislation provides for a committee and I have talked about the Commissioner and I've talked about the Commission. There is also a committee which is appointed specifically to work out a proposal when such a situation arises. The committee consists of the Electoral Commissioner, Mr Campbell, the Chief Commonwealth Electoral Officer for the state, in this case, Mr David Farrell who is on my far right, and two New South Wales officials who are on my left, Mr Warwick Watkins, the Surveyor General who is next to me and Mr Bob Sendt, the Auditor General.

PN639

What has happened so far in the process is that the committee has made a proposal which selects for reasons that the committee explains in its report the seat of Gwydir as the one to be abolished and makes a number of consequential changes and also a number of other changes which it sees as required by population movements. The procedure allows for people and organisations to object and as you testify by your presence here, many have. The legislation then provides that the objections must be considered by a body which is different again from any I've yet referred to, the augmented Electoral Commission.

PN640

The augmented Commission consists of the three members of the Australian Electoral Commission, whom I've already told you, plus the other persons who were on the committee. Now, we are empowered as a body to hold an inquiry and

that is happening today, it has happened yesterday. There is limited time, not from our choice but the Act lays down a strict timetable for these things to be done. The augmented Commission has been studying written objections and comments which we have also received in writing but there are some 33 or there have been some last minute changes, possibly 34 or five people who have accepted the opportunity to address us on the problems they have raised.

PN641

Not all will I expect be covering every issue and I mention now the questions of time and the numbers speaking so that everyone will be conscious of the number that have to have their opportunity so that everyone will leave to others a reasonable opportunity to speak apart from themselves. You may be assured that we will consider what has been put to us in writing and what is said and we will perform our duty to make a decision on these matters. We have to consider the question in accordance with principles that are laid down in the legislation.

PN642

Before I call on the first speaker I will add that we propose to take a break at about 10.30 for a quarter of an hour, lunch 12.40 to 1.40 and a 15 minute break at 3.15, both those times can be slightly flexible. We found that sometimes people finished a little sooner than expected and a break was able to be taken at a slightly different time which left more time later on. I will now ask Mr Lewis Hathway who is the first person on the list to come forward and address us.

PN643

MR HATHWAY: Thank you, Mr Chairman. My name is Lewis Hathway. I come from Mullaley and I belong to the Christian Democratic Party which is headed by Fred Nile in the state Parliament of New South Wales and I wish to protest regarding the proposed abolition of the electorate of Gwydir and amalgamation into the electorate for Parkes. I would just like to begin my remarks by taking you back 218 years when Captain Arthur Phillip arrived in Sydney Harbour with a flotilla of ships and began to colonise Australia known as our European form of government and in the passage of time other colonies were established.

PN644

It was seen fit to divide Australia into states and we had state governments, but these state governments had problems and it was seen that it was necessary as far back as 1857 in some way to coordinate these states because one of the biggest contributing factor was a variation in the rail gauges which were being installed in that period of time and with the passage of time Henry Parkes was one of our great political statesmen, he was the Father of Federation and to his initiative things were put in motion. A constitution was put together and the people of Australia were asked to vote on that at a referendum and subsequently the federal Parliament was convened and one of the great clauses in that particular constitution says it is a job of the Parliament to provide government, a government of the people, for the people, by the people.

PN645

While this discussion regarding the abolition of Gwydir has gone on a new terminology has occurred and that is materially of distance whereby the elected political Member cannot physically contact in any shape or form adequately the

people whom he has been elected to represent and so we see that as an absolute disaster in that regard. The life of the politician is not easy. I chanced to catch up with a man who had been elected to Parliament whom I knew and I said, "How are you getting along here in this particular area", he said, "Well, you ask me how I'm getting on here, well, that just depends who you've been speaking to". And so the politician is expected to be all things to all men.

PN646

I have been in various organisations and they have sought the help of the government because many of the resolutions they bring forward they head off with that the government be asked to assist us in this regard. I was on a deputation once to a local politician, our local Member regarding the phone services soon after the completion of World War II and he said, "Well, I'll put it to you this way, what you people have to do is to write letters and those letters will be put in a pigeon hole somewhere, keep writing the letters and when that pigeon hole gets full they'll think things are fairly drastic we better do something to help those people".

PN647

Likewise there's been many submissions presented to you people according to what we read in the press and what you have reiterated here today regarding this proposed amalgamation. The politician wants to be available to people, he doesn't want to be encumbered by the tyranny of distance because he's part and parcel of our democratic way of life. When Australia adopted the federal government constitution this particular area here of Australia relied on the sheep industry, the wool industry and it was said that Australia rides on the sheep's back, but those days are far diminished and we have an entirely different concept here in this particular electorate.

PN648

We have the development of mining. We have the very contentious issue of Namoi River which runs along over there. Our forbearers planned very well because they established Keepit Dam and when there's plenty of water they impounded the water and when the season is drier the water can be released and the local newspapers tell us that the irrigator said yes, we'll have plenty of water and the people at Broken Hill said, well, we need a drink, where does the water go, what's the situation, and so we rely on the political expertise of people who are elected to do that and in our democratic way of life as a politician it's not satisfactory, when the next election comes that's it, mate, and so we go forward from strength to strength with this system and we ask that you people in your way and means of doing things, I understand it's something to do with population.

PN649

Well, that might have been very applicable 100 years ago but things have changed somewhat and we have a great population concentration on the coastal regions and the hinterland, the inland, rural and regional Australia is the backbone of our nation one way and another, so the situation as I see it. Often when a speech is made there's a four letter word said and I'll finish with that four letter word but I'll tell you what's the significance of this four letter word, it means so let it be. If we so let the Gwydir electorate continue on, as the words of the national anthem sound say to us, Advance Australia Fair and the word fair is a significant word in our Australian colloquial language because we want a fair go and the word is

amen, so let it be and let Gwydir remain as is at this particular point in time.
Thank you.

PN650

MR BURCHETT: Mr Pape.

PN651

MR PAPE: Mr Chairman, my name is Bryan Pape, I appear on my own behalf. By profession I'm a senior lecturer in law in the University of New England and I wish to refer to the issue of the abolition of Gwydir. I have two submissions to make to the inquiry. The first is that the committee failed to give proper weight to the facts in section 66(3)(b) of the Electoral Act because the approach it took miscarried and, gentlemen, it miscarried because the error is to be found in paragraph 68 of your report, or the report of the Commission, if I might just refer to paragraph 68.

PN652

MR BURCHETT: The report of the committee you mean?

PN653

MR PAPE: Sorry?

PN654

MR BURCHETT: The committee.

PN655

MR PAPE: The committee's report, sorry.

PN656

MR BURCHETT: Yes, yes.

PN657

MR PAPE: At paragraph 68 it is said:

PN658

Whilst seeking to maintain a relative equality of voters between divisions the committee also recognised the need to consider the state as a geographical whole -

PN659

And then it goes on -

PN660

The committee acknowledged therefore that it must seek to link the relative low and high growth areas of rural and coastal New South Wales.

PN661

And my submission is that those matters are not referred to in section 66(3) of the Act. That's the first submission and I'll elaborate on that in a moment. The second submission is reference to the disclaimer which is given by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in relation to the projections and the submission there is that disclaimer is so wide that it is unsafe and ought not to have been relied upon. I have with me just copies of that disclaimer if I might hand those to the inquiry.

PN662

MR BURCHETT: Yes, please. Please do.

PN663

MR PAPE: So in the grounds of objection which I have put to this committee the first submissions to my paragraphs 5(ii), (iii) (vi) and (vii) and (ii) I say that I object on the basis that it was an exercise of power that was so extreme and unreasonable that no reasonable person could have so exercised the power. (iii), it was a discretionary power in accordance with the rule of policy, including a policy of the number of electors and the single number elected shall be as nearly as equal as practicable as identified in paragraph 61 of the committee's report, without regarding to the merits of retaining the seat of Gwydir and correspondingly retaining the present seats of Parkes, New England, Calare, Riverina and Farrer.

PN664

(vi), the committee preferred and pursued a policy of one vote, one value and erroneously excluded due consideration of the factors which it was required to take. And I might just interpolate there for the inquiry, whilst the Act purports and does seek to give some credence to one vote, one value, as a general proposition the Australian constitution does not do that. It doesn't guarantee one vote, one value, but Parliament has seen fit to do that and one's only got to look at the situation in Tasmania where 60 000 votes is in fact one Member, referable to 60 000 votes whereas what's happening here is it's around about 90 000 odd.

PN665

So if I might now just take you to this issue of what is called the paragraph 68 error, the need to consider the status of geographic area. There is nothing in section 66(3) of the Act which says anything about considering the state as a geographic area and the proposition I put to you is that 3(b) is simply silent on that issue. It's something the committee has in fact made up and quite frankly I put to you that really the committee went off on a frolic on its own. There is one distinguishing geographical feature in New South Wales and it's called the Great Dividing Range and I emphasise and stress the word dividing.

PN666

Contrary to the previous practice which the committee has referred to in its paragraphs I think 73 and 78. Paragraph 73 -

PN667

Whilst redistribution committees have been reluctant to utilise these alternatives in the past the committee was convinced that their use as key corridors coupled with their existing and emerging social communication linkages made them very suitable for use in the modern day.

PN668

Then in 77 the committee went on to say:

PN669

In particular the committee noted the decline in relative enrolment shares in divisions west of the Great Dividing Range.

PN670

Mr Chairman, my submission is that great weight must be given to the Great Dividing Range because when read as a whole the Act and the criteria which is set out in section 63(b) in relation to community of interest and all of those other factors they are peculiarly relevant to country electorates west of the divide. They

really have no relevance at all in relation to metropolitan areas, for example, the seat of Berowra and the seat of Bradfield there's a street, one side of the street one elector is in the seat of Bradfield, on the other side of the street the elector is in the seat of Berowra. I mean that is an entirely different situation from what electorates west of the Great Divide are.

PN671

So my proposition, my submission to you is that it is so fatal that that warrants the Commission doing over again what the committee failed to do and the point I'm making is the Great Dividing Range is the key and you go back to what has already been done in the past in previous committees. So that's the first submission. The second submission I make in relation to the disclaimer, the disclaimer in relation to the projections, bearing in mind these projections go out to 31 May 2010 and on page (vi) of that statistical report which I've put before you the disclaimer says:

PN672

It's important to recognise that the projection results given in this report essentially reflect the presumptions made about future fertility, mortality and migration trades ...(reads)... no certainty that they will be realised.

PN673

I'm not asking for a certainty but this starts to take the overtones of, to be frank about it, a bit of a guess. ABS takes responsibility for the method employed however in accordance with ABS policy regarding small area population projections and the basis of this whole projection is based on small area projections, the assumptions used are the final responsibility of the client and the projections are not official ABS population statistics. The projections may be referred to as projections referred by the ABS according to assumptions reflecting prevailing trends agreed to by the Australian Electoral Commission. Now, what they are I don't know and nobody else knows.

PN674

It reminds me of areminiscence of many years ago in the late 1970s and early 1980s there were a number of, dare I say, tax avoidance schemes, and one of the features of it was called the black box approach that a whole lot of data was fed into a, as it were, black box and out came some figures at the other end but nobody had the faintest idea what was going on inside the black box and quite frankly the so called projections which have been raised here seem to come to - or answer that description of a black box. Now, that's a colloquial description but those are the two matters which I would urge the Commission or this inquiry to take into account and I ask you, Mr Chairman and your committee, to determine that the committee did miscarry and I invite you to do over again what they should have done in relation to the Great Dividing Range and go back to what has already been done in the past, otherwise we wouldn't have got into this predicament which we have today where I think we've got one Member representing nearly half of New South Wales and the other 48 representing the other half.

PN675

MR BURCHETT: Mr Pape, you have read paragraph seven of the committee's report I take it?

PN676

MR PAPE: Yes, I have, Mr Chairman. The reason I'm emphasising is the disclaimer, my submission is that it's too wide.

PN677

MR BURCHETT: Yes, but you'll appreciate that in that paragraph the committee accepted that of course there are some problems inherent in the task of projecting into the future and they told you what they did and your argument doesn't really refer to what they actually said they did.

PN678

MR PAPE: Well, those are the submissions I make. The primary submission I make to you is that the Great Dividing Range is, quite frankly, the critical factor.

PN679

MR CAMPBELL: Mr Pape - can you hear me up the back? No. Can you hear me now? Mr Pape, your first submission, what I'm not clear about is you talked about the constitution, you talked about the Commonwealth Electoral Act, you talked about Tasmania and you talked about the Great Dividing Range, it's not clear to me whether or not you're arguing that the divisions west of the Great Dividing Range should therefore be outside the quota that is set in the Act?

PN680

MR PAPE: No, all I'm saying is that you, the committee, took New South Wales as one geographical situation and looked at various growth areas. All I'm saying is that's not a relevant factor.

PN681

MR CAMPBELL: No, but the reason I put my question the way I did, and I'm sure it will come up in other submissions and maybe in comments later on, is what the committee was faced with is what is in the Act and it is where the population is and the reason I couched my question the way I did is that if you look at the population, and we'll put to one side for a moment your second submission, if you look at the population there is not enough people in New South Wales to have the number of seats, number of divisions west of the Great Dividing Range, irrespective of abolition or not some division would have to actually have a city/country component. The only alternative to that is to have the divisions west of the divide less than the number of voters set by the Act.

PN682

MR PAPE: Well, I accept that the committee is bound by the terms of the Act as unpalatable as it may be with the 3.5 per cent, but all I'm suggesting is that there may well have been other alternative city electorates such as Blaxland which you could have in fact started from and gone that way. All I'm suggesting to you is the preference, and the reason I say that is the criteria which are set out in 63(b), those relevant criteria about community of interest, they have a peculiar relevance and it's implicit in there that they in fact - it's not said there but they really relate to country electorates and what I'm saying is the committee hasn't really understood that and I don't wish to be disrespectful in saying that.

PN683

MR CAMPBELL: Well, I'm not being disrespectful either.

PN684

MR PAPE: No.

PN685

MR CAMPBELL: But in effect the Act does not say that the Great Dividing Range is an immutable boundary.

PN686

MR PAPE: I know, but my submission to you is that the previous practice of this distribution committee and it doesn't say that, but what it does go on to say is the criteria set out 3(b) point to country electorates and implicitly you come to the Great Dividing Range.

PN687

MR CAMPBELL: Well, I don't believe that 3(b) is solely for country divisions and if you had been in Sydney you would have heard some very strong arguments about community of interest within the metropolitan area, but my point is about population and I'll leave it there. Can I just make another comment?

PN688

MR PAPE: Sure.

PN689

MR CAMPBELL: In your submission in (iv) you say the following:

PN690

The committee irrelevantly and capriciously took into consideration the announcement by the sitting Member for Gwydir of his proposed retirement from the House of Representatives when the present Parliament is dissolved.

PN691

We did not and you're not the only person who has said that and I do take some offence at that. We did not take that into account, that's all.

PN692

MR PAPE: All right. Well, I didn't come here today to make that submission or to amplify it. I certainly made the submission objection that you've answered in relation to others.

PN693

MR CAMPBELL: Yes, thank you.

PN694

MR PAPE: Thank you, Mr Chairman, unless the - - -

PN695

MR BURCHETT: Thank you, Mr Pape. Mr Pape, before you go, unfortunately we were interrupted, but Mr Trewin, do you have any questions?

PN696

MR TREWIN: No, I have no questions, thanks.

PN697

MR BURCHETT: Thank you. Very well, yes, thank you, Mr Pape.

PN698

MR PAPE: Thank you, Mr Chairman.

PN699

MR BURCHETT: Well, then the next speaker is Mrs Helen Strang. Yes, Mrs Strang.

PN700

MRS STRANG: I'm Helen Strang. I've come here as an individual and my electorate is the Gwydir seat. Good morning to all and thank you for holding this public inquiry into the federal redistribution proposal. I'm here to verbally object to your proposal. It has taken great courage for me to be here today. I'm not one usually to follow through such procedures and to become so involved in a public issue or to travel over a 350 kilometre round trip from home to speak just for a few minutes. It tells me that I'm proud to be part of this Gwydir electorate and it's important to me to do everything I can do to show you people here today that me, as an average member of this electorate, I feel it important to retain this historical seat.

PN701

I feel that we are going to be conveniently forgotten and removed. As I expressed in my letter I wrote to your Commission dated 20 July 2006, I objected to this proposal, feeling like this is a vendetta against our rural population. Our representation will be reduced, one electorate will now become a massive area which incorporates so many kilometres, councils and communities. One federal Member will never be able to fairly represent us. We need to encourage people to stay in our country regions, not give them another excuse to leave our regions. Our seat of Gwydir is a Federation seat. This is part of our Australian history that you are now proposing to remove. Please do not abolish this historical federal seat. Let rural New South Wales retain a fair representation in Parliament. Thank you.

PN702

MR BURCHETT: Thank you, Mrs Strang. Next we have Mr Andrew Strang.

PN703

MRS STRANG: He isn't here.

PN704

MR BURCHETT: Very well, thank you. Well, then Mr Mark Coulton.

PN705

MR COULTON: My name is Mark Coulton. I am the Mayor of the Gwydir Shire Council and I'm here today to speak about the proposed abolition of the seat of Gwydir. I'm here today representing the residents of the Gwydir Shire. The Gwydir Shire is in the far northeastern corner of the proposed mega seat of Parkes and comprises approximately two per cent of the population of the proposed new electorate. Firstly I would like to say that we are not a community in decline. There has been an unprecedented interest in both rural and residential property with values doubling over the last couple of years. Rental accommodation is very scarce with the demand for new building blocks very strong.

PN706

The reason I am saying this is that I believe the premise on the information used on population does not relate to what's actually happening on the ground. I realise that this is a hearing based on fact and not emotion, but this is a very emotional issue for the people of my area. The residents of the Gwydir Shire believe they

are not disadvantaged by choosing to live where they do. Indeed they have a love for their community that someone from outside would find hard to comprehend. One of the reasons that my community has experienced the period of heightened activity is because it has been stimulated by a variety of projects that have gained from a close relationship between government and community.

PN707

I realise that today you will be inundated with facts and figures as to why the proposal is unacceptable. Today I would like to explain the importance of the relationship between a small rural community and their local Member of Parliament. The issues that relate to a small community are as many and varied as those of a larger town, for example, a proposal to expand an aged care facility by five beds in a small town would require a similar amount of a local Member's time as would a 100 bed facility in the city. Community committees or councils at many of these facilities must have direct access to the Member deputising a staff member to inspect a proposal such as this would not be acceptable and nor should it be.

PN708

The Gwydir Shire area is to have over \$20 million spending capital works relating to health care over the next two years. Included in this are two new hospitals, extensions to two nursing homes, one of which is dementia specific, as well as a contribution to a walk in/walk out medical centre which was announced on Tuesday. All these proposals have seen considerable input from our local Member. The walk in/walk out medical centre which will ensure that residents will be able to have access to doctors and allied health professionals in future years has had considerable input from our local Member of Parliament. It is the type to be under rural medical infrastructure fund, a program which our local Member instigated as the Minister for transport and regional services.

PN709

This is also a classic case of the advantage of having your Member of Parliament as a member of cabinet, a Member of Parliament for a seat five sizes the size of Tasmania who will find it very difficult to hold a position in cabinet. The Gwydir only region concert band is a 55-piece orchestra comprising mainly students and adults from the communities within our shire. This orchestra has not only boosted the self-esteem of its members but has lifted the morale of the whole community. The success of its orchestra was aided by the instruments that were the result of a grant from the federal government. Once again this is an example of a Member of Parliament championing a project that has a deep impact right throughout the community.

PN710

These are just a few examples of the connections between community and our local Member, remembering we are just two per cent of the population of the new seat. If you multiply these examples by the number of communities in the electorate, add real issues, personal issues such as pension problems, environmental issues and catchment management issues and add the time needed to travel between towns you will start to appreciate the enormity of the job at hand. This is allowing time to adequately represent the interests of the electorate in Canberra. As the residents of our city stew in their waste and wonder where

their next drink of water is coming from they are realising that moving to areas west of the Great Dividing Range has merit.

PN711

The improvement in communication technology has negated the reason for people to congregate in cities to do business. There will need to be a strong political leadership for the projected resurgence of this region to reach its full potential. This will be difficult to achieve if the local Member of Parliament has to spend most of his time driving between towns in a motor car. The removal of the seat of Gwydir is sending a clear message of no confidence in the future of its residents. We are not asking for special consideration, we are just asking for a fair go. I'm asking you to abandon this proposal and start again. The future prosperity of our region, our state and our nation as a whole is at stake. Thank you very much.

PN712

MR BURCHETT: Mrs Veronica Cusack. She's not here. Well, Mr Melville Mibus. I apologise if I've not pronounced your name correctly, doubtless you'll tell us.

PN713

MR MIBUS: Mr Chairman my name is Melville Mibus.

PN714

MR BURCHETT: I got it right.

PN715

MR MIBUS: I'm a farmer from Moree and I am in the electorate of Gwydir. Dear Commissioners, today I want to make the point to you that the one vote, one value theory does not work for country people. The one vote, one value for country people is no value at all. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm led to believe that all of your Commissioners and committee people live in or near a large city. If it is so practical for one representative to look after an area of 47 per cent of this state why don't any of you live out here and commute to Sydney or wherever every day? Of course that would be impractical and so it is also impractical for one person to adequately represent an area of 47 per cent of this state. And why isn't there a person who lives near Cobar or Nyngan or Gilgandra or Walgett or Narrabri or Moree or Dubbo appointed to this Commission or committee?

PN716

The reason is because we are ruled and run by an NSW Newcastle, Sydney and Wollongong city centres, city-centric bureaucracy, and that is exactly what happens when rural people are not adequately represented. Now, I can hear you saying that we have come out here today to listen to and hear your concerns and I know that you will listen intensely, but at the end of the day will you really understand what we are saying if you don't live here? At the end of the day you can do one of two things, either you can dismiss what is said as unreal or you can take our word at face value. The real problem with reduced representation for country New South Wales is reduced services like worse roads and rail and transport, inadequate hospitals and schools, et cetera, and our young people see much better services in the big cities and so the country is dying. With less people statistically we are eligible for even less representation and so this whole problem is self-perpetuating. It is the country people who provide the food and fibre for this nation's people and around the world.

PN717

If country people do not have adequate representation they do not get adequate services and they leave the country region. Don't leave it till the shelves in our supermarkets are half empty, by then it is too late to say to hell with the guidelines and let's just get people back working in the country. So I appeal to you save our seat of Gwydir. It is already big enough if not already too big. I feel that we have been well represented in the past but it is only one vote amongst so many other votes. The overall balance of representation is already heavily against country New South Wales. I feel that we need one more country seat to what we now have, not one less. That would mean that there would be two less big city seats so that there can be a fairer balance right across the entire New South Wales community.

PN718

One more seat west of the Great Divide would not only be good for country people, I feel that it would be good for city people as well if we could stop the tide of country people moving to the cities. I appeal to you let's get fairer representation right across this nation of ours to build a better Australia and I plead with you to at least save the seat of Gwydir. Thank you.

PN719

MR BURCHETT: Mr Trewin, do you wish to comment?

PN720

MR TREWIN: No, thanks.

PN721

MR BURCHETT: Mr Mibus, I think in the light of something you said I should assure the people who are here that this committee does include to my knowledge persons with country background. The fact that the duties they're now performing require them to live in cities is a different question, but you should understand that. I will now call on Mr Graham Donaldson.

PN722

MRS DONALDSON: Excuse me, will I

PN723

MR BURCHETT: I beg your pardon?

PN724

MRS DONALDSON: I am Mrs Donaldson

PN725

MR BURCHETT: Yes, Mrs Donaldson. I had Mr Donaldson down on my list first and I had you next.

PN726

MRS DONALDSON: Thank you.

PN727

MR BURCHETT: But you're speaking for both, are you?

PN728

MRS DONALDSON: No, and then the other - - -

PN729

MR BURCHETT: You reverse the order? All right.

PN730

MRS DONALDSON: Thank you. Mr Chairman and members of the committee, I'm speaking on my own behalf but I'm a life member of CWA. I know that there are many CWA members, branches and groups that have sent in written submissions and I'm here today to talk on area and population. Maps are funny things to Australians, you can look at a district, part of a state or even a country and agree it's not really far to travel, or so it appears on a map. Reality is an entirely different matter. Would the members of the committee like to drive from Sydney to nearly the Victorian border to attend a two hour meeting or to go that same distance to sort out a problem that cannot be fixed by phone or computer? Of course they wouldn't, but that is what our local Member does at present.

PN731

To enlarge the size of any electorate bigger would be criminal. In 1984 a similar event occurred and this time the army were the culprits. They took a map and drew a large circle around part of Pilliga Scrub and the adjacent farming land for a proposed training area. It was only the concern, research and expensive submission by the farmers to the unsuitability of the whole area that saved our area. I feel the same rough circle has been drawn around the area of the map and what's to happen in the electorate because of population. I challenge the hearing today after they've finished to drive around this proposed area, so long as they have a week or 10 days to spare, and pause to think of their own electorate where they can see their local Member if they want to in a few hours, not days if the proposed area goes ahead.

PN732

The proposed area is geographically impossible but it all depends on population you'll tell me, falling population. True some of the smaller towns are getting smaller, but in an area of Boggabri the population is really on the increase. Two factors are doing this, there are now two mines working up and coming on line soon. An existing one is in production halfway between Boggabri and Gunnedah. When fully on line one of the new mines will employ 80 persons, the other about nearly 100. Another mine is proposed nearer to Narrabri with their families and other enterprises servicing the coal industry and the three towns of Gunnedah, Boggabri and Narrabri are flourishing.

PN733

I am sure the officials of this industry will not like to chase the local Member hundreds kilometres south or west or wherever he or she comes from to speak to someone who knows nothing about coal mining or that the local Member does. The second factor is interesting, as houses and land get more expensive in the cities and the coastal areas of the state a constant trickle of people have been arriving in town, buying a house or a block of land and settling down and happily to become valued members of our community. I speak of Boggabri but I know there are new families arriving in Gunnedah all the time and I presume in Narrabri as well. Not only have the older couples come, their children and family follow, also brothers and sisters, bringing business experience and much needed tradespeople.

PN734

Gone are the days when I tried to sell a block of land in Boggabri. I finally advertised it Malaya and then gave it away. Prices have shot up in the last two years and have almost doubled in our area and this is not a sign of diminishing population. I'm sure many other speakers will have ideas of how to solve the population problem without doing the radical step of combining these two huge electorates. Thank you.

PN735

MR BURCHETT: Thank you. Mr Trewin, any questions.

PN736

MR TREWIN: No questions, thanks.

PN737

MR BURCHETT: Right, thank you. Yes, Mr Donaldson.

PN738

MR DONALDSON: My name is Graham Donaldson, I live in Gwydir, talk about Gwydir and I'm here on my own behalf although I am a member of the National Party and for New South Wales farmers. I would like to apologise for my written submission where I discussed Tasmania with their 65 000 per electorate and said why can't we take one off them until I read the constitution and I find they've got to have five members of the reps. I don't ask you to - I don't think your committee can change the constitution and I'm not here to discuss the tyranny of distance although I would believe, I fully concur with what they say about it, but what I want to look at is somehow or other the electorates are spread from Sydney which make up our electorates and then we sort of ooze out the bush.

PN739

When we get out to Gwydir or Parkes I get the impression they're sort of divvied up to get the right people, or hopefully. Why don't we make the seats out here and bring them back? In other words, to take a little bit out of Upper Hunter say we could bring Gwydir up to scratch, say Denman or Muswellbrook, or ooze it into New England and take a bit out of Lyne which has 92 000 people on the 2004 figures, on the roll, and then we could slowly ooze it back to Sydney and because a lot of places in Sydney we have a reduced population in some of those suburbs, we have single people households and we've also got to realise the north coast is also a big growing area.

PN740

When we look at the western areas surely we could share those areas between at least three or four electorates. What is wrong with sharing them say between Gwydir, Parkes, Farrer and possibly the Riverina so that we could ease the burden on the representatives from that area? I would also like to say why did we increase the size of Gwydir and then call it Parkes, because this proposed electorate of Parkes doesn't even contain the town of Parkes. Thank you, Mr Chairman.

PN741

MR BURCHETT: Thank you, Mr Donaldson. Mr John May-Steers? Not here. Well, then the next on my list is the Honourable John Anderson.

PN742

MR ANDERSON: Mr Chairman, to you and to the augmented committee can I say to you I appreciate very much your coming out here, I really do, and I think all present would join me in that sentiment. I know that it's not often done that way. My name is John Anderson, I am the current Member for Gwydir and I wish to discuss not only the issue of the proposed abolition of the seat of Gwydir but also the importance and the nature of country representation. You will be aware that the National Party believes very strongly indeed that it is neither necessary, wise nor equitable to abolish a country seat and that our submission sets out very clearly the way forward in a way that we believe meets the requirement of the Act which you are obliged to comply with and I say to you recognise that it's a difficult Act and places very great pressures on you.

PN743

Nonetheless I would draw your attention to the fact that no significant submission put together by people who had access to all of the information before you, as I understand it, including the same computer modelling equipment, found it necessary to abolish Gwydir in the first instance. Can I also say that I suspect that it's not widely understood that you're obliged to base your calculations on the projected population of an electorate mid term between redistribution, so you're effectively looking at 2010, not now. The seat of Gwydir is not currently significantly below quota as it stands compared to many other seats in this state, including seats in the Sydney basin.

PN744

I do want to join with those who have gone before and have indicated their confidence that numbers may rebuild. There is a very considerable amount of activity starting to emerge across the electorate. This region for example is very richly endowed with coal resources and as a result of the Commonwealth having taken over the management of the interstate rail network in Australia and investing some decent management and money into the infrastructure thereof, the rapid reopening of pre-existing coal mines and opening of new coal mines in the region is quite dramatically affecting the revitalisation of the Gunnedah and Boggabri region and indeed beyond that and the projections are that by 2012 there will be some 12 to 15 million tons of coal leaving the Gunnedah area.

PN745

As I reflect anecdotally on other parts of the electorate and other industries coming forward I see the Scone area growing extraordinarily strongly, I see the Mudgee area growing extraordinarily strongly. This area, Narrabri, which is commonly regarded as one of the three most productive agricultural areas in Australia has been having a very, very tough time. It will rain properly again one day. As an agricultural economy, I have no doubt that it too will pick up. So I want to say to you I actually have very great confidence indeed that you will see a pick up in numbers and economic activity right across the region. But to move on having said that I really do very seriously urge the serious reconsideration of the National Party's position, I want to acknowledge that it is not my intention to recontest the seat.

PN746

Now, it is unfortunate that my retirement, I have to say this, has been linked in the public mind with your decision and I would ask you not to count that against

those people who have made that observation in this electorate because it's been made by serious political commentators and I make the observation because it's best to acknowledge that it's been there, I've heard it on no less authority than on the ABC radio from some of the most respected political commentators in the country and I think that is unfortunate for us all and I know full well that you have had a difficult job in looking objectively at the numbers. But the point that I wanted to particularly draw out of that is that there is a sense in which I have no personal interest in this, the new seat will not affect me as the Member, I won't be the Member whatever the new seat happens to be in this region.

PN747

But I am I think in a unique position to have some understanding of what this means. If I may, with respect, say that there would be very, very few Australians who have a real and material, practical experience and evidence based understanding of what this is going to mean to whoever succeeds me in representing this area and I can say this, that I know that there are larger seats, I know that, but they are very undesirable and wherever possible I passionately believe we should as a nation resist the creation of what have become known as mega seats.

PN748

There are a number of reasons and some are referred to. I mean I might as well spell it out bluntly. I find it incomprehensible that you can talk about fair and equitable access to your Member when you look at a map of New South Wales and you say one person is going to represent 47 per cent of that area of New South Wales and that will be 48 of the remaining 53 per cent. There are real issues here, very big issues, and it isn't simply the size of the seat that must be considered, it's its diversity. Some of those very large seats that exist now I would say to you certainly are enormous in terms of area. I mean the largest constituency in Australia and the world is in Australia and it's a huge seat but most of it it's desert, there's no population there.

PN749

There are a limited number of population centres. It doesn't make it easy to service but there is a world of difference between a seat that is large where there are one or two significant population centres and just a smaller collection of perhaps a slightly smaller one and seats like this where, in its current sort of form, if I can put it that way, the population is spread like custard across the top. It is very, very difficult to remember, to readily, fairly and equitably service and make themselves accessible to their Members, to their constituents. When I started as the Member for Gwydir the seat was the size of England. We've added Scotland and now we're talking about multiplying the whole lot by an unbelievable factor.

PN750

In terms of how do you actually physically and in a practical sense do it, when I started as a keen young backbencher I developed a routine which saw me circumnavigate by car. The idea that you can do it by aeroplane is not actually right when you've got relatively dense populations, you can't do it. Country people won't accept it. Some people might say, well, aren't they difficult, but I'd say it's part of the endearing nature of country people, they expect and know and have access to their Member and a long developed pattern is, if you like, a travelling surgery model and really every country Member has to do it, there's no

option. I developed a model where I would go right round the outside of the electorate. I would leave home at 6 o'clock on a Monday morning and I would get home 6 o'clock on the Friday evening and that would take me around the perimeter towns and villages.

PN751

You could never hope to do more than three or four in a day an absolute maximum. I would then spend the next two weeks, again 6 o'clock on a Monday morning until 6 o'clock on a Friday night, filling in the internal gaps, so it took three weeks to cover the electorate. The seat in its current size if I could do that and I found it impossible to do as a cabinet Minister, impossible, it couldn't be done, as many people behind will say, we didn't see so much of him then, it was impossible. It takes six weeks to visit all of the significant towns and villages and one mayor said to me the other day, well you know, we've got used to seeing you four times a year. Well, that's given the size of the town, not really adequate now. Double the size of the electorate and pretty much double the number of communities that have got to be visited, you can expect to get there twice a year as a practical illustration of what it's going to mean.

PN752

Now, I don't want to cry poor because I've been fit and healthy and I've been able to cope with it but I want to say that that is an unbelievably demanding sort of timetable. It is tough on Members' families and I don't think that ought to be completely discounted. It is vastly different to somebody in a manageable size seat where they can get home to their children and their families every night. It's also quite dangerous and I make no apologies for raising that either. During the time that I've been a Member, the 18 years that I've been a Member we've had four nasty car accidents involving members of my party, including involving the death of one man's spouse because he was pushing it too hard. He was out on a part of his electorate, desperately trying to get home so that he could catch an early flight to Canberra the next morning and there was a horrendous accident.

PN753

It is an unbelievably demanding job. Extra resources are provided for people in large electorates. They go nowhere near making that Member as accessible to his or her constituents as is the case in the small more manageable electorates. I stress again that country people really are involved in politics. They expect to know and have access to their local Members and indeed when they don't I don't think any of us should ever forget the political disruption to the nation's social fabric that country people are capable of visiting when they really feel unrespected and so forth. I think any brief reflection on the upsets of the late 90s with One Nation would evidence that.

PN754

So to come back to the issue of how you do it in a practical sense with a large electorate, the only model that really works that I have found is that you increasingly become dependent upon interaction with your Local Government Areas and local government and I have six at the moment of substance that I deal with, a bit of an overlap with a few more, but six basic Local Government Areas. It's worth noting that many city seats in fact the Local Government Area is larger than the federal seat, but out here I have six and the only way I can really practically service my electorate as a Member, and this was even more so the case

when I was Deputy Prime Minister, was to interact with those six councils with the local leadership.

PN755

The issues that they confront in rural areas are unbelievably diverse. They are not as similar as you might think. The concerns that they might have at a Local Government Area of Moree are vastly different to those that they might have at Bourke or Scone in the Hunter Valley, so six I found quite a handful. But the proposal under the new arrangement would see the new Member coping with 17 and I say to you in all sincerity that is a very powerful reflection of just how difficult it will be. So can I say to you, I do respect very much the difficult task before you, I genuinely do. Your task is not an easy one, or the task made of you. I appreciate very much that you've come out here and I hope you will understand and excuse the fact that because they do feel very strongly about their political representation I think every one of my colleagues in the Liberal and the Labor Party who represent city seats would say one of the things that strikes them when they go to rural Australia is the level of interest in and knowledge about public affairs and politics.

PN756

It is different out here, there is no doubt about that. People have a different set of expectations and they are very passionate about being represented and in that context I do ask that you excuse the fact that many people, myself included, feel pretty strongly about this at a personal level and I want to end on a personal note by urging you in all seriousness, in all sincerity, from a perspective of someone who has given 18 years now, or virtually 18 years, a genuine commitment to the people of this region who has found that unbelievably demanding, I know how tough it is and I know how tough it is to, you know, if you like, relative to looking after a small city seat and, quite frankly, I also know what an advantage that gives them when they seek higher office in a cabinet or something.

PN757

They have a distinct advantage, I'll say that. It's much easier for them to juggle all those balls and to serve properly at cabinet level and one of the things that I'm very passionate about is I think it's incredibly important that country Australians have the opportunity to have a representative of a senior level in cabinet from time to time and I say quite frankly that every time a country seat goes and every time we have more of these mega seats you reduce the chance of country people having a voice at the cabinet table and I believe that that is a very serious problem and I feel very strongly about it indeed.

PN758

So can I urge you again to look seriously at the National Party's submission but I also say this, if in your view it is utterly impossible notwithstanding what we've said about our real confidence in this region about a rebuilding of the population, if you believe that it is utterly impossible for you to avoid stripping the region of one of its 15 or so seats, that I would plead with every bone in my body that you do it in a more realistic way, that you break up a smaller seat somewhere, it's the only way I can put it, that's got a heavier population and distribute some of those numbers, please, for the sake of the people out here and for the nation don't impose another mega seat on us.

PN759

MR BURCHETT: Mr Anderson, Mr Anderson.

PN760

MR ANDERSON: Sorry, yes.

PN761

MR BURCHETT: I think there's a question for you.

PN762

MR CAMPBELL: Thank you for your final statement because I was going to ask a question along those lines. In your objection to us of 28 July you make your last point.

PN763

MR ANDERSON: Yes.

PN764

MR CAMPBELL: And I thank you for that and your earlier comments about the difficulty we are facing because you are aware of the population.

PN765

MR ANDERSON: Yes, I do.

PN766

MR CAMPBELL: You also point out it's 2010. If we were to follow through the suggestion in your note of 28 July you stop at the point of saying what Parkes and Gwydir would look like if they were still in there, would I be correct in assuming, because we have to work these through, that as a consequence of that you would see Calare being the seat to be abolished?

PN767

MR ANDERSON: Look, I think that that is a reasonable extrapolation out of what I've said and I am very conscious that that could be seen as somebody from one of the big bad parties, let me be frank about this, attacking a seat that we don't hold. I'm aware of that, I might as well put it on the table, and in that context can I say to you again I have less of a personal axe of this now than anyone because I'm retiring. I'm going back to a quiet life on the farm and I can't wait at one level. Sorry to those who might be heard saying we don't want you to do it or don't give up on us now. And I want to state to you in all sincerity this has nothing to do with who holds that seat. That is not why I put it up.

PN768

I floated that idea and I don't pretend and I'm not going to work through the numbers now, you are the experts on that. I accede to your expertise in that area. I floated it because I believe that it represented an option which was more workable in terms of giving country people fair and reasonable access to their Members because I believe so passionately that that matters, an option that would let you work the numbers in such a way as to avoid creating one of these huge unmanageable seats.

PN769

MR CAMPBELL: Thank you and we will do that and just so that you and all the people here are hopefully confident that we are and did do more than just one thought process, in some work that we have done and I will put this on table, if we

did I think what you were proposing the seat of Parkes would still be over 300 000 square kilometres.

PN770

MR ANDERSON: Well, I would have to say that I was unaware of that.

PN771

MR CAMPBELL: Yes. And the reason for that is the reason - that there is the issue in the meeting here today of the very vast expanse in the northwest of the state where there are very few people living.

PN772

MR ANDERSON: No, that's an interesting point and let me build on that. You see, it is not simply the size, as I said in my submission, it is the nature, the number of Local Government Areas and the diversity of them and we all accept that there are areas where you do have to have very large areas indeed, but it's the nature of those things that I urge to look at and to take on board in terms of my practical experience of having lived with it for a very long time.

PN773

MR CAMPBELL: And I understood that. The point I was making and not being inconsistent or contrary to what you were saying about the difficulty is, the very nature of the population means that we are faced with a big task and I suspect that there will be a seat that you might call it mega, but my suspicion is there will have to be a seat of that size or approaching that size simply because of the factors that the Act has.

PN774

MR ANDERSON: And I understand the difficulties you face there. So let me then say that perhaps we shouldn't have used quite so blandly the expression mega seat. Perhaps we should have talked more in terms of manageable seats because it is my serious submission to you that that is the issue. It's keeping them manageable for two reasons, there are two sides of the coin, to make it reasonable for the local Member. You don't want to burn them out too early. You don't want to make it impossible for them to serve at a senior level. You don't want them so exhausted that they are in physical danger a lot of the time because of the travel requirements on them. But also the other side of it, if we're to talk one vote, one value, you know, I mean you have to consider whether or not people do have fair access to their local Member and it's often it's not the Member.

PN775

There are people from my office here today and they are besieged with requests. It is absolutely extraordinary the workload that it's placed upon them and people understandably though, they expect as a right that access to their local office and very often they'll say we can't talk about it on the phone, we've still got to do it face to face and so probably it would have been wiser to have talked in terms of manageable seats because I do understand the dilemma that you face in terms of areas where there's scarce population. But I would with great respect say that New South Wales for all of that is not Western Australia, much as I love Western Australia.

PN776

MR CAMPBELL: I wasn't saying it was.

PN777

MR ANDERSON: No, but I'm just making a point, just illustrating a point. Thank you very much.

PN778

MR BURCHETT: Before you sit down, Mr Anderson, I will just check with Mr Trewin. Do you want to ask anything?

PN779

MR TREWIN: No, no questions, thanks.

PN780

MR BURCHETT: Right, thank you. Thank you, Mr Anderson.

PN781

MR ANDERSON: Thank you.

PN782

MR BURCHETT: Well, that will enable us, thanks to the courtesy of everyone who has spoken so far in leaving room for others, I think to - unless is there some problem? I am told that two people who were not here earlier have now arrived. Is either Mrs Cusack or Mr May-Steers here and do they wish to speak? Well, if not and having regard to the fact that we are a little bit running early rather than late on time, which is remarkable, I think we'll take the morning adjournment of a quarter of an hour now but that does mean that people to speak after the adjournment should bear in mind will start a bit sooner than they might have thought.

<SHORT ADJOURNMENT

[10.19A.M.]

<RESUMED

[10.42A.M.]

PN783

MR BURCHETT: Mrs Jan Burgess. Yes, Mrs Burgess?

PN784

MS BURGESS: Good morning. My name is Jan Burgess, and the name of the organisation is basically the Coolah community which the family's lived in for nearly 100 years, in the Gwydir electorate. The division is the Gwydir division that I wish to speak to this morning. Can I just ask as a way of a question, is where all you commissioners live?

PN785

MR BURCHETT: Look, we're not engaging in a quiz, I'm afraid.

PN786

MS BURGESS: No, I'm not - I've just arrived, and I didn't hear - - -

PN787

MR BURCHETT: No, I'd like to hear from you, what you have to put to us. I think everyone knows where we're from.

PN788

MS BURGESS: Well, basically I'm going to put to you what I put in my letter to the Commission and I was writing on behalf of the family and also the people in the Coolah community regards the mandatory changes in the seat of Gwydir. We

can only see this matter as an attack on the country people, one that's seen in federal Parliament will make this country people's representations vulnerable to ministerial influence in the Parliament. To eliminate the seat of Gwydir, you'd have to change 15 boundaries in the country area and disenfranchise most of the country electorates in New South Wales. The people of rural New South Wales like stability, especially in their representation in government. The electorate is now five times the size of Tasmania, or bigger than Germany.

PN789

They have four seats in federal Parliament in Tasmania. This is hardly fair to have one seat in half the state of New South Wales. There are 28 electorate seats in the Sydney basin which would easily fit into our local shire boundary. It would seem to me that the electorate boundaries could quite easily have been altered to accommodate the removal of a seat in the Sydney basin without very little disturbance to the city people. Their parliamentary Member would still be closer than my shire council office. People in the electorate will now have to travel up to 1000 kilometres to speak personally with their Member, to which they freely now do, and this is very important to the people in the electorate, to be able to speak personally with their Member.

PN790

The estimated growth rates provided by the Commission do not predict Parkes/Gwydir to have the lowest growth rates. Another criterion in the redrawing of the boundaries is an attempt to keep the communities of interest together, moving boundaries from one suburb to a neighbouring suburb in the city does not jeopardise these interests, but to completely abolish 180 000 square kilometres that has been part of Australia since Federation, that is to break down the interests of the community after community and to sentence them to representation by 1 000 kilometres away. I fear that unless the draft boundaries are heavily revisited, Gwydir voters will never forgive nor forget that their political heritage has been trashed.

PN791

This hardness of boundary decisions is grossly and seriously unfair and totally unnecessary. There was no need to go down this path. There are alternatives. There is a great frustration in the bush, and by that I mean the contempt that country people are held by the local government on the eastern side of the iron curtain, and we have no representation there at all. The Gwydir electorate is the only piece of representation we have. We are sending our defence forces overseas in the name of creating democracies, but in our home, it is being taken away. This could easily have been fixed by the removal of the seat of Blaxland which has a small population and declining, more so than Gwydir. You only have to have a good season with the drought ending and the population could change quite rapidly.

PN792

If you leave the boundary as you have redrawn, the Member would have no family life of his own at all, and would have to be able to give his job satisfactorily to all concerned. We have already lost a National electorate in the state Parliament which is only contempt for the rural people living west of the Great Dividing Range. Please look upon all these submissions put to you today kindly. Thank you.

PN793

MR BUCHETT: Thank you, Mrs Burgess. Mr Peter Shinton. Mr Shinton is the Mayor of Warrumbungle Shire.

PN794

MR SHINTON: Commissioners, ladies and gentlemen, my name is Peter Shinton, I'm the Mayor of Warrumbungle Shire. I represent nearly 11 000 people in an area of 12 380 square kilometres. My interest is the seat of Gwydir. I have been party to two submissions, so today is another tack. There are a lot of pleasant things about country life; the environment, the friendly people, the style of pace, the clean air, the clear night skies, the innocence, mateship, community and volunteers, all things that are disappearing or have completely gone in the Sydney urban area. All of these traits are Australian and by diluting representation on this side of the Blue Mountains, you are completely abandoning the Australian way. It must have been easy to create a seat that contains 47 per cent of New South Wales, but personally, I call that shirking your responsibility.

PN795

We are now experiencing the scourge of the green movement. It is not a group of bright young scientists persuading us of errors in our ways, it's a group of misinformed people with large amounts of sponsorship who want to imply their ideals on areas of New South Wales that actually produce something. You might realise that I'm quite fed up with people with no practical experience telling my people in my shire what we are doing wrong. You wouldn't know, but members of the National Conservation Council actually argued that Coonabarabran's water supply dam should be destroyed to create environmental flows in the Castlereagh River. Yet evidence over the last 129 years shows that the river flows underground for most of its course and no environmental flow will ever change that. But what a great idea that was.

PN796

We live with our indigenous mates and we've done so for quite some time, but the other day I intercepted a fellow from Sydney telling them that they get lesser medical support than the rest of the community. This is absolute rubbish. I can't comment for the Northern Territory, South Australia or Queensland, but here, the doctors support all the community equally, and so do all levels of government. I'm not going to go on with all the problems that having such a large proposed seat introduces. You would know yourselves that to visit a local Member which could live, say, at Moree when you live at Dubbo and can only drive to see him or her, is a whole day affair. Is this fair? Is this equitable? How do you judge us out here?

PN797

A few weeks ago I spent three days at Country Week in Sydney. Here I met with hundreds of people who are fed up with Sydney and are preparing to move to country New South Wales. We have a real chance that projected growth figures are completely wrong because this attitude and this frustration in Sydney is brand new. Most of us out here don't tick the box in the census, \$100 000 to \$150 000 income; no, we don't. But we feed you, we clothe you, and all we want from you is a fair say. Don't delete our communities in western New South Wales any further. Give us a chance at fair representation. For God's sake, and for a fair say and a fair future, leave our two seats of Parkes and Gwydir alone. Leave our two

western federal Members and have the guts to support rural Australian representation. Thank you.

PN798

MR BURCHETT: Thank you, Mr Shinton. Mr Ross Gleeson, the Deputy Mayor of Narrabri.

PN799

MR GLEESON: My name is Ross Gleeson, I'm the Deputy Mayor of Narrabri Shire Council. I'm here to discuss the abolition of the Gwydir electorate. Firstly, I'd like to, in the absence of the Mayor of the Narrabri Shire Council, George Sevil, welcome the members of the Electoral Commission to our shire. I believe that your presence here is an indication to us that you're willing to listen to the concerns of the people in our region, and from those from far, far a field. Too often it seems that decisions which are detrimental to people living away from the coastal fringe are made by those with little knowledge of our area, or of the consequences those decisions will have on the residents in our region. I would hope by the end of the day you will have a far greater appreciation of the reasons for the public objection for this proposed redistribution which eliminates the seat of Gwydir.

PN800

So what are the bases of the objections that most people have spoken to me about? Some people say that the seat of Gwydir is a Federation seat and for that reason should be retained. Well, that has no place here, and I'm sure we'd agree with that. While history is important, it's not a relative argument. If the objection is based on trying to ensure that the National Party retain their numbers in the House of Representatives, then similarly I would say to the Commission, let's finish up now and we'll give you a tour of our shire, because again, that is not what people are on about. With the exception of one person, everyone I've spoken to on this issue has one basic concern; how can we possibly receive fair representation after such a redistribution? When I explained the process to people, almost all of them accept New South Wales, must lose a seat to Queensland. This is not in dispute.

PN801

A reduction in 50 seats to 49 seats in New South Wales is accepted by everyone. A two per cent reduction in the number of seats. Inevitably, then, people ask the question, how has a two per cent reduction equated to the loss of a seat the size of Gwydir and the creation of a seat covering 47 per cent of New South Wales, including 19 Local Government Areas and seven state electorates? They then ask me the question, is this democracy? Is democracy just a numbers game, of evening up the numbers? Is democracy simply one person, one vote? Almost universally in this area the response has been, no, this is not democracy. Democracy is about one vote and one value. It is about representation. It is about equal representation. The ability of the constituents to have equal access to their Member, and conversely, their Member to be able to give equal representation to each constituent when compared to a city Member.

PN802

Inevitably, then, the discussion turns as to how the proposed redistribution could have been decided upon, and I refer people - when I'm talking to them - to look at the Australian Electoral Commission's own information and refer to the question,

"What criteria are used to draw the boundaries?" In part, when you look at that question, the committee must consider the community interests within the division, including the economic, social and regional interests. The means of communication and travel within the division. The physical features and the area. The existing boundaries of the division and the enrolment. Well, let's have a look at those things. What, then, are the community interests common with the proposed division of Parkes? Well, actually, there's very little.

PN803

It is true that the division is all west of the Great Dividing Range and is described as rural. But from my discussions with people, there is only one other community interest and that is the total opposition to this proposed distribution. That is the one thing that is uniting the people of the proposed seat of Parkes. Within this proposed area, there are widely varied economic, social and regional interests. How can an area covering 47 per cent of the state and encompassing 19 Local Government Areas, numerous medium to large towns and even more small towns and villages, have community interests in common? What does Moree or Warialda or Narrabri have in common with Lake Cargelligo or Conjola? My interest is nothing except that we're all in New South Wales. In reality, Moree, Warialda and Narrabri have more in common with Grafton, Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour.

PN804

Last year, my shire council, the Narrabri Shire Council, moved to move from the C division of the Shires Association to the B division because we had no common interests with the C division. C division consists of such towns as Coonabarabran and and Warren. The B division consists of such towns as Inverell, Moree, Narrabri, Quirindi, Tamworth. We are being asked, however, to be a member of an electorate containing the Local Government Area of Greater Darling. Where is the common interest? Let's have a look at what the common interests are within our Gwydir electorate. Our health services used to be based at Tamworth, under Hunter New England Area Health. They are now run through Hunter New England Area Health based on Newcastle. That's one area of interest. The Gunnedah and Narrabri Shires are currently undergoing a change through the number of coal mines which have commenced in the region.

PN805

This change will have the same impact on our shire that the commencement of irrigation did in the 1960s. We are about to see a fundamental change in the Narrabri and Gunnedah Shires. The growth of the mining industry will see these shires have a far greater and closer community interest with the Hunter, whereas we have no community interest, no common interest, with the current seat of Parkes. Our cultural and sporting interests are with the New England area, the northwest area and the Hunter area. We have no affiliation with the existing electorate of Parkes. Let's then look at the second consideration that the Commission must take into account, communication and transport. The proposed division of Parkes has no uniting communications or transport network. None.

PN806

Our media coverage in this area is via local newspapers and the Regional Northern Daily Leader based in Tamworth and the North West Magazine in Gunnedah. Our regional television stations are Prime from Tamworth and MVN

from Newcastle via Tamworth. Our regional ABC Radio is at Tamworth. No common interests with the current electorate of Parkes. There is no continuous public transport system within the proposed division of Parkes. Our air services link this region to Sydney. The rail system runs from Moree to Narrabri, to Gunnedah and combines at Werris Creek with the northern tablelands service to continue through the Hunter to Sydney. The Newell Highway runs north/south from about Eumungerie to Boggabilla within the current Gwydir electorate and unites the current division.

PN807

The Kamilaroi Highway runs northwesterly and then westerly from Willow Tree to Bourke, and again, it unites the existing Gwydir electorate. Significantly, these highways intersect here at Narrabri. But there are no such uniting transport corridors within the proposed division. None whatsoever. The third point that the committee must consider is the physical features and the area of the proposed division. Well, we all know that the proposed area covers 47 per cent of New South Wales, about five and a half times the size of Tasmania. Or looking at it another way, the proposed area will be serviced by one Member, whereas the other 48 Members in New South Wales will service 53 per cent of the state. This hardly seems equitable. How can a Member adequately serve such an area with such variety? And what variety we have. The Nandewar Ranges on the east side, the Warrumbungle Mountains to the east, the vast Pilliga scrub to the east, the Barwon - Darling River dissecting the northwest to southwest, the huge Unincorporated Area of the far west with its semi-arid landscape and the rich fertile soils of the Moree, Narrabri and Gunnedah shires.

PN808

This proposed division has an array of river catchments; the Gwydir, the Namoi, the Castlereagh, the Macquarie, the Bogan, the Lachlan and of course, the Barwon - Darling system. These are widely, widely diverse areas with significant ecological features. At a time when there is increasing pressure on our environment, our federal Member needs to be familiar with such a range of ecosystems. The size of the proposed electorate of Parkes would make this impossible. Make no mistake, the environment would be a significant loser if the proposed boundaries were adopted. The fourth point that must be considered is the existing boundaries - - -

PN809

MR BURCHETT: I'm sorry, can I interrupt for just one second. We're getting a lot of banging sounds coming through the system and they are, I am told, attributable to people being a little bit too close to those microphones. Don't be deceived by what I have to do, I have a different sort of microphone and unfortunately I have to hold it very close to my mouth, but you don't, and if you don't, we'll avoid those noises. Thank you.

PN810

MR GLEESON: Thank you, sir. The fourth point that must be considered is the existing boundaries of divisions. Gwydir currently has an area of about 186 000 square kilometres, the seventh largest in Australia. The existing seat of Parkes has an area of about 268 000 kilometres, and is the sixth largest. You know that better than we do. The proposal, then, is to combine the sixth and seventh largest electorates into a mega-electorate, or a manageable electorate or something like

that. Of the 12 smallest seats in Australia currently, eight are in New South Wales, in Sydney, ranging from Wentworth with an area of 26 square kilometres, to Sydney with an area of 50 square kilometres. 26 square kilometres? Just consider that. From the 80 kilometre sign on the Coonabarabran side of Narrabri, the 80 kilometre sign on the Moree side of Narrabri, roughly an area of 26 square kilometres.

PN811

That is the size of the Wentworth current electorate. If the redistribution as proposed is adopted, there will be electorates in Sydney the area of the greater Narrabri area. While the new Parkes electorate will cover 47 per cent of the state, from Warialda in the northeast to Newnes in the southwest. Is this equitable? A constituent in Wentworth could walk to their Member's office in half an hour. A constituent in the proposed Parkes electorate may have to drive a day, just a straight drive without stopping, to access their Member. Is this equitable? The fifth point the committee must consider is enrolment. The existing division of Gwydir has 82 626 voters. The proposed quote for New South Wales, I think, is 93 508, roughly a difference of about 11 000 people. I've got to ask myself how a change of two per cent for the total of New South Wales turns out to be the abolition of a seat of 82 626 people.

PN812

Surely a slight adjustment towards the Hunter Valley, which I have shown has very common interests with this area, would correct these numbers? It seems that little account has been taken of the mining boom which has started in the Narrabri and Gunnedah shires. The projected enrolments for Narrabri see an increase of just 70 electors in the next four years, by 2010. I believe this is substantially under-estimated. The projected increase from Gunnedah and Mayor Gae Swain will be aghast if she hasn't already heard this, is just 45 electors, by 2010. Now, I would submit and I'm sure Gae will have something to say about this, that those numbers will be there next month. I just cannot understand where these figures come from, and does anyone actually believe these numbers? Our council has put in place several measures to cope with the expected increase in numbers in this shire.

PN813

Gunnedah, I understand, currently has a subdivision - just one subdivision - for 300 lots. Three hundred residential lots, on their books. Having looked at the five points that the committee must consider, it is obvious that there are gross inequalities in what is being proposed. I will give a further two examples. Simple examples of where this inequality will be exacerbated. Frequently, community groups and local governments make application for funding to the federal government. They often require the support of their local Member. How would this be possible under the proposal? The local Member, how could he possibly cover the area needed to assess and support such applications? In the Sydney electorate of 50 square kilometres, applications could be assessed within hours. This would be impossible under the proposed division. Recently, John Anderson brought the federal Minister, the Honourable Jim Lloyd, to look at proposals for road funding to our area. It was an opportunity for our council to get the Minister on the ground.

PN814

How would a local Member possibly get a Minister to get equitable time to an electorate the size of the proposed area of Parkes compared to say Wentworth or the Sydney electorates? Finally in conclusion, could I say it's the responsibility of the Commission, and I know it's not an easy job, to devise a redistribution that will give as equitable representation to the electors as possible. But this proposal does not. It is your challenge to amend the boundaries in the centre of Sydney outwards and working to disrupt minimal - to give minimal disruption to inland New South Wales, and I'm sure we all urge you to meet this challenge. Thank you.

PN815

MR BURCHETT: Mr Trewin, do you have any questions?

PN816

MR TREWIN: No, I don't, thanks.

PN817

MR BURCHETT: Right. We also have the Mayor of Gunnedah Shire Council, Gae Swain.

PN818

MS SWAIN: Thank you, Mr Chairman. My name is Gae Swain and I'm speaking on behalf of Gunnedah Shire Council regarding the proposed abolition of the seat of Gwydir. Mr Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to put the case for Gunnedah on behalf of our community. We have already put in a written submission, but I'll be just touching on a couple of the issues I guess that we felt needed highlighting. Many of the issues have already been addressed in the representations from the other community representatives, so I won't go over and over unless I think it's something that is important for me to go over and over. I have been a councillor for 15 years in Gunnedah, and I've been Mayor for eight years.

PN819

I represent 12 000 people and I've seen the difficulties experienced by our communities over the last few years, but sirs, rural communities are growing and surviving. As has already been spoken about, Gunnedah at the moment has \$20 million worth of development happening at the moment. There's a 300-lot subdivision, as Ross has already mentioned. Other developments that have been spoken about already are the new mines coming on line and Gunnedah and our basin is considered as the growth area for mining in the state. I understand your hint of consideration have covered several issues, community of interests, means of communication and travel, physical features and areas, et cetera. I just want to address a couple of them. Community of interest, which has already been spoken about; we have absolutely no community of interest with the Parkes area further down south.

PN820

We have no affiliation with that area whatsoever. I won't labour the point, it's already been spoken about. Means of communication, an issue that someone raised with me which I must admit I actually thought about. The new proposed Parkes electorate will cover three area codes, with the increase in telecommunications costs for residents. TV coverage has already been spoken

about and another issue that was raised, in the different time zones. There will be two different time zones, or three in daylight savings times. Now, I haven't heard that mentioned before. Rural people feel strongly about their communities and the opportunity to access our local federal Member.

PN821

John Anderson has already spoken about this extreme difficulty of covering Gwydir as it stands at the moment. What about the future? Our written submissions cover many of the issues which have been covered here today and you know how important they are. It appears to us to be a soft option. A retiring Member, rural people being disadvantaged again. A fundamental principle of democracy surely lies in providing every citizen with fair, equal and unhindered access to his or her Member. The issue that has been raised before, but I'll reinforce it, the seat will be huge, it will be impossible for one person to be readily available for local constituents. It will be extremely hard for a Member to be appointed to a senior level in the government, where they can really give a powerful voice to rural concerns and still look after the electorate.

PN822

One Member will be covering an area formerly covered by two, which will reduce the say - in inverted commas - that we have out in the bush. All this, we feel, is about inequity. Inequity in representation. We must have, and are entitled to, fair and equitable representation. It's surely not about the size, but about the proper representation. In my position, I have never had so many people stopping me in the street with passionate representation, as on this proposal. I appeal to the Commissioners to seriously consider the issues which have been and will be raised here today. We love our communities. We work hard in ensuring their sustainability and we need that appropriate representation from our federal representative. It will not be possible under this proposal. Thank you.

PN823

MR CAMPBELL: Just one question. You said if the new proposed division of Parkes goes forward, there will be three time zones. What do you mean by that?

PN824

MS SWAIN: It was an issue that was raised with me last night, at a meeting at half past nine. I must say, I haven't checked it out, but the lady who was speaking to me said it would represent three time zones, particularly in daylight saving time.

PN825

MR CAMPBELL: Well - - -

PN826

MS SWAIN: Broken Hill.

PN827

MR CAMPBELL: Broken Hill.

PN828

MS SWAIN: So the further out west.

PN829

MR CAMPBELL: Yes, okay. Yes, but that's not three.

PN830

MS SWAIN: And Queensland time.

PN831

MR CAMPBELL: Yes, but the new division of Parkes is not in Queensland. The proposal - I now see what the lady is saying. Okay. Right, okay. Thank you.

PN832

MR BURCHETT: Thank you, Ms Swain. We now have the Mayor of Gilgandra Shire, Mr Warwick Moppett.

PN833

MR MOPPETT: Sirs, I represent Gilgandra Shire Council. You've read my name out. I'm here with Councillor Merryn Spencer. We did request two speakers, so I'm just reminding it wasn't on the registration, and we are here about the abolition of the seat of Gwydir. Firstly, welcome to the bush, and also thank you for the opportunity to hear our concerns. The community of Gilgandra wishes to express the great disadvantage and burden the current draft New South Wales federal seats for 2007, in particular the proposal to abolish the historical seat of Gwydir, will impose on our region. The proposal will inhibit the opportunities for future growth, restrict a healthy culture of political contact and choose the least advantageous region to partner for the betterment of governance.

PN834

MS SPENCER: If your figures forecasting declining growth are correct - - -

PN835

MR BURCHETT: Could I have your name? Your name is not on my list, and I'm quite happy to hear from you, there's no problem about that, but could you put your name on the record?

PN836

MS SPENCER: Merryn Spencer, Gilgandra Shire Council. Councillor.

PN837

MR BURCHETT: Yes.

PN838

MS SPENCER: If your figures forecasting declining growth are correct, then reducing the federal political representation will only ensure the decline is forever more. The fact that despite your figures, the shire of Gilgandra recorded steady population figures for the years 2001 to 2004, and that the local high school's 2005 enrolment in year 7 was some 120 students. In 2001, these same students, then 9 years of age, numbered only 65. The rural and regional communities have always cultivated or required a strong link to the regional state or federal Members. This is because of the very important need to offset the geographical or tyranny of distance disadvantage. Issues such as Telstra services, aged care, health infrastructure, education, export markets, transport networks, will never be understood by urban culture because their services are driven by economies of scale.

PN839

Such, without the benefits of high density city populations, a rural and regional community face issues of accessibility. It follows that people in our communities make a point of meeting and/or knowing who their representative is, as there will

not be as many opportunities to express their needs. This can simply be illustrated by the example of the number of visits over the last two years, total six, to the Gilgandra shire, and those issues covered were health, aged care, regional museum, rural roads and natural gas. Double the area, half the visits; which three do we miss out on? Of course, reducing the number of politicians in regional areas also decreases the understanding. The current inland rail proposal will directly affect four federal seats. Your proposal takes us from four to three votes in Parliament.

PN840

MR MOPPETT: The proposal to reduce rural and regional political opportunity for growth that can offset the resource pressures of high density urbanisation, pressures such as water, roads and crime, group political support for the growth and opportunity of rural and regional seats. This boundary change will greatly inhibit the possible remedy that is presented. Further, the nature and role of a rural and regional politician is wide, as seen by the above examples of visitations. The need to be multi-faceted in representation is unique in that the issues faced by the federal politicians are greatly extended to that of their peers in Sydney. Both will reflect residential concerns, still further, others will be involved in commercial activity, but very few will be involved in primary production, in particular agriculture, and even less will have to traverse two Victorias to do it.

PN841

Current rural and regional districts have great communities of interest. Regional cities tend to be on the easterly trend, a hangover from our forefathers and the significance of state. The current proposal does not look at those trends. The nearest big city is Tamworth. Then Newcastle, and then our state capital, Sydney. From Nyngan, a town in Parkes electorate, to Dubbo through Orange and Bathurst and finally Sydney, are two quite different directions. Business in the northwest gravitates to Tamworth, not Dubbo, and agriculture is primarily based around the northern river systems. Socially, this has determined many community connections and groups. For example, schools cluster primarily around Tamworth. Sporting organisations are zoned and organised in the northwest. Many interest groups, such as around the northwest and not the far west or central west, are connected.

PN842

Government departments, both at a federal and state level, align along these boundaries. For example, ABC Radio. Culturally, much media that forms an important exposure broadcast to these regions from separate entities and have very different local content. Media today forms a very important conduit for education, culture, news and current affairs. The reality of media broadcasting regions is anecdotal evidence, the merger has little community of interest. Not even airports have linking connections between the vast new seat of Parkes and rail is no longer an option. Of course, this proposal to abolish Gwydir would only further impose disadvantages to regional travellers. They may have to travel half the state to discuss or seek help from their local Member. The current climate of rising fuel costs further disadvantages communities and people in the shire of Gilgandra.

PN843

We suggest the redrafting be along the lines of a less disadvantageous boundary change in a high density urbanised seat, that any changes in the Gwydir seat should be along easterly connections where rural and regional people have a natural inclination to travel in the light of our state capital and the transport and business infrastructure that travels in that direction. Boundary changes that seek primarily to solve numerical benchmarks in rural and regional Australia, in particular New South Wales, will continue to disadvantage those communities that need help. The need to reorganise greater representation in disadvantaged or needy regions is already precedented in Tasmania. We should acknowledge that this can also be done within states. Representation to offset the disadvantages remains a great challenge. We urge you to reconsider the current redistribution in the light of the comments and concerns that our community has raised. Thank you.

PN844

MR BURCHETT: Mr Trewin, have you any comments or questions?

PN845

MR TREWIN: No, thank you.

PN846

MR BURCHETT: I think there's one from Mr Campbell. If you could come back for a moment?

PN847

MR CAMPBELL: No, well you don't need to. I just want to make a comment. Your last - or I think your second-last point about Tasmania, it probably will help people if I point out that the situation for Tasmania is actually set in the constitution, where Tasmania has five divisions of a smaller size. Constitutionally, Tasmania has five divisions, whereas there was no constitutional division for other states. So then the provisions in other legislation comes to the fore, which is what we are doing now. So it's not within the powers of the augmented Commission to actually do a Tasmanian solution, that's the point I wanted to make to you.

PN848

MR MOPPETT: I am not looking for a constitutional recognition, but however, I guess constitutionally, if we have recognised in the past that there is some disadvantage to the famous state of Tasmania, than within the state of New South Wales, if there is a large community and area, you do actually have for your consideration the opportunity to make that, so I guess the second issue of community of interest.

PN849

MR BURCHETT: Well actually, the position is that the constitution guarantees that if a state loses population, it nevertheless doesn't get below the level of five Members, and that's really the origin of the Tasmanian difference. You're not affected by any such problem here. We're nowhere near down to five Members. The question here is that we are bound by not merely the constitution, but legislative provisions as to the numbers that - the extent of the flexibility with numbers that we are allowed to look at. Now, that observation does not mean that what you have been saying cannot be in some way reflected in what we do and we

are here because we want to hear from you and we want to consider the various options.

PN850

But there are limits on what we can do and we certainly cannot simply say, well, we'll do something analogous to what happens under the constitution in Tasmania. We're not empowered to do that. We're not dictators, we're not substitutes for a referendum to amend the constitution.

PN851

MR MOPPETT: Thank you. I guess my request was just to consider that a precedent is actually out there. Thank you.

PN852

MR BURCHETT: Mr Tramby, the Mayor of Moree Plains.

PN853

MR TRAMBY: Thank you, Mr Chairman, committee members. I am Mayor of the Moree Plains Shire Council, I'm here objecting to the division of Gwydir to be eliminated. I'd also like to acknowledge on behalf of the public here that I know Mr Warwick Watkins was actually born in Inverell and knows Moree quite well, so we do have some local representation on your esteemed committee. I had a prepared speech, but it's all - - -

PN854

MR BURCHETT: He's not the only one with a country background, actually.

PN855

MR TRAMBY: That's the only one I'm aware of, but I acknowledge all others. My prepared speech, Mr Chairman, is now totally inadequate. It's all been said. I don't wish to repeat what's been said by the very fine speakers before us. In particular, the Deputy Mayor of Narrabri. I think he actually read my speech before he arrived. However, it is contained, and also I think in John Anderson's words, I believe that we should rest our case. However, I believe that a couple of points should be brought into a context here. The numbers are being worked upon is a fact that we're just going through probably the longest and biggest drought in the last 100 years and we as a community historically lose numbers of population during these periods of drought and lack of employment.

PN856

Unfortunately, when the drought breaks and the rains come, the workforce doesn't necessarily return. The people who live and work in rural Australia are very proud people and when the work dries up, they move on and get a job somewhere else. They don't tend to wait around, living on community funding to support themselves. They move on, get another job, and when the work returns to the bush, we tend to have to wait five to 10 years to virtually grow our own workforce again and rebuild a number. That happened in Moree in the early nineties. We had a severe drought, we actually lost 2 000 people from a population of 18 000, and it actually took just on 10 years for those numbers to come back, through natural birthrate and so forth.

PN857

So we at the moment are going through a downer, as far as numbers go. But what also happens in rural New South Wales when the numbers aren't there to do the

work, rural people are very inventive and they find out how they can work twice as hard for twice as long for half the money and take the place of those people who have moved on. Innovations in farming have done that. In my early days, you drove a tractor and you had a 10-foot scourer. Today, you are using 80 to 100-foot booms and they're doing the work that 10 men were doing 50 years ago. So rural New South Wales will continue to lose the workforce because we have those innovative ways of doing it. But saying that, we at Moree are just putting an LEP, a Local Environmental Plan, together to double our population in the next 20 years.

PN858

To do that, we are going to possibly relocate our airport and we're looking to grow our town. We have the fortunate position, although we have a capped water supply and we do respect the water and scarce water of our country, we have a situation where, if it stopped raining tomorrow, we would, for our current population, still have 200 years of water left underneath us. We're living on the greatest fresh water aquifer in Australia. We have the capacity to expand. We can attract people from the city areas who are under a great deal of stress, and that was shown at our presentation at Country Week in Sydney, that people do want to relocate, but to do that, we need representation, we need people in Parliament who can represent us and look after future direction of rural Australia. We're in a situation at the moment where the growth on the north coast and the south coast, as in your report, have been growing.

PN859

Now, that our forefathers didn't undertake, the fact that the great nomads of the baby boomers would be the wealthiest generation ever to retire in Australia, and they're heading up and down the coast to retire. Unfortunately, those same people are leaving rural New South Wales. They couldn't have foreseen that. So I urge you as a committee, and I suggest that you look possibly - and my interpretation may be incorrect - at section 66 of the Act it states:

PN860

The redistribution committee may adopt a margin of allowance to be used wherever necessary, but in no case shall a quota be departed from the greater extent than one-tenth more, one-tenth less.

PN861

I understand you may have that discretion when you take in community of interest, means of communication, the physical features of the area. I urge you, if that is possible, to take that into account to give us, not a gerrymander, as some people talk about happened in Queensland some years ago, but a consideration taking into account what has been spoken about here earlier. The other area which we most take into consideration, the numbers are based on those who actually register to vote. In rural and regional Australia, particularly in our region, there are large numbers of people who for various reasons do not register to vote. The area of Lightning Ridge, it is considered that there is possibly 4 000 people there who haven't bothered to register to vote, for some reason other than they want representation.

PN862

Also, the large numbers of indigenous people in our electorate, Moree, it is considered there is 1 000 people living there that have never actually registered to vote. Without the system to ascertain a population basis of any town, it's used worldwide and it's actually based on the sewerage flow coming out of the town. Now, using - which sounds quite shocking, but it is considered worldwide as an accurate assessment of the population living in a town. Based on that, Moree is considered, as I say, to have 1 000 people that have never registered to vote. So not only do we have a lack of population due to people relocating, we have numbers that aren't counted for various reasons, and I believe that should be part of that system that you're looking at, as far as considering who will represent us.

PN863

Mr Anderson has shown the great difficulty of representing an area and it's a communication factor, is very difficult. We here in Moree, when we want to advertise a meeting, we have to advertise in seven newspapers to cover all the people who live in our shire. If someone was going to visit the new electorate of Parkes, I couldn't imagine how many newspapers they'd have to put the ad in, that they're coming to town. The logistics are just over-bearing. But I appreciate your time. I won't repeat what's been said before, only to endorse everything that's been said. We have a problem. I believe men of your learned backgrounds will come to a decision that is suitable to us all, but being a life member of the RSL, I would like to draw a comparison, which some people may not consider appropriate, but I do so.

PN864

Last weekend, we celebrated and commemorated the Battle of Long Tan, where 108 Australians held out against an overwhelming force of some 2 500 to 3 000 equally determined young men. We are the besieged D Company in rural New South Wales; you people are the artillery, you're going to save us. We can't do it on our own, we need your help, we need your understanding to save rural New South Wales from a future that has great potential. We are the powerhouse of New South Wales. Moree is the most productive agricultural shire in Australia. We've got the coal, we've got the gas, we're going to produce ethanol in Moree and in Gunnedah and other areas. We are the powerhouse that will feed this nation. We just need representation. Thank you.

PN865

MR BURCHETT: Thank you. There was just one matter raised in that speech which I think, as Chairman, I should clarify for those people who don't have the Act at their elbows. Is everyone hearing me now? This system is hard to get used to, as some of the speakers found. But I should clarify, for those who don't have the Act at their fingertips, that that 10 per cent that was referred to as a margin is certainly there in the Act, but there is also in the Act a somewhat narrower margin which we are also required to observe, and that is the requirement that, as far as practicable - so there's some limit on it - we must endeavour to ensure that if the state were distributed in accordance with the redistribution that we settle upon, the number of electors enrolled in each electoral division would not, at the projection time that's a date in the future which has been fixed, and in this case is - I'll just check that I get it right.

PN866

The date is the date, I've just forgotten the exact month, but it's in 2010, that at that date, would not be less than 96.5 per cent or more than 103.5 per cent of the average divisional enrolment. So what that really means in practical terms is that when you project into the future, and of course you can't do so with exactitude, but when you do your best to form a view about the future which will take account of the kinds of factors that several speakers have mentioned that may bear on the population, that the margin either way is actually, at that point, 3.5 per cent, not 10 per cent. I just thought I'd better add that explanation so that nobody goes away with a completely wrong idea. It's not quite as simple as taking the present figures and going 10 per cent one way or the other.

PN867

Now I'll call upon Mr David Aber. Is he here? And have I got your name right? I apologise if I haven't.

PN868

MR ABER: Thank you, your Honour. You have got my name right, and usually the only people who get it right is my family. Thank you very much. As said, my name is David Aber. I am the General Manager of Moree Plains Shire Council. I've been asked by my council to discuss the division of the Gwydir electorate and the combination of the Gwydir electorate with the proposed seat of Parkes. I am not proposing to cover a lot of ground that I believe that's been covered here this morning. I think that certainly most of the points that we have raised in our submission, we put them in writing to you previously, and also I think they've been raised fairly eloquently and adequately in this forum this morning. But I would like to use an analogy to probably express the sense of frustration of feeling that people within the Moree Plains area are currently expressing.

PN869

It really comes from a piece of tribal wisdom from USA, which basically says if you're riding a dead horse, the best strategy you've got is to get off it. It's a sense of the frustration, I believe that we face sometimes in our areas, is the unintended consequences of legislation and where the systems and things take us. In a sense with this seat it's taking us to an outcome that I think really threatens the sense of fair representation, the feeling of fair representation that people have. I think probably in a sense it's the illustration that, Mr Campbell, you were interested in, was the changes in daylight saving and the effect of time zones. Particularly in our shire, we have to get - from November to March, we have to be very careful about scheduling meetings in Mungindi and Boggabilla and places north of for that reason.

PN870

It is simply that while officially the time zone ends at the Queensland border, the practicalities are that our people have a close affinity with Queensland in terms of their business and their economics, that they have to run on Queensland time. Consequently, it's left - well, where in Moree we do work to New South Wales time, a lot of border areas are working on Queensland time. Indeed, Mungindi is the only town in Australia, I believe, actually straddles the border and is actually a town of both Queensland and New South Wales population. Often we have a number of strategies that we need to adopt in looking at it. I commend you and thank you for coming out into these areas, the area, to actually hear the

submissions today. I think that's important that you do that, and it's important in a sense to the people here that they understand that you do care enough to do that.

PN871

But I also commend you that probably while you're here to take the opportunity maybe to head off to Narrabri to Bourke, or some of the far areas of this proposed seat, to get an idea of what a local Member would have to put up with, in being able to travel it. In fact, it probably reminds me of one of the strange things we tend to have in government is to appoint a committee to study dead horses, in a sense that if this comes in, we may have to go to Western Australia to see how they do it over there, because I know and I realise that the seats over there are far greater. The other thing is that I think the reason it makes it difficult to represent is that there's quite a large diversity within these communities. I think a lot of speakers have talked on it and talked about 47 per cent of the state being represented by this seat.

PN872

Certainly, looking at the difficulties you face as a group in devising the electorates, I can see that there is a heavy responsibility on your shoulders. But I think the situation that we have, the transportation and communication links have already been raised. But primarily, those links are radial from Sydney; a bit distorted by Newcastle and Wollongong, but primarily the major transportation corridors and the communication corridors are coming out radially from Sydney. That, in a sense in the way you propose Parkes, you're actually crossing a lot of that radial communication stuff. That's why, when people are talking about Moree and the areas here, Gunnedah, Narrabri and Moree being more closely linked to align to Tamworth and also Newcastle, but primarily of course the first highway systems have come out from those regions into this area.

PN873

The north-south link of the Newell Highway was established at a far later time and it's only in the seventies that it actually was a sealed link right through to the border. That, I think in terms of your consideration under the, what is it, 3(b)(ii), in terms of your communication links, thus raises a difficulty in a sense for us is that we don't have that communication link with the southern parts of the proposed electorate. We have a strong community of interest, particularly with the shires in this northern area, particularly around Walgett, Moree, Gwydir, Inverell, Narrabri, Gunnedah and we do tolerate Tamworth, but we do have a much stronger community of interest around there. But also I think one of the things it does seem to - the factors that come into play here is that we have also a strong affinity with Waggamba, Goondiwindi and Balonne shires.

PN874

I know that the boundary is the Queensland border, but economically, in terms of regional and interest, our interests start to go across the border as well. It doesn't go south, and that's the point I'd like to make. Our philosophy is that the two seats probably should remain. We urge you probably to rethink and maybe look at methods that would include population on more of the radial basis and to wind back a seat maybe to one of the more populous areas. I think they have a stronger community of interest. We talked about seats in Sydney having 26 square kilometres in comparison to the vast area that we have. It would be far simpler to remove one of those seats and expand the areas around that, in my belief, and to

bring it out radially rather than looking at creating one big seat and just trying to do minimal adjustments around there.

PN875

The issue quite simply is that for this area, it's the quality of representation, and that's where I think that they're basically saying it's not there. In a sense, to have someone who has to travel such a vast area, to be cognisant of the issues and the developments that are going on in an electorate that size, you're actually giving them a very big portfolio, just to represent the people. Any burden like being a Minister or a parliamentary secretary, then the people really start to miss out. Now, there have been some expressions of that in a sense that we've been very fortunate having the Deputy Prime Minister out of our own electorate, but even then, we have expressed frustration in being able to deal with some of our local interests with the Member who is that busy.

PN876

I think the creation of this large electorate to us cannot be seen as an improvement on the existing situation. It is taking us back. It is causing greater problems than we currently experience. We know, and we do live in an area that is diverse, widespread and has communication difficulties. We have to understand that we are not in the privileged situation that a lot of our urban and coastal cousins are experiencing. But what we're saying is, please, don't make it any harder than it has to be. It is important for us that we are represented, particularly for areas like Moree. We are, in a sense, in a phase of growth, where we are growing, and we are looking to grow. But we're looking to grow in a very planned and structured way. We already have proposals on the books for ethanol growth, looking at providing future fuels for this nation.

PN877

Solar power; areas that are actually quite important to the interests of this nation. But we need, I think, to have the quality representation with us, to take those proposals and to get them forward and we'll get them over the line. I think the economic, social and regional community of interest stuff is really difficult. We have the diverse regions ranging from mining areas to forests, semi-arid, to the rich, fertile river deltas of the Moree Plains and Narrabri areas, Gunnedah. We have broad wheat and cattle grazing areas to the west of us. Geographically, there's major diversity within that region. As means of communication and travel, yes, we really need to have some continuity of communication, I think, to work effectively. The physical features of the area range from alpine to our east, and particularly if you look at the Kaputar Range when you walk out of the Theatre, to arid desert.

PN878

Quite a diverse range of geographical features. I guess in using the analogy, I think, yes, to us it's a dead horse. No flogging it, no pushing it hard is going to make it work for us. We were happy, and I think we are content, to work with probably the two pack horses that we had previously. Now, it's no pun intended on our existing Member, John Anderson, but it's reliable, we know it works, and yes, it's a day's pack ride to get around the electorate, but it is important that we actually have quality representation. We have been fortunate to have a Member of the quality that we have had, in John Anderson. I think that it's important for

the people of this area that we maintain quality representation, in a sense that they have access to it.

PN879

We're not asking for the 10-minute walk to the electorate office in Sydney, but we do know that by making it such a large area as it is now, you really taking us to the point where we are disadvantaged. Thank you very much.

PN880

MR BURCHETT: Just one moment, please. Mr Trewin, do you have any questions?

PN881

MR TREWIN: No, thank you.

PN882

MR BURCHETT: Right. Thank you. Now I will call on Councillor Michael Ivanov.

PN883

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Councillor Ivanov is not here.

PN884

MR BURCHETT: He's not here? Thank you. Well then, Councillor Anne Jones from the - the Mayor of Wellington Shire. Is she not here either? Coming, right.

PN885

MS JONES: My name is Anne Jones and I am the Mayor of Wellington Council. I wish to discuss the redistribution of the Gwydir electorate and also Wellington's transfer to Calare. Council is concerned with the very large size of this proposed electorate, with a concentration of population to its eastern section. This would effectively disenfranchise western New South Wales which already suffers from low representation due to its very large geographical size and sparse population. Council contends that the sparseness of population should also be a factor in the setting of electoral boundaries and this would go some way towards assisting in providing effective representation for areas like western New South Wales. The proposed area is so vast that any Member elected will have considerable difficulty in servicing all of their constituents effectively.

PN886

The distance from boundary to boundary would not be readily travelled within a day unless by plane, and such distance will only result in the Member spending more time and money on travel than effectively representing his electorate. His or hers, I might say. This will have a considerable effect on our Members who will not only have their elected representatives - who will not have their elected representatives readily available. Reducing the number of seats in the central west and west of this state will only increase the size of the remaining electorates and make it all that more difficult for country Members of Parliament to deliver quality service to, and represent the interests of, their constituents. Wellington is currently mainly in the Dubbo state electorate. Wellington, it would appear, would be moving to Calare.

PN887

Our community of interest is with Dubbo. We believe Calare and Dubbo should stay the same. I would like to suggest an alternative proposal. In point 68 of the 2006 proposed redistribution of New South Wales into 49 electoral divisions, the report states:

PN888

While seeking to maintain a relative equality of voters between divisions, the committee also recognises the need to consider the state as a geographical whole. The committee acknowledges, therefore, that it must seek to link the relative low and high growth areas of rural and coastal New South Wales.

PN889

Under the proposed redistribution, Parkes and Gwydir combine to form one electorate for the majority of western New South Wales. There was no attempt to head in the horizontal easterly direction and pick up larger population areas, but smaller in geographical size. In fact, with the removal of the Upper Hunter Local Government Area from the proposed Parkes electorate, the new electorate is even further from the larger population areas on the coast. Council believes that the abolition of a Sydney seat would have far less impact than the current proposal for the Parkes seat. The Australian Electoral Commission's own predictions have seats such as Wentworth and Watson in Sydney well over the plus/minus 3.5 variation allowable when the 2005 quota for the electoral enrolments was set. In addition, 16 of the 23 seats that were predicted not to meet the quota in 2010 were seats from Sydney metropolitan areas. Thank you for your time.

PN890

MR BURCHETT: Thank you. We have on my list of speakers Mr Morris and Mr Fieldis of the Australian Road Train Association. Who is it who is going to speak? Yes, Mr Morris? John Morris.

PN891

MR MORRIS: Thank you. I have some presentations, would you like that I put those on the table now?

PN892

MR BURCHETT: Thank you.

PN893

MR MORRIS: Thanks very much for allowing me to spend a couple of minutes at the microphone. I do apologise for two of my colleagues, Mr Fieldis and Mr Cusack who were unable to be here today. I'm John Morris. I run a small business in Dubbo with my wife, Trish, and I'm also executive director of the Australian Road Train Association which is based in Dubbo and started in Dubbo years ago; 1989 exactly. One of our major problems in Dubbo, and especially representing the transport industry, is the tyranny of distance across western New South Wales. I am on many committees all over Australia, but one of the most hardest areas in constituents we have to represent is in the remoter side of New South Wales. Now, Parkes, the size it is, is a very large electorate.

PN894

We have our current federal Member, and as all of us notice, on the news when he goes out and represents his constituents all over that electorate, we watch the local news of a night time. It's actually got to be recorded on two or three TV networks

to cover that whole area. Also, the local news has to be covered on four or five radio stations to reach all those constituents. With the combination of Gwydir and Parkes, this will make that problem more acute. We saw not long ago the premier of New South Wales and his latest slogan was, "New South Wales - Open for Business." The biggest problem we have in western New South Wales, business is closing down. Now, I come from a generation of - five generations of farmers and we all grew up on the land, and my predecessors before me.

PN895

None of the Morris family on our side is now on the land, it just got too hard. Things like the drought, low prices, wool prices, all that sort of thing, made it very hard. With my transport insurance business, I note back when I started in 1993, there were 30-odd prime movers in Bourke operating, carting stock, wool and general commodities and other commodities into the abattoirs of Bourke and surrounding areas. There are now two operators in Bourke that own trucks. This is the major problem we have with the western community. People are just pulling out of there, and one of the main reasons for that is we don't get enough representation as it is for the vaster areas of New South Wales. I should rephrase that; we're not being heard with the representation we are being given, especially in the coastal areas, and especially on the state level.

PN896

Our federal parliamentarian in Canberra, which I've got good access to, always listens to us guys out in the bush. Now, I'm also on the Road Trade Advisory Council for New South Wales and the major drama we have is getting them to listen to our issues in western New South Wales, and it's usually the federal guys that manage to lobby for us on a state level. I was out at Lake Tandou last week on a four-wheel drive Rotary safari and I asked the guys out there, the manager, where they sent their commodities to sell. Their answer was Dubbo, because it's a major regional centre. They've actually got closer regional selling centres in Victoria, but they opt to send to Dubbo because they get the higher prices at Dubbo because it's a nationally known good selling centre. It shows you that we don't need to expand the Parkes electorate by taking in Gwydir.

PN897

What we should do, in my opinion, is combine one of the smaller electorates, such as Calare and put part of Calare into the Gwydir electorate and maintain the Gwydir electorate, distribute the eastern and southern parts of Calare into the other electorates. One of the major troubles we have in western New South Wales is our road network. With our industry representation, our main focus in representation is road safety, improving road safety. One of the main ways we can do that is road funding. That's one of the main issues that we have, spending money allocated to our western roads. We also lobby the various state governments for higher productivity vehicles, which we're not having much joy with at the moment. But once again, we go to our federal colleagues and they help us lobby each state for the higher productivity vehicles to be used in our more remote areas.

PN898

So in closing, I request that the Commission seriously looks at the redistribution of the Gwydir/Parkes electorate and hopefully that you will maintain the two electorates currently as they are. Thank you.

PN899

MR BURCHETT: Thank you, Mr Morris. Mr Trewin, any questions?

PN900

MR TREWIN: No, thank you.

PN901

MR BURCHETT: Right. Thank you. We now have Ms Jenny Gardiner. Yes, Ms Gardiner.

PN902

MS GARDINER: Mr Chairman and members of the augmented Committee, my name is Jenny Gardiner, I represent the National Party of Australia, New South Wales. As you appreciate, I presented the party's position at yesterday's public inquiry in Sydney. I don't intend to recover that ground. Suffice to say that the National Party's view is firmly on the record. We oppose the abolition of Gwydir and the consequent creation of an unmanageable Parkes division, and we urge the augmented Committee to generally revisit the proposed redistribution, particularly as to the elimination of a country seat. Before introducing Dr Roy Powell, I'd like to raise with you, Mr Chairman, just one matter.

PN903

Yesterday at the Sydney hearing, you afforded the Australian Labor Party, Mr Shane Easson, a brief right of reply at the end of proceedings, and I would perhaps ask if I might be afforded such a right of reply briefly, if need be. It may not be that I need to take that up.

PN904

MR BURCHETT: Yes. Well, we had some time, you will remember, and I gave him, I think, precisely two minutes. I suspect he took two and a half, but we should bear in mind there are limits on time. But I will take the same attitude with you that I took with him.

PN905

MS GARDINER: Thank you very much, Mr Chairman. Once again, I'd like to thank the augmented Committee for accepting the invitation to visit Narrabri and Gwydir. Mr Chairman, members of the augmented Committee, in many of the objections that have been lodged with respect to the proposed boundaries, there have been many references, and added to by many of the speakers here today, to changing and in many instances, more positive economic and population trends across the north and north west of the state and the Upper Hunter. To underpin that disparate information, I'd like to introduce to the augmented Committee Dr Roy Powell, who is the executive Chairman of CARE, the Centre for Agricultural and Regional Economics based at Armidale.

PN906

Dr Powell is a leading professional in the field of regional development. He is a former chair of the New England and North West Regional Development Board, and he has prepared regional analyses for many regions in Australia. He monitors development changes in regional economies. Dr Powell and his colleagues have just published a major report which is titled The Namoi Region Economy and that has been undertaken for the Namoi Catchment Management Authority. So not only is Dr Powell an expert on past trends in the region, he's also has some very

recent data which may assist the augmented Committee's deliberations subsequent to these public inquiries. Dr Powell.

PN907

DR POWELL: Thank you, Mr Chairman and members of the committee. I think my background has been adequately spelled out, although I must confess to having an abiding interest in the development of regional areas in Australia, and New South Wales in particular. I guess I spent about 30 years of my working life preparing analyses of what's been going on and over the years, I've been one of those really good customers of the ABS. We've bought a lot of data over the years. I also appreciate the difficulties that you have. In terms of cycles, this is the difficult part of a statistical cycle. We're five years away from the last census and a lot of our data systems hang around the census data.

PN908

And that's always difficult and until we get that new data collected from those census forms, outlines from those census forms in a week or so. I do want to raise essentially three issues and as Jenny Gardiner has pointed out, in the last three or four years I've done work I suppose in nearly half of the Local Government Areas that constitute the electorate of Gwydir and that's what I want to concentrate on. The first point is there is pretty clear evidence now that there's a turn-around that is occurring in many inland regions.

PN909

MR BURCHETT: Excuse me, have you reduced this to writing, this report of yours?

PN910

DR POWELL: No, I haven't.

PN911

MR BURCHETT: We've got a number of submissions and it's a lot easier if you're going into statistical matters to read and consider. Have you got something that you wish to hand up?

PN912

DR POWELL: I have a page which I will give you shortly.

PN913

MR BURCHETT: Thank you. I was just concerned that we don't get lost in a fog of oral figures. We really ought to be looking at figures carefully.

PN914

DR POWELL: Thank you, Mr Chairman. No, most of the numbers that you need were already included in the submission, so I'm really talking about the concepts that lie behind those submissions. I might ask you to bring back one copy of that to me, thanks. I think the turn-around that's been occurring in inland New South Wales is essentially post last drought. The major drought was very severe in 2002 and things have been getting better since then.

PN915

I want to just contrast the period of the 2000s with what was occurring in the 1990s and I've been, as I say, chronologically advantaged enough to be able to recognise I think that the 1990s was a bit of a one off. I think in terms of regions

and this region in particular, we've seen a period when structural change was so rapid and where the impact of technology, particularly improved communications and IT systems, were driving that change pretty strongly so that we actually saw a very large restructuring of utilities, transport and communication systems, electricity distribution and spreading over into some of the key services like wholesale trade and the banking industry.

PN916

There were some market effects driving that, too. It was the period of low commodity prices, sufficiently low to have forced some coal mines to close and ironically now with huge prices, they're rapidly re-opening. It was also a period I think when the sponge effects of the major cities, especially the capital cities, sucking people and particularly young people out of the region was very strong, so the 1990s for most inland areas was a real disaster period.

PN917

What's been happening in the 2000s, the pressure for those structural changes has abated considerably. A lot of the factors that were driving those changes in the 1990s has changed. The market prices for major commodities, agricultural and energy products, has turned around and those changes in utilities and transport systems and so forth that occurred in the 90s have largely run their course, so that's removed a negative and replaced it with a positive in terms of what's been happening in major industries in regional areas and for this area, for example, the economy is driven very much by what happens in primary industries that directly and indirectly account for about half of our regional economy.

PN918

The last thing in the 2000s is the growing disaffection in Sydney is really starting to take away some of that pressure that's been there with the sponge effect where people were being sucked into the cities and many of us who spent a weekend or two ago at the Country Week expo experienced a lot of that with the people that came to Country Week. There is no doubt some growing disaffection in Sydney that's encouraging some people to leave.

PN919

That's counter-balancing I think some of that population drift that's been occurring with young people going. Now, my question to this proposition is really that if there has been a turn-around, how well do the projection models and how quickly do the projection models pick up that turn-around, because I'm not a detailed expert on the projection models, but most projection models are based on a lot of the functions of the past trends continuing, unless there's some strong evidence that those trends will no longer prevail.

PN920

My view is and this is the point I am trying to make, that a lot of those trends that are based on the 1990s I believe are no longer occurring to anywhere near the same force in the 2000s and I've observed this in a number of different sets of projections that basically use the same models, whether it be the department of planning, the ABS projections of resident population which are closely related to those that I expect have been used in this study and so the first question is - proposition is how well do those projection models and how quickly do they pick up a change in trend and the second proposition is how do we match the

information that these models are giving us with what we observe on the ground and we do have, in the absence of the population census data for 2006, what sort of indicators do we have and what are they indicating?

PN921

If I go to the piece of paper I've given you, there are two indicators included there and I just want to focus on the one on the middle of the page which is the estimates of the labour force, also driven in part by some projection models, but produced using information on employment and unemployment and a range of other things which have indicated since 2002 in the Gwydir electorate an increase in the labour force from a little over 70 000 to well over 80 000 and that's a fairly substantial increase.

PN922

What's more, when you look at it across the Local Government Areas that are included in those estimates, it's very consistent. They do recognise that there are statistical errors in that data because of the estimated nature of them, but it's difficult to deny. The other piece of evidence I've got on the page is the building approvals for the Gwydir electorate and the residential one is the one that would normally be used and I believe you use it in your analyses as well as it reflects demand for accommodation and the level of population and since 2001/2, there's been a pretty hefty rise in the building approvals for residential construction.

PN923

The non-residential upsurge I expect. I haven't looked up the details, but it looks as though there's some major mining development that's crept into those 2004/5 data, so that's two indicators that look to be supporting a turn-around and a growth in population in the last four years and what other evidence is there? Well, there's some evidence that most retail areas, for example, in nearly all of the towns that I've visited in recent times, are experiencing additional investment in retail development.

PN924

That's indicating that the investment community at least believes there's some growth occurring and they are investing as a result, so the investors think so. Certainly there's been an upsurge in property values throughout all this area and especially residential property values, so property investors see some prospect in this region and so do industries, as we've had more investment and especially coal, so that's the evidence that I see from the economy side and by working with a lot of local councils and trying to interpret what are the signals coming out of the economic data that we have, albeit we don't have any population census data.

PN925

Everything seems to be pointing to an increase and if we've extracted the right information from your web site which is in the third graph on that page, the enrolment in this electorate has been going down since 2003 so that led me to try and think can these two things co-exist? Are we somehow or other interpreting the economic data and translating that into likely enrolments in the electorate incorrectly or whatever? It just seems to me and my experience of looking at the data that I have available in this electorate is that everything points to growth, yet the data that we've extracted from your website is indicating a decline in the

number of people enrolled and as a rough approximation, the number of people enrolled as electors approximates the size of the workforce, the labour force.

PN926

It's about 80 000 in both cases as you can see, so I can't in my mind reconcile those two different trends, so if we just talk about where we are today, this data here to me in summary says that this is my best guess at what's happening. We've had about a six to 8 000 people increase in the workforce in this electorate since the last census and I can't reconcile why that would translate into about a 3500 decline in the number of people enrolled, so there's something missing.

PN927

Either I'm missing something or there's something missing in the way we're going about this, so in summary my three points are, (1) there's increasing evidence that we're seeing a significant turn-around and these working economies and this one in particular. I am not convinced that many of the projection models that I've seen respond very quickly and recognise and are able to build into those models that turn-around factor and, thirdly, I see what's happening in terms of the labour force and what seems to be happening to the numbers enrolled and I would conclude by saying that I think I interpret particularly for this part of the world the concern of the residents of this electorate is more about is the mining industry disease about to hit us, too, where the mining industry is so big and so powerful that it really creates a lot of problems for all the other industries and how are we actually going to manage this process of development in the next decade so that the powerful employment effects of the growing mining industry, how we're going to manage that so that it doesn't impoverish the other industries in the region. Thank you. Happy to answer any questions.

PN928

MR BURCHETT: Thank you. Mr Trewin, any question or comment?

PN929

MR TREWIN: No, thank you.

PN930

MR BURCHETT: Thank you.

PN931

MR CAMPBELL: I might make one and obviously, Dennis, we'll talk about this when we see each other on Monday, of course, when economic conditions improve, the participation rate actually increases. In other words, people who haven't been in the workforce come back into the workforce. That might explain part of your second graph there, as conditions have improved.

PN932

DR POWELL: I think that's true, but I don't think it explains all of it.

PN933

MR CAMPBELL: The other thing that I must admit I'm surprised at is that in most divisions and I don't have the figures here, I'll have to look when I go back to Canberra, but in most divisions we get an increase in enrolment at the time of an election. Now, my memory was that Gwydir was one of the lower divisions that had those cards come in at the very last minute, at close of rolls time, smaller

than most other divisions, but I'm surprised that your graph here does not even show a blip that relates in 2004.

PN934

DR POWELL: I've taken an annual figure there just to try and - - -

PN935

MR CAMPBELL: Yes. In effect, it would have been - I'll check those figures myself when I'm back in Canberra.

PN936

DR POWELL: I'm just having difficulty reconciling that.

PN937

MR CAMPBELL: I certainly think, as your first point was about the change from the 90s to now, we do know that when you have improved economic conditions, the workforce participation does increase with no change in population.

PN938

DR POWELL: Yes, but not of that size, in such a short period of time.

PN939

MR BURCHETT: Thank you. Ms Sarah Johnston who represents Young Nationals.

PN940

MS JOHNSTON: Good afternoon, Mr Chairman and committee members. My name is Sarah Johnston and I am here this afternoon as both a constituent from the electorate of Gwydir and as a representative of the New South Wales Young Nationals. I wish to discuss the proposed abolition of the federal electorate of Gwydir. I'd like to begin by giving you some information about myself so that you can understand the relevance of my arguments here today. I'm 24 years old. I'm a member of the Young Nationals. I live in Gunnedah and I've always had an interest in politics, particularly the representation of people who live in country areas.

PN941

I studied political science at university and during this time, I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to undertake work experience in the office of my local Member, John Anderson. When I finished my studies in November last year, I began working for John in his Gunnedah office and I work for him because I am passionately committed to rural politics and I strongly believe that country people, especially young country people, deserve effective political representation.

PN942

I am here this afternoon because I feel very strongly that to abolish the country seat of Gwydir and create an unmanageable seat will be detrimental to young people such as myself who live and work in this wonderful part of rural Australia. Mr Chairman, I have to admit that today I'm feeling a little afraid, not afraid of speaking in front of this large crowd who have gathered behind me to show their concern over the proposed redistribution of seats, but I am afraid of what will happen to young people in this area if the country seat of Gwydir is abolished.

PN943

If Gwydir is abolished, then young people living in the unmanageable seat that has been proposed to take its place will almost certainly miss out on the opportunity to see democracy first hand. One of the aspects of my job that I enjoy the most is visiting schools with John, as it is wonderful to see how many school students and school leaders enjoy speaking with him and having their leadership qualities commended by a man who was the Deputy Prime Minister of this country.

PN944

I remember as a former school captain the impact such a visit had on me. If the seat is abolished, then even the most well intentioned Member will not physically be able to visit all of the schools in the proposed unmanageable electorate of Parkes in the space of one school year. I know from my own experiences that my interest in politics and the political process stemmed from having a local federal representative who lived in my area, a federal representative that I could identify with.

PN945

If the proposed abolishment does go ahead, many young people will miss out on the opportunity of having a local Member that they know and can identify with who can visit their schools and who can talk to them about the Australian political process in real terms. The young people of Gwydir have benefited from having a local federal Member who understands their needs and has been able to properly represent them in federal Parliament.

PN946

We have benefited from having a local Member who is also a Minister and was able to help implement programs and policies that have been of enormous assistance to us, but even with this high level of representation, there are still challenges that will continue to face young people living in the numerous towns and villages that cover the entire area of the electorate. Such challenges include improving access to hospitals and health services, access to quality education, coping with the drought, creating more employment opportunities and the importance of retaining and building strong and unique rural and regional communities, but despite all of these challenges, young people are choosing to remain in this area.

PN947

We enjoy the sense of community that comes with living in the country and we want to stay. It is imperative that every effort is made to encourage growth and productivity in this region for young people. The only way this can be done is if strong policies continue to remain in place to ensure the survival of this country area. The only way these policies can remain is if we continue to have a local Member in Canberra to represent us and our needs.

PN948

Mr Chairman, I am worried about what kind of opportunities and facilities and services will be available for young people like myself in the future if Gwydir is abolished and we become part of the proposed unmanageable seat of Parkes where we will have only one local Member trying to service the needs of a diverse range of constituents living in an area of almost 380 000 square kilometres. I am

afraid of what will happen if we have only one representative covering 47 per cent of the state of New South Wales.

PN949

I am afraid of what will happen if our local Member will have virtually no prospect of becoming a minister due to the sheer size of his or her electorate and this in turn meaning that our political representative will almost certainly never be able to sit around the cabinet table in Canberra where the policies are created and the real decisions are made. I believe the proposed redistribution will cause the political voice of young rural Australians in Gwydir to be silenced.

PN950

The younger constituents of Gwydir will feel as if they have been neglected by the bureaucrats and devalued in comparison to their city cousins. The abolishment of the country seat of Gwydir will lead to young people becoming disenfranchised by the political system and the overwhelming number of city-centric MPs and senators. We should not be punished for choosing to live in the country by having our political representation taken away from us.

PN951

Young people living in Gwydir deserve to be fairly represented in the federal Parliament. My biggest fear is that if the wrong decision is made in this redistribution process, then it will be my generation who will have to suffer the consequences. It will be my generation who will miss out on the opportunities and benefits that come with having a local Member who understands our needs and concerns. It will be my generation who will have insufficient services and facilities due to a lack of rural political representatives in Canberra.

PN952

It will be my generation who will miss out on having a local Member who can hold a place at the cabinet table. It will be my generation which the redistribution process will have failed. It will be my generation who will not be able to live in this area and be a future political leader of Australia. Mr Chairman and committee members, I respect and admire your decision to come here to Narrabri today to hear objections to the proposed redistribution from those of us who stand to lose the most if the seat of Gwydir is abolished.

PN953

As a representative of the New South Wales Young Nationals and as a 24-year-old constituent living in the rural electorate of Gwydir, I urge you to please reconsider the abolishment of this Federation seat. With all due respect, young people living in the country face enough battles as it is. Please do not take away our political representation. Thank you.

PN954

MR BURCHETT: Mrs Jocelyn Cameron.

PN955

MS CAMERON: Mr Speaker, Jocelyn is unable to be here today. Will you allow me to speak on her behalf?

PN956

MR BURCHETT: Would you give us your name, please?

PN957

MS CAMERON: My name is Tanya Cameron.

PN958

MR BURCHETT: Tanya Cameron. Yes, certainly.

PN959

MS CAMERON: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I represent the Country Women's Association of New South Wales and I wish to speak about the proposed redistribution of the Parkes and Gwydir electorates. You may or may not be aware that for almost 85 years, the Country Women's Association of New South Wales has represented rural women, their families and their communities and in that respect, I speak hopefully on behalf of the 2 500-odd members who will be affected if this proposed redistribution takes place.

PN960

Many speakers before me have referred to the population drift and the resulting reduction in services and infrastructure. I will not go into that any further because it has already been spoken on, except to say that we would add our support to the thinking that if this redistribution goes ahead, it will make that population drift - it will exacerbate the problem. Mr Anderson earlier referred to this psyche of country people and the desire for the local Member to drive his/her electorate rather than fly.

PN961

By way of explanation and as someone who lives on a black soil road, can I say that if our parliamentary representative has to travel on our roads, then he or she will hopefully put a stronger case for funding to improve or at least maintain those roads. The parliamentary process needs less scepticism from rural voters, not more. In our written submission to your committee, we've stated that in the most recent New South Wales electoral redistribution, the commissioners were mindful of the size of electorates and took the opportunity to reduce the size of the state seat of Murray Darling.

PN962

It is imperative that rural Australians be equitably represented in Parliament in order for their issues to be heard. Any proposal to reduce this political voice must be avoided and the CWA of New South Wales respectfully asks that an alternative redistribution be considered. In conclusion, Mr Chairman, can I say that this is definitely not a good example of bigger is better. Thank you.

PN963

MR BURCHETT: Is Mr Peter Gibbs here? I have a request to permit Mr Peter Gibbs to speak. If he is here, this is a convenient opportunity because we're running early. Thank you, Mr Gibbs.

PN964

MR GIBBS: Thank you, Mr Chairman. My name is Peter Gibbs. I come from western New South Wales, from a little place called Weilmoringle and you won't find that on your map, but it's just a little dot, a small community, not accessible by sealed road. My family of about 150 people still live there today. We used to live into our 100s. My great-grandfather died at 102 about five years ago. A lot of my aunts, his daughters, lived into their 80s. Unfortunately, we're now dying

in our 30s. I've got some young cousins who we buried just recently in their late teens.

PN965

Mr Chair, I think a lot of issues in this redistribution, my people are getting lost in it. The indigenous issues aren't being raised. I've looked through on the web site and it's only mentioned sparingly. The indigenous people in this area, combining both Gwydir and Parkes, make up a significant population. Mr Chair, drugs, grog, unemployment, suicide and crime rates in our western community are at significant levels, worse than they've ever been.

PN966

The stuff in the national media that's coming out of the Northern Territory is replicated right here in western New South Wales. This redistribution will take away a Member of Parliament, a voice that can represent my people, unlike the state governments. Our state government's answer to my people's problems are building big things called gaols. The time now, I believe, presents us with a perfect opportunity to do great things for my people.

PN967

This government and our indigenous leaders are fair dinkum about forming a partnership that will see a change for indigenous people in this country. I've looked through a lot of the objections. I've never seen any from my people. I wonder why that is. I think we're sick to death of being the wounded dog. Well, I came with an intention of speaking up for my people. Please, along these lines, we need people at the federal level advocating on behalf of indigenous people.

PN968

It's a perfect opportunity for you mob to do something for my people. I'm not ashamed about speaking out on the issues that my people face, but in just a couple of minutes, if it assists you to make a better informed decision, I think I have to speak. I didn't prepare a presentation. I didn't send through a submission. I'm speaking from the heart, Mr Chair. As my grandfather who I just spoke about has been doing for most of his life, advocating on behalf of his family.

PN969

Well, I think I have to stand up, too. My family extends right throughout western New South Wales. I'm a former shearer. I never got a university education, but I was driven to get involved in politics because I believed that's where we can make some changes. I was born in 66, one year before my father could vote and vote he did and drink he did, so my whole life has been devoted to two things.

PN970

One is to ensure that the 67 referendum would be a significant part of history that our people must take advantage of for generations and here is an opportunity in 06 for you commissioners to make another significant contribution because I believe it's just as important as in the 67 referendum because here our mob in western New South Wales will lose an effective voice at the federal level. On behalf of the Gamilaroi people, please have a look at this decision, review it carefully. There's a lot of issues in the indigenous communities that you are very aware of. Don't disregard it in this important time. Thank you very much.

PN971

MR BURCHETT: Mr Anderson, I gather you want to add something.

PN972

MR ANDERSON: No, I don't want to add something. I just wanted to ask Peter a question.

PN973

MR BURCHETT: Yes, by all means.

PN974

MR ANDERSON: And I'd just be interested in his views and you and people here as well. I'm just wondering, Peter, whether you could comment on is the what proportion of your people of eligible voting age who might be enrolled in the two electorates?

PN975

MR GIBBS: That's a very good question, because I believe not very many of my people are now voters, or registered to vote. I think looking anecdotally at my family, there are mobs of people that aren't on the rolls and that's a real challenge for us at community level and certainly for government. We need to get much more rigorous around getting indigenous people enrolled and getting the belief in political processes, but I can tell you, for the people who are enrolled and the people who are involved in community leadership and certainly in politics, there is this emphasis and a concentration on getting our communities enrolled and involved in the political process.

PN976

MR BURCHETT: Thank you. Now, when I called upon him to speak earlier, Mr Jon May-Steers was not here. If he's here now, we do have five minutes before we're scheduled to break for lunch.

PN977

MR MAY-STEERS: I thank you for coming up to this part of the world to listen to our concerns about the proposals you put forward for Parkes and Gwydir. Just before I start, it's nice to see somebody wearing a tartan tie. Some of the points I've made or have in front of me have been dealt with by other speakers. I will make this very brief. As you know, 47 per cent of the state would be covered by the new seat of Parkes. That would make a seat larger than Germany. I cannot see how any Member of Parliament could adequately service an electorate that size.

PN978

It would be five and a half times bigger than Tasmania. It seems to me that it would be - well, I believe it would be a classic example of regional Australia losing one more representative. In fact, it would be and I think this comes at a time when we desperately need to retain our parliamentary representation, we being regional Australia. Section 128 of the constitution, the way I see it, there is a provision in there and I'm not saying that section 128 is necessarily related to this, it's not, but there is a section in there which allows for - it basically quotes that a majority of the voters and a majority of the states and a majority of the voters overall have to be taken into account when a referendum is put forward or an alteration is put forward in the constitution.

PN979

MR BURCHETT: Which section, please?

PN980

MR MAY-STEERS: Section 128. Now, that section 128 is not necessarily relevant to what we're dealing with today, but I believe that the founding fathers or those that drew up the constitution could see the necessity of not letting the larger population areas necessarily swamp the interests of those in more regional parts of Australia. This proposed new seat, I believe it cuts across all I believe that in a democracy, we should be preserving ways of retaining our number of representatives in Parliament and while I respect the fact that you gentlemen have to operate within legislative guidelines, if the guidelines are not suitable to the people of Australia, then it is up to us as the people of Australia to pressure our governments to change them so that they are going to adequately represent us, because there's a hell of a lot of Australia that lives outside capital cities and it's unfortunately boiling down to an argument between us versus them, us in regional Australia versus them in the cities and it happens all too often, both at state and federal level.

PN981

One vote in Tasmania would be worth 29 per cent more than a vote in New South Wales. Well, I realise that there are constitutional provisions for the way the Tasmanian electorate is represented and I don't wish to go into that. There is certainly very little commonality of interest between the seat of Parkes and the seat of Gwydir. They go that way, we go that way, it's as simple as that. We produce similar commodities, but we don't have any dealings with the central west or the far west, we're the north-west and again it would be extremely difficult for any Member of Parliament to adequately service such a proposed electorate. I will conclude on that, but on a lighter note, if we do run out of oil and the doomsayers say we might, coming from the Upper Hunter Valley, all I can say is it would probably create a very good market for our quality Australian for any federal Member of Parliament to service such a huge electorate. Thank you.

PN982

MR BURCHETT: Well, thank you very much and thanks to the co-operation of everyone, I'm please to say that we're adjourning for lunch only one minute late. Thank you and we're coming back in an hour's time.

<LUNCHEON ADJOURNMENT

[12.45P.M.]

<RESUMED

[1.53P.M.]

PN983

MR BURCHETT: May I call the meeting to order, please? If people would resume their seats and we'll begin this afternoon's session with Mr John Cobb, Member of Parliament, Parkes.

PN984

MR COBB: Thank you very much, Mr Chairman. We do appreciate the fact that you and the other members have come out here. I should add the rider that Broken Hill really did want you to go out there as well. I do appreciate as others have said already that the job you have is not an easy one, but that doesn't mean that you still don't do it thoroughly. I'm well aware that you do, but it also means,

I believe, you have to take certain social consequences as well as statistical ones into account as you do your job and I have no doubt that today you are being convinced to do that, but if I could get back for a moment to the statistical side of this.

PN985

I think that they can lie and I'm quite sure they have been shown in the past, the projections about population figures can and have been shown to be very wrong and the figures that I'm sure that you've looked at show that the seat of Parkes, the projections in the near future for it to 2010 show it growing by around three per cent and Gwydir by one and a half per cent and I should point out that there are seats certainly like Wentworth and I don't pick on Wentworth because the smallest is Point Piper, I pick on it because it's an eastern Sydney seat, but there are also western Sydney seats with lower growth rates than that.

PN986

I think we also have to look at that fact that the area we are talking about here, the one half of New South Wales of Parkes and Gwydir, they are going to grow, they are growing and there are good reasons for it. When you consider that the last five years have been the worst drought known in living memory, in that time some incredible things have happened. We haven't really lost the population vote, despite the fact that for obvious reasons, an area that is based on agriculture, have lost job opportunities, they've lost production, have lost families because of that, despite all those things, the population has held through its worst history and, in fact, unemployment has actually gone down in this area over the past few years by an incredible two per cent and that's due to a range of factors, but a range of factors that show when this drought comes to an end and it will, this place is going to boom and it is going to boom because of agriculture which is so low over the period you're looking at it and it's also going to boom because of mining.

PN987

They are just two of the reasons and I will get back to the mining issue later, Mr Chairman. The talk of it being a mega seat, yes, it will be, it will be an enormous seat, but as has been said before, particularly where my friend and colleague, the Member for Gwydir, size is not really the biggest issue here. It is the number of communities and the difference in those communities and as someone who's driven around most of them, if not all of them, that is the issue.

PN988

I wonder, have you stopped and realised that in Parkes and Gwydir currently there is around about 130 towns and communities and in the seat that you propose, it will still be over 100 because as John said earlier, this is not about the Simpson Desert, it's not about land that is unproductive. The whole thing is used, the whole thing is populated and there are small communities all over and that is one of the reasons it would be such a hard seat to represent with any fairness.

PN989

As has been said earlier, the people in Parkes and Gwydir should not be denied the opportunity of having maximum representation. By that I mean being represented by a Minister who might have to say to himself how in heaven's name can I properly represent this area when I've got the duties of a Minister, travelling Australia, as well as the electorate, as well as being in Canberra 20 weeks a year

and that's what I'm faced with currently in 33 per cent of the state, not 48 per cent and it is a big job and a lot of people have shown why that is so.

PN990

Look, it is about the number of communities and I will draw your attention to the disparity of that shortly, but there are other issues which make today's representation for a Member of Parliament very different to what they were in the past, the way government works, the way towns, not electorates, not local governments even, but those 130 individual towns and communities now have the opportunity to take advantage of projects like regional partnerships, like road to recovery, like community water grants, investment in our schools program.

PN991

There are heaps of these programs which the government now puts out there and these individual towns and communities have to apply to them, individually, not as an electorate, not as a Local Government Area, not as one of the 19 Local Government Areas you propose, but those 130 towns and communities, because they're vital to them, whether it be a water issue, a water grant, the school grant, something to help their local commercial employment, whatever they are, so that Member, Mr Chairman, has to be able to relate to every one of those issues and we're talking about at least two, there's at least two in my electorate now, different spheres of influence, but to add Gwydir to that, to add Gwydir to that would be incredibly different spheres of influence, by communication, by roads, in every way that you communicate with those people.

PN992

It is a very different way from which the federal government, I speak particularly about the federal government, relates to the constituents today to what it did 20 and 30 years ago when things tended to be very much more across the nation, rather than to an individual community. You earlier heard Peter Gibbs be much more eloquent than I can be, but I have to myself speak on the issue of indigenous representation and the way people in our Aboriginal community relate to their local Member and I want to speak about western New South Wales in particular.

PN993

The seats of Gwydir and Parkes both have around about 10 and a half per cent on the statistics, 10 and a half per cent Aboriginal populations. In actual fact, it's quite a lot higher than that and I think what Peter and John said earlier bears that out, but the proposed electorate nearly doubles that because most of the Aboriginal population will be within it. It is the one sense of continuity I see in it. However, that is not the end of the story. I think Peter spoke to you about the needs, but we also have the fact that we've reached a point thankfully in our history where the indigenous Aboriginal leadership is determined now wants to deal with things.

PN994

We want to deal with things, the local community or our general population has decided, yes, we have to and you've heard Mal Brough recently, my cabinet Minister, he's made it plain we're ready to do so. How does it look that at this point in our history, when we are going to deal with these issues of violence and family violence, all the things people alluded to which are very true, just as much here as they are in northern Australia, how is it going to look to those leaders

when you think how tenuous that trust that we have developed is, if we suddenly say you're not worth two people, you're only worth one?

PN995

I think it would be hard to blame them for that. Peter spoke about his people. I actually think they're his people, but they're my people, they're John Anderson's people and they're people who belong to the electorates of Gwydir and Parkes. I'd like to talk also about the growth factor in both these electorates. We have mining that's obviously the number one area in which growth is happening and it's not just the towns of Cobar, Parkes, West Wyalong, Hermidale, Girilambone, Nymagee, Broken Hill, Pooncarie - Pooncarie is actually not in the electorate, but everything it produces is processed in Broken Hill.

PN996

These are expanding mines. You add to that the proposed and I mean proposed, the very large developments for Peak Hill, Gunnedah, Tomingley and Toongi and you're talking very serious mineral exploration, mineral development and with due respect to you all, I have to say comments I heard that came from the Commission that mining cannot be taken into account in the proposed expansion, population of this area because of fly in, fly out, it's totally wrong. I can assure you and I've spoken to every mining company in the area, there are 16 in this whole area, 16 people out of all those mines that do fly in, fly out. They're in Cobar and they're specialists and that's only because they cannot access those people locally.

PN997

Fly in, fly out is not an option in western New South Wales, it is not a factor on the growth side. Could I also talk to you about the development and I'm obviously saying this because this area has bottomed out? Agriculture cannot get any more efficient. In fact, if you look at what's happened to this drought in the last five years, we haven't lost very many people. Even broad acre agriculture is very intensive today. It is going to use more people, not less and that is obvious and you'll find anybody in agriculture will tell you the same, but we do have new industries coming into this.

PN998

We have - ethanol production is quite obviously a very real possibility. It's going to happen in Gunnedah, it's going to happen in the central west in the Urana region and by its very nature, those issues mean there'll be more feed lines. We have the growth factor here, not a loss factor and I do not for one second believe, not for a second, that the projections which you have had available to you and it's not your fault, but I don't believe they're showing the true factors here.

PN999

We also have to look at the growth in the transport industry. Parkes and Dubbo are monstrous truck links, probably as big as you'll find anywhere in Australia, if not bigger. Parkes and Dubbo, Parkes in particular is what's called a transport hub. It is quickly becoming, along with Dubbo, a distribution centre for the whole of certainly south-eastern Australia, all the way from Adelaide, right around to Brisbane and in actual fact, because of the trans-continental railway which goes right through the electorate of Parkes, it also can feed Bourke, very real issues and that's now linked to Darwin through the new railway line.

PN1000

Don't underrate how big the trucking industry is in this area. Do not underrate the fact that trucking companies, logistics companies are now buying land in Parkes because they know Sydney can't handle logistics and distribution and that is where Parkes and Dubbo are coming into their own, a very big growth factor. In fact, both K-Mart and Big W opened up supermarkets recently in a town of only 10 000 people. They don't do that without very good reason.

PN1001

I'd like to also point out that Parkes, Dubbo and Broken Hill which are separated by this proposal, are linked by road, rail and air, the Mitchell Highway, the Newell Highway, the Goulburn Highway, the Barrier Highway plus the trans-continental railway line, plus the air and I must get back to the air issue for a minute. For any person, especially a Minister, but any person and let's not forget for a moment that any electorate deserves to have the actual representation that a Minister can give them if he is able to achieve that, but any Member or Minister has to be able to go around an electorate and what's happened here is that people, for example, north-west to this proposed electorate, given that Dubbo is 40 000 people, there's going to obviously be an office and perhaps Moree would be an office.

PN1002

How in heaven's name can one person logically deal with that in a commercial sense? You probably don't realise that a Member of Parliament in an electorate of this size gets about \$40 000 a year with which he can use charter to get around his electorate. You could spend that in two or three months in this electorate because you're going to have to fly. You're not in the electorate 12 months, you're not even in it 20 weeks. When you have duties outside, you're lucky to be able to spend half your time in that electorate, very lucky.

PN1003

You could spend that charter in next to nothing. The first job I would have to do if I had the honour of representing this new electorate is go to the Remunerations Tribunal and say you've got to triple my charter allowance, I cannot in all honesty give people the representation they deserve in this. You've also got to realise that they are not linked commercially by airlines. Dubbo goes to Broken Hill, goes to Parkes, et cetera, but to go to Moree, for example, you've got to fly to Sydney, Sydney to Narrabri, Narrabri to Moree or Tamworth, whatever.

PN1004

It is a very intricate way of travelling and to drive all that, we're talking a lot of driving and as John Anderson made the point before and others, it is not the size partly, it is mostly the number of communities. This has an incredible number of communities, more than 10 000 population towns. It is an incredible job to do at any time, let alone given the complexities of trying to communicate and travel an electorate that is not commercially linked by air.

PN1005

The issues that have to be dealt with, we're talking about two electorates, two areas that have been - Parkes is the most drought affected area in Australia over the last five years and probably Gwydir the second most. No one person could have represented those two areas sufficiently over that time. They are feast and

famine areas. They both suffer drought, they both suffer floods. Unfortunately, the floods have been a little lacking.

PN1006

Could I mention that there are incredible numbers of community? I've mentioned how many towns there are. Currently in those electorates, there's about 250 schools, nearly 50 hospitals, even in the proposed electorate, that's going to be around 200 schools, not far from 50 hospitals. They have special needs, special representations. You've got to think - I mean, I wonder what any seat, what any seat, even the biggest one you can think of on the east coast, how many hospitals, how many schools? Not 200, not half 200 and not 50 hospitals, not half that, not a quarter.

PN1007

The issues that we have in health, in education, they are enormous and to get things like an MRI up from a major centre like Dubbo, to get a rural university for medical students, to deal with an issue as important to these regions as the inland rail from Melbourne to Brisbane takes more than the efforts of one Member of Parliament, even if he were the Deputy Prime Minister. Could I say that I do appreciate how tough your job is, but I think you have to appreciate how tough ours is as well, even if we love doing it. It is an awfully tough job.

PN1008

Could I just finish up by giving you some general statistics? Over 200 schools, towards 50 hospitals, 19 shire councils, around about 100 child care centres, heaven knows how many aged care centres, about 200 polling booths we're talking and over 100 towns and we haven't touched on what this Member would have to do to keep the media, to keep his electorate informed, because he's not going to be able to see them all very often.

PN1009

We're talking here in the current electorate 46 newspapers. Somebody earlier said they don't know how many papers. Well, I do. There's 46. Even the new electorate would have close to 40 newspapers and every one of those newspapers wants a different story, because they all have their own angle on it. We are talking very different towns here, very different. As somebody said, Lake Cargelligo is not Moree, it's not Gunnedah and Tibooburra, it has its own community paper, too. For 170 people there, I think they deserve to know what's going on as much as Dubbo or Gunnedah.

PN1010

As I said, two totally separate TV systems, one based on Dubbo, one based on Tamworth. You're going to have a hard time linking all that up, but people deserve to know what's going on. They also deserve for you to hear what their issues are in the media as well. Could I just - the Mayor Broken Hill very much wanted to be here today. However, when he rang me, he said I can't, he said I've got to fly to Dubbo, then I've got to fly to Sydney, then I've got to fly to Moree and Narrabri. He said I can't do it, I simply don't have the time, as important as it is. I'd just like to read you very quickly two paragraphs:

PN1011

Broken Hill has forged an identity as an outback-mining community and more recently as an outback tourist icon. Visitors and artists, to visit Broken Hill

and the surrounding communities, rightly view this as a unique region. By ripping out Broken Hill, the gateway to the accessible outback from the proposed new electoral boundary, will change forever the administrative dynamic to the far west. Issues of water in Broken Hill are totally different from Farrer. Farrer lies in the Snowy hydro and Broken Hill pumps from Menindee via the Darling which will no longer be in the same electorate.

PN1012

The last thing I would like to draw to your attention, a very good friend of mine who lives about 60 kilometres from Tibooburra rang me on Monday. He said, Cobbie, I would do anything to help you and John make your points on Friday, but he said even though it is so important to us, for me to get to Moree and remember what I said, you would probably have an office, let's say Dubbo or Moree, for example, Tibooburra is also in this electorate, if that person wants to see his Member when the Member simply can't go out there to those 150 people, he's going to have to drive or fly if he's lucky to Broken Hill or Moree - sorry, Dubbo or Moree.

PN1013

What Tom said to me was I can drive 300 kilometres to Broken Hill, fly to Dubbo, fly to Sydney and then fly to Narromine and that's at least three days. By the time I spend a day there - or he said I can drive 300 kilometres to Broken Hill, 460 kilometres to Cobar and around about another six hours' drive to Narromine. It would have been nice to get to go to Broken Hill, but perhaps what Tom said might give you some idea what he would have to do if he needed to see his Member in a hurry. Thank you very much.

PN1014

MR BURCHETT: Mr Richard Clark, Senior Vice President, New South Wales Farmers' Association.

PN1015

MR CLARK: Thank you, Chairman. My name is Richard Clark. I'm the Senior Vice President of the New South Wales Farmers' Association. I'm not here in fact to discuss a division of a region. We're an apolitical organisation. We're really more concerned about the principles that go behind redistributions and what's led to the result that's been delivered. We are Australia's largest state farmer organisation. We're apolitical and we're voluntary. Members join us every year.

PN1016

We represent commercial farmers across New South Wales in policy activity and commercial activities. In order to represent those farmers effectively, we also need to ensure that their communities and regions have equitable access to our political institutions. We believe electorate boundaries must ensure that voters have timely and effective access with the elected Member, that the elected Member is able to service and represent the electorate in a timely and efficient manner and that there must be a maintenance of community of interest. We believe the proposal fails all three of those criteria.

PN1017

The new Parkes electorate is seven or eight hours' drive from one end to the other. It's unreasonable to ask electors to travel such distances to see their Members. Parkes has a very large number of widely scattered settlements, each with a school

or club which hold functions and they should be rightfully able to expect to see their Member at those areas from time to time. More importantly, the urban geographical history of New South Wales is based on a hub and spoke system and Parkes and Gwydir very effectively service two of those spokes.

PN1018

Gwydir has very effectively serviced that spoke which heads to the northwest from Sydney. Parkes has very effectively serviced that spoke that heads due west from Sydney. What that's meant is that they are very different agro-ecological regions, they're very different historical regions and they have a comparatively small cross fertilisation between them, but more, we think that when redistributions come about, it is much, much more disruptive for those redistributions to be looking at population rather than area in isolation.

PN1019

We believe that it's much less disruptive to modify more densely populated areas and add those to the more sparsely populated areas and I give you the example along the eastern edge of the major rural electorates in New South Wales. There are quite a number of very small rural electorates which could be equally easily incorporated into the larger ones with much less disruption, much less isolation of electors from their Members, a much less disenfranchisement of those Members.

PN1020

The AECs own data suggests that Gwydir is growing rapidly, from 72 900 in 98 to 84 600 in 2001. It seems that that is going to increase as we've heard from Mr Cobb with the opening up of the mining areas in the southeast and the existing Gwydir. Parkes has increased from 79 500 to 83 000 in the same time period. These are not declining seats. The statistics make it very clear they're not declining seats, so, Mr Chairman, we believe that electorate redistributions need to be based on small land areas, not on low population densities and if they are, they'll meet the three criteria that we've set and that is timely and effective access to the local Member, an effective ability to the local Member to service his electorate and to maintain a community of interest. We don't believe it's acceptable that people's access to the political institutions of Australia should be diminished unnecessarily. I think that's about all we've got, Mr Chairman. Thank you.

PN1021

MR BURCHETT: Just a moment, please.

PN1022

MR CAMPBELL: Mr Clark, I know you didn't use one of your overheads, but you did give them to us and I think I need to raise an issue. It's the overhead at the bottom of page 2 where you say:

PN1023

Both electorates currently meet Australian Electoral Commission quota of electors, 79 138 to 96 724. Conclusion, redistributing Gwydir is not justified or efficient.

PN1024

Now, I don't know whether you were here this morning when this issue came together, the 10 per cent and the three and a half per cent. Those figures are the

10 per cent which is the current population, but, of course, the Act says we have to look at the projection for May 2010 and those figures in May 2010, the projection have to be between 90 236 and 96 780 and the projected enrolments for Gwydir and Parkes are about 82 000 so in effect at the moment they do meet one criteria, but they don't meet the other and that's what the issue is about, so that's why I thought I should bring it to your attention.

PN1025

MR CLARK: We accept that. What we're saying is that not only are they rapidly growing at the moment in terms of population, but equally, it would be much less disruptive to take, for example, a significant population, one significant population centre from effectively because of the way we are distributed, from the eastern side of those electorates and add in than to do the multitude of boundary changes that have been required to try and re-jig this system.

PN1026

MR CAMPBELL: I understood the point you were making. I just wanted to clarify this.

PN1027

MR CLARK: Okay. Thank you.

PN1028

MR BURCHETT: Mr Trewin, do you want to add anything?

PN1029

MR TREWIN: No, I don't, thanks.

PN1030

MR BURCHETT: Thank you. The next speaker is Mr Mark Horton of the Nationals Parkes electorate.

PN1031

MR HORTON: I won't speak to it, Mr Chairman, but I've got some additional information there which gives you some scenarios, should you be interested. I am going to be short and sharp. Really, the relevance to today, I was coming over the bridge after a three-hour drive from Dubbo. In that time, I saw an awful lot of ironbarks that look particularly good at this time of year, but not many people, 3000 I think we passed through and three hours of that time just to get to the next major centre, in that division, anyway.

PN1032

One of the passengers in the car, coming over the bridge, said I haven't been to Narrabri for years and to me that says it all. There is no reason to come to Narrabri if you live south of the Goonoo. With the social, economic, transport, media or telecommunication links when you're using your mobile in that area, they are two separate economic, environmental, social and service driven regions and the services that are in both those areas acknowledge that by having their regional administration centres based in Moree or Tamworth and Dubbo to the south.

PN1033

Linkages between the communities when compared to, say, the Georges River or Sydney Harbour are significantly larger than the social differences you will find in

other areas which are also in decline. The other thing I'd like to - I'm intrigued about is in your proposed redistribution of New South Wales electoral divisions booklet on page 1, it says:

PN1034

The quota of electors for New South Wales was 87 931 with a minimum of 79 138 to a maximum of 96 724 respectively.

PN1035

And on page 26 that:

PN1036

The reconfiguration of Gwydir and Parkes resulted in approximately 82 500 electors needing to be transferred to other areas.

PN1037

Mr Chairman, that is an electorate. Thank you.

PN1038

MR BURCHETT: Perhaps I should explain that the conundrum to which attention has just been drawn is really just a confusion between the 10 per cent and the three and a half per cent margins. We have to look at both of them. The 10 per cent on the present figures, the three and a half per cent on the projected figures, but we can't ignore one. We have to comply actually with both. Now I will call upon Mr Stephen Monkton.

PN1039

MR MONKTON: Thank you, Mr Chairman. To many I'm known as King, Stephen on the electoral roll. Mr Chairman, committee of the Electoral Commission, ladies and gentlemen, I have much pleasure in submitting this submission to you in the retention of the electoral seat of Gwydir and I would like to start by saying that this is a regional business district. It is not the bush. It's a regional business district. It earns a lot of money.

PN1040

In one day it earns more money than speed cameras bring in New South Wales in one year. It is a very worthwhile area and very valuable to the Commonwealth of Australia. I'll go if I may now and read part of my letter that I've put into the submission. By now you will have received many submissions objecting to any interference with the electorates in rural and regional Australia. In New South Wales, the Federation seat of Gwydir has served not only a vast, diverse and strategic area, but, further, due to the stable and increasing population, the potential for further growth and prosperity is assured.

PN1041

There is no doubt that in the event that an electorate area is too large, then parliamentary representation is greatly diminished with very minimal or no benefit. The proposed creation of a mega electorate is doomed to failure and would not be good for the constituents or in the national interest. There is a saying, if something is working well, then leave well alone and another, if it ain't broke, don't fix it and you only change something if it will be better than before that change.

PN1042

If it was proposed to either merge or abolish the Australian Electoral Commission, then it would have to be proven that this was in the best interests of Australia. The same goes for an electorate, in this case Gwydir, to which there should never have been any intention of dissolution, especially as no good reason has been given, with no proof of any evidence as to why Gwydir or any other electorate should be interfered with other than to deliver minimal or no representation and to reduce greatly the standard of living of a regional business district.

PN1043

For historical information, Gwydir was named after Lord Gwydir after Alan Cunningham discovered the Gwydir River in 1827 with the first proclaimed election in 1901. When Blaxland, Lawson and Wentworth surveyed a track across the Great Dividing Range, later named the Blue Mountains, it opened a vast, rich area. That has today made possible the wealth of this nation. Again, a new freeway is proposed across the mountains which will allow huge amounts of people to traverse the whole rural area of New South Wales.

PN1044

It is with this that not only Gwydir electorate, but all other electorates, will experience significant increases in population. It would be futile to interrupt the fair and reasonable boundaries of an electorate based on false or misleading information or statistics, including using a supposed population variation of three and a half per cent for survival of any given electorate and further to this, whoever orchestrated this flawed criteria is out of touch with reality, as there is no justification at all for either changing of electoral boundaries or a redistribution, no need, no reason and no credibility at all, especially when the proposal is flawed and would lead to a mega mess, an area five times that of Tasmania, twice the area of Victoria and the size of Germany or Japan.

PN1045

It is an absolute and utter nonsense to even consider interfering with, let alone the thought of deleting Gwydir from the well-formed electoral divisions of the Commonwealth. The population of Gwydir will not only accept or tolerate this flawed proposal and it will be said, printed and repeated over and over again, do not interfere with, do not abolish, do not delete, do not change the boundaries, do not initiate any redistribution, do not carry on with a flawed process.

PN1046

Finally, in the event that the wishes of the population of Gwydir are not met and that is to leave Gwydir alone, then the AEC, Australian Electoral Commission and its staff, including Commissioners and the like will have drawn contempt of the citizens of Gwydir. I say that in absolute sincerity in the quest to hang on to Gwydir and keep Gwydir in the Commonwealth as it has served it so well and as it has been served so well by the current leader, John Anderson, who's served this electorate with absolute integrity, as his forebear, Ralph Hunt, and will in the future, an astute person. That's all I have to say and thank you very much.

PN1047

MR BURCHETT: I don't doubt for a moment the sincerity of everything you've said, but I feel as Chairman I must correct you when you suggest that there's no reason to abolish any seat, because, in fact, our legal duty is to reduce the number in New South Wales by one. It has to be some seat. What we're considering here

is whether it should be the seat that the committee proposes and you'll appreciate that's a committee proposal. It's now being considered by the augmented Commission which the Act sets up to deal with proposals that come under fire, but it's not possible for us to go back to your stand and say no seat should be interfered with. It can't happen.

PN1048

MR MONKTON: Thank you.

PN1049

MR BURCHETT: Now, I'll call on Mr John Dunnet.

PN1050

MR DUNNET: Thank you, Mr Chairman. My name is John Dunnet and I'm the Managing Director of the North Western Courier Pty Ltd and I speak today as a newspaper proprietor with some understanding of the regional view and the regional mood and as a person with some academic grounding in regional, economic and social geography. I've also served over the past 40 years on a variety of regional government and commercial bodies. I'm a former President of the New South Wales Country Press Association, the national body, Country Press Australia.

PN1051

I've also served on the state government's regional development board for the New England region. I'm Chairman of the North West magazine, a regional publication of 14 newspapers which circulates in an area from the Queensland border, Mudgee and from Lightning Ridge to Tamworth, so I personally know the distances involved and I have an awareness of the special characteristics, the land falls, the ebbs and flows, the history and the community interactions which have created the regions of this part of New South Wales.

PN1052

Now, the dissolution of Gwydir and the creation of what has been properly called a super Parkes in order to satisfy the need to excise a seat in New South Wales may well meet the formulaic requirements of the AEC, but the decision does not meet the test of economic and social equity in our area. In other words, true political equity for the inhabitants must be diminished under this proposal. Many people before me today have explained why, but I will recapitulate.

PN1053

Many people find it hard to appreciate the scale of distances in the west. The distance from Narrabri to Bourke is about the same as that from Narrabri to Sydney. It's a five-hour car trip. Distinct communities of interest exist within Gwydir or overlap with neighbouring electorates. These may range from sporting zones to health regions to community service organisation zones, from agricultural service organisations to wholesale distribution networks.

PN1054

In terms of retail and business hinterlands, the medium sized towns of Moree, Gunnedah, Narrabri, Mudgee, Coonabarabran and Bourke service our area as well, but the influence and presence of the city of Tamworth is strong, especially this area. The influence of Dubbo is much less so in this part of the state and it extends mainly towards Bourke in the west and as far as Coonabarabran to its

north. Now, the new seat which has been proposed, as many have said before, would be as vast as several European countries, but I should say that despite its thinly spread population, the sheer size of the area does encompass distinct regions and these are regions of distinct regional identity, they have their own modes of economic activity and we've heard today from many other speakers, they have different sets of cultural and social focus and again I repeat the refrain, to expect one individual to act as an effective parliamentary representative for such a vast, diverse area with distinct and often competing nodal points is quite unrealistic.

PN1055

Apart from coping with the daunting distances, a person would need to understand a vast region which includes, as we've heard, 19 Local Government Areas, a wide range of agricultural activities, all with their attendant problems, forestry and mining industries and their issues, along with the economic, cultural and social aspirations of scores of communities. The population mix ranges from disadvantaged indigenous settlements to prosperous towns.

PN1056

The new Parkes, of course, would take if we're driving from one boundary to the other, would take about 14 hours by motor vehicle and it's in this context, it would take a super human effort for an elected Member to spend an appropriate amount of time in each part of the electorate and again we've heard today the difficulties of a poor constituent with a pressing problem to travel hundreds of kilometres to see his representative. It's already enormous. It would be simply magnified to the point of impracticality in the larger proposed seat of Parkes and again we've heard this morning and I think it was from Councillor Ross Gleeson, talking about the small metropolitan seats, homogenous seats, homogenous cultural groups and I think there are 41 seats with an area of less than 100 square kilometres and we've heard that Wentworth covers 26 square kilometres.

PN1057

The local sitting Member in some cases can stroll around their seat in an afternoon. The day to day concerns in such seats tend to be clear and focused, such as airport noise or a motorway and the local people can easily see their representatives and the scale of Parkes, it's got to mitigate this fair representation. I think it's important that the redistribution committee looks again at how the seats could be reconfigured to reflect regional realities that have been mentioned by me and others today and perhaps, unlike some others, I do not presume to instruct the committee how it should do this, but note that in passing the Newell Highway bisects the eastern segment of Gwydir and around this axis rotates about 150 kilometres in each direction, irrigation of broad acre farming and regional characteristics of similar type almost all the way to Dubbo, but not that far, so in closing, please reconsider the current recommendation on the dissolution of Gwydir and surely a 49 seat solution can be found for New South Wales without the need to create such a vast seat which, while meeting the requirements of a formula, leaves the inhabitants disadvantaged in terms of practical political representation.

PN1058

MR BURCHETT: Thank you, Mr Dunnet. Mrs Ruth Strang.

PN1059

MRS STRANG: I'm Ruth Strang. I'm the co-ordinator of the Save Gwydir campaign for the National Party and I wish to discuss the redistribution proposal. Mr Chairman, committee members, welcome to Gwydir. When you leave Mascot, over half of the trip, of the flying time was the seat of Gwydir. This is the only true rural seat in New South Wales. As the campaign co-ordinator of the Save Gwydir campaign, I wish to strongly oppose the intention of the redistribution committee to abolish the federal seat of Gwydir.

PN1060

I have received many phone calls from concerned citizens who are unable to attend today due to work commitments or distance constraints. All wish to apologise. Many have signed a further petition of protest and I also ask permission to present a few letters that have been sent to me. As the campaign director for the Honourable John Anderson, Member of Gwydir for all bar one of the elections that he has stood for, I know the seat extremely well.

PN1061

I wish to present this submission in addition to my first submission. My time frame is once again over a five to six week period, the federal election campaign when time is absolutely of the essence. True democracy is one of choice and equal opportunity. Once again I'm going to concentrate on the ability of the Member, an independent individual or a small political party to adequately cover this proposed mega seat of Parkes.

PN1062

A sitting Member has access to a travel allowance both for car and plane hire, so in effect has an advantage over any potential candidate. However, as Mr Cobb has so pointedly enunciated earlier that his travel allowance would not adequately cover the new proposed electorate and he would fall very short of the money that he would need to cover this area. Distance is an issue, especially in a cabinet campaign, as in a proposed electorate, there are many major highways in the new electorate.

PN1063

I have calculated a single driving trip around the mega Parkes electorate and these are just a single trip. Broken Hill to Gunnedah, Dubbo to Barigan, Broken Hill to Moree, Bourke to Narrabri, Cobar to Hillston, Angledool to Dubbo is a distance of 3 707 kilometres. I have not included the trip to poor old Tibooburra which I don't think in an election campaign you could ever even attempt to visit due to the fact that on the way, there are fewer small towns, so you would actually be wasting your time.

PN1064

This is not a return journey and the driving time is approximately six days, an eight-hour driving day. I have not allowed for any stops on the way. The cost of one trip at 62 cents a litre for an over 2.5 litre car at the local government award rate is \$2 298. This cost does not include food, entertainment expenses or overnight accommodation for the trip. One would have to allow at least \$200 a day and then include all the stops to meet the constituents along the way and there are many stops that would have to be made.

PN1065

With one city, 11 larger towns, 16 smaller towns and 30 villages, with many different routes, all have schools, a community and health centre, all have a voting public and varied issues to solve. Driving is the only option to visit many of these smaller country areas as they do not have access to an airstrip. One cannot fly in and out as they do in some of the Western Australian electorates. To visit all of these major towns, it would take a four to six week period and the entire campaign period. The costs would be astronomical and therefore not feasible for an independent or a minor party.

PN1066

The personal touch would be immediately lost in the campaign. The opportunity to ride a bike around the electorate as the candidates do in some coastal seats is definitely not an option. There are alternate methods of campaigning in this era of mass media, television, radio and newspaper. I will start with television as it brings the face of the candidate into the sitting room and gives them the opportunity to deliver a very small portion of their policy platform to the electorate. A 30 second advertisement in a prime time slot, 6 pm to 10 pm is \$222 per advertisement.

PN1067

With five adverts a night for three weeks, it would be at a cost of \$23 100. For a new candidate and the new electorate, this would be necessary to introduce the candidate to the voting public. This sounds like a very plausible option. However, in the proposed mega seat of Parkes, there are eight commercial television stations that cover the electorate. This gives us a sum of \$184 800 which for an individual or a small party or for any party for that matter is a financial impossibility.

PN1068

If we cut the advertisements back to three a night, it would be 110 880 for three weeks. If we cut it back to a two week duration, 73 920. This would be a minimum requirement for a new candidate. If they do not have this step for financial support available to them, there is still the option of radio and newspaper to enunciate their policies. For most newspapers, a quarter page advertisement is approximately \$250. The smaller regional papers in Gwydir are all around this same price.

PN1069

However, in Dubbo and Broken Hill, the price is \$990, so to advertise in all of them, 30 and I'm not including all of the smaller papers which quite often you do advertise in, I'm only sticking to the larger regional papers, the bill would be around 45 000. Candidates would have to have the support of large numbers of voters prepared to back them financially. Radio is also reasonably expensive and here are 15 radio stations in the proposed new seat.

PN1070

Prime time 30 second advertisements, five times a day for 10 days, would cost \$37 500. As campaign director, these are the rates at which I normally advertise during Gwydir campaigns. I have just added the additional costs that would be incurred to take in the new area. I have also deleted the stations, channels and newspapers that go into Calare and Hunter. A candidate could look at these costs and decide to campaign in another way.

PN1071

Direct mailing, an approximate cost of six to 10 000 in Gwydir in the hope that all are delivered to the roadside mailboxes safely in the isolated areas and if you wanted to do a series of these, it would turn out to be very expensive. The how to vote material poses another huge problem in such a vast electorate. At present, there are 116 polling booths in Gwydir and 97 in Parkes. I would estimate that in the new seat there would be approximately 114 to 120, as we lose some and we gain some, so I'm still thinking it would be about the 120 mark. However, the thing that is going to alter quite considerably in this is the vast distances that the polling booths are going to be apart.

PN1072

As I have mentioned in my previous submission, the delivery of election material to all the polling booths is a major problem and would be. One cannot print the final election material until the drawing of the ballot paper following the close of nominations, so a time constraint is automatically imposed. With city electorates, many only have 30 to 50 polling booths, so with a group of 100 supporters and families, the candidate would effectively man all the polling booths on election day.

PN1073

This, of course, is not going to be a possibility in the new proposed electorate because the distance involved getting the election material out and for people to man them, it would just be astronomical, so once again the smaller parties and independents would be severely disadvantaged. This, of course, flows over to postal voting when so many rely on alternate days and weekly mail deliveries. In the past couple of elections, postal voting has become a major problem for everybody, especially the AEC and when we had a flood in Gwydir three elections ago, it posed a huge problem because most people, many people did not receive their ballot papers on time and also, to get yours back, you must have them stamped before the day of the election and this has also posed a major problem, so that many of these isolated and regional areas are going to have a huge problem with their voting.

PN1074

I feel that any potential candidate will have extreme difficulties with campaigning in the new seat of Parkes. This would deny us, the voters of the new electorate, the opportunity to know the candidates and their policy platforms. This denies us a choice which is a fundamental principle of democracy. Many people today have covered all the other aspects and disadvantages that a politician will face once in office. However, I feel that this will commence the minute the seat of Gwydir is abolished and the nominations open for the new seat of Parkes. Please reconsider this redistribution proposal and retain the Federation seat of Gwydir. Thank you.

PN1075

MR BURCHETT: Mr Ralph Schulze.

PN1076

MR SCHULZE: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Ralph Schulze from Narrabri speaking about the abolition of Gwydir and it's a private submission, even though I am a member of the Nationals and Narrabri Rotary and other organisations. I want to just address things that have happened since the committee released its draft, its draft proposal. There was an unprecedented number of objections.

PN1077

When you look through and certainly I'd like to pay credit to the people who've posted that material so quickly and efficiently on the website both in the first protest and also the comments on those objections. When you stroll through it, you see that there is a very strong concentration of objections from the current seat of Gwydir and to some degree from the extension into what is now in the federal seat of Parkes.

PN1078

Even some of those objections came from Sydney based people, coastal based people, still looking at why did they select Gwydir as the one to be abolished. There were very few comments that actually supported the abolition of Gwydir. One of them were from theoretical numbers people like Mackerras and people like that, but nobody who had any empathy or understanding of the differences in rural and regional Australia compared to those faced in city Australia.

PN1079

You look at all those objections and the comments and just look at the number. You might say quickly around 2 000, but when you look at the numbers of petitions and signatories on those petitions and you start to add them up and you look at the comments on the objections and most of those are in effect objections themselves, we're talking about a huge number. We're talking 10 000, unprecedented concern at the abolition of the federal division or electorate of Gwydir.

PN1080

You also notice as you stroll through and read some of the typical comments how heartfelt a lot of the objections are because there's people that are being made to suffer. The common thread that goes through those objections is really asking the two sides question, based on the concept of equal value, equality of representation, it asks how can one person, one sane person, possibly represent such a diverse and widespread area and how can the people in that area have adequate access to the Member of Parliament?

PN1081

And here I don't agree with the comment that it's all to do with area. It's not to do with area. It's to do with the linkages and the distances between communities. In fact, when you look at some of the West Australian electorates, you've got areas that are bigger even than this unmanageable proposed Parkes and when you draw the matrix, the lines of connecting the various communities in those electorates, you find it's a fairly straight triangular, a few lines here and a few lines there, but when you look at even the current seat of Parkes or the proposed unmanageable seat of Parkes and the current Gwydir, you find it's more like the craze of a broken windscreen, lines going everywhere.

PN1082

It would be a masterpiece in modern art. It's very, very different to those other electorates and I think it's been shown very, very well here today that each of those communities has its hospital, each of those communities has its problem that it wants access to their Member on and we've got to recognise, even though we're all nicely friendly in this hall, that most of those communities are competitive. We've got a hospital here in Narrabri that passed its use by date many years ago and we're fighting and have been fighting to have it brought up to - out of a third

world standard, up to Sydney like standards, but in doing that, we're competing with other towns who are in the same boat.

PN1083

The Minister or the Member has to access all those people, those different communities and somehow prioritise, assist others, just a competitive situation. If you took that same idea to Sydney, well, would it really matter if a new hospital was built on one side of Ocean Avenue or the other side of Ocean Avenue or if it was built in Wahroonga or Hornsby? It matters a hell of a lot different out here. If you look at even where you can give birth to children, obstetrics, there was a current affairs TV program on this fairly recently and you saw the tremendous agony and hardship suffered by people because their local hospital had been denied that service, that ability, that applies here.

PN1084

You go west from here, no way, you cannot give birth to a child there and that is what develops the anger and the frustration and whether it's a state matter or a federal matter doesn't matter, they need access and help from their local Member of Parliament. As I say, that hospital, that obstetrics hospital from Wahroonga, if it was closed over to Hornsby, it would not matter at all. In fact, those people can look at rationalising those things very effectively and I think somebody this morning mentioned and it's very true, in Sydney you do have communities of interest in some parts of Sydney, just the way in which you have in all these scattered communities and one area I am familiar with is the Sutherland Shire and, yes, a tremendous community of interest in the Sutherland Shire, but they have one luxury, one Member of Parliament covers all this electorate.

PN1085

It's all within Sutherland Shire, that's I think Cook and another part of it fits in here, so they've got one and a half Members to service one community, one shire area and here as we heard, 19 scattered competitive shires, scattered over huge distances and it's the distances by which they're separated that creates all the problem. The other difficulty is in abolishing Gwydir, you're really taking the inland part of New South Wales which is currently covered by four electorates, Gwydir in the north, then down to Parkes, Riverina and Farrer which goes along the Murray and you're trying to say, well, that's a huge western part of New South Wales, we'll amalgamate them all into three.

PN1086

Well, what has frustrated people here is the fact, why was that chosen as the option when it increased the hardship of people who are already suffering great hardship, whereas the same thing could be done starting in a central location, an electorate in Sydney with low population growth and then using as they have before, following the different corridors of transport out and so the saving or the numbers of people are distributed outwards, so that in the case of Gwydir, it might have meant only the adding of Muswellbrook, say, which we already go to Aberdeen, so adding Muswellbrook is no sweat or maybe Merriwa, so that that would maintain the community of interest and still bring Gwydir well above quota.

PN1087

The other thing that I certainly noticed when I was out the other day is the widespread nature of people's concerns. It's not just a few people. It's not just a few politically active people trying to agitate objection or protest. It's very genuinely held and it's very widespread, it covers people irrespective of their position, irrespective of their political support or anything. It's very widespread and it's held with a lot of agony. The thing is to me, the Commissioners have a tremendous opportunity now

PN1088

To go back and redraft the boundaries so that you minimise disadvantage rather than have the current outcome from your proposal as it stands now which exacerbates disadvantage and in choosing why pick an area that is disadvantaged and disadvantage it more, people do naturally see that as discriminatory, understandably so, because it's unnecessary. There are other ways, there are other ways to achieve it and I think the other thing that I sense is the strength that people feel that they're being denied a democratic right access to their politician and service from their parliamentarian and even if through this round of hearings that you're having you determine that Gwydir must still go, I think that you could predict there will be further challenge and even though people here don't understand the law and I'm not legally trained or even exposed to the law, but people ask how is it and it's been today that Tasmania has its five seats that's protected in the constitution and historically I believe it was given to them to make sure they joined the Federation in 1901 and also to overcome their fear of being overshadowed by the bigger colonies, Victoria and New South Wales, or particularly Melbourne and Sydney.

PN1089

That's the same principle, the same thought that's passing through the minds of people in Gwydir and seeking some protection about being treated as a number, not as a person. So the other thing constitutionally that people find it hard to work out is that there are 76 senators, the constitution says the number of seats for representatives will be as near as practicable, twice the number on the senate so people say 152, yet this distribution seeks to achieve 150. So is there a question on the abolition or reduction of New South Wales from 50 to 49? I don't know the answer to that, I certainly don't, but it's the avenue that people will look to if they fail in this round of consultation to the maintenance of the four inland direct electorates which includes the maintenance of the electorate of Gwydir.

PN1090

So just in closing, Mr Chairman and members of the augmented committee, I just plead with you to reconsider and to redraft and to take on board the concerns of the people in this part of New South Wales and to restore the seat of the electorate of Gwydir. Thank you.

PN1091

MR BURCHETT: Thank you, Mr Schulze. I will now call upon Mr Paul Kahl.

PN1092

MR KAHL: Paul Kahl, I represent a company, Merced Farming Proprietary and I wish to discuss Gwydir and I'll be short. Pardon me, I'm not loud enough. My name is Paul Kahl and I wish to speak on the Gwydir and I represent Merced Farming Proprietary. I sincerely appreciate being given the opportunity to speak

on Gwydir's future. In speaking against the Commission's proposed boundary changes to the electorate of Gwydir I would make some pertinent points. I would not think I would be the only one to express these today but I believe there is strength in number. If the proposal is based on a diminishing population it is short sighted.

PN1093

Five years ago was historically the electorate's worst drought in history. It is still on and if no significant flow is in to Keepit Dam before October our farms will not be planting or will be planting very little cotton, corn or other irrigated crop. For five years our company has been operating less than normal staff. Some local businesses have closed their doors. They are vacant houses and shops in Wee Waa. Without jobs people are moving elsewhere. Under the above circumstances the district is of course losing population. Should we cop an enormous penalty from the government because of an exceptional abnormal weather pattern? It would seem to me a massive kick in the backside for those under great stress not of their own making.

PN1094

A return to normal rain pattern, and it will come, will create jobs, bringing people back, thus changing the present population trend. Ethanol and are on the horizon and will certainly create jobs. Clinically speaking we know that country people are greatly outnumbered by those in the city. I have learned the impression that the Australians pride themselves on giving the battler a fair go. This proposal would certainly put a lie to that thought. Also it is grotesque to suggest that one man or woman could possibly represent or properly represent an electorate scattered across such a great area. Surely the Commission can see this effect.

PN1095

The Member would have a very limited ability to be available for town functions and other events. Just getting there and back would take many hours and the same for individuals or small groups wanting a face-to-face talk with their representative. I understand there are one or more Sydney electorates with static or declining numbers, why not shift their boundaries around the little and fix the problem without massively upsetting the whole western side of the State of New South Wales by making normal political life impossible in that area? It certainly flies against the fairness that Australians expect from their government. Thank you very much for giving me your time.

PN1096

MR BURCHETT: Thank you, Mr Kahl. I will now call on Mr John Clements.

PN1097

MR CLEMENTS: Thank you for the opportunity to speak and thank you for coming out here today. I'm the Executive Officer of Namoi Water. I represent an entitlement group, a water entitlement group. We cover the area from Quirindi through to Walgett, some 400 odd kilometres if you drive it from one end to the other. In the course of my work I have cause to travel out to areas such as Broken Hill and Menindee Lakes, I was out there last week, so I know what it's like to drive a large area on one issue. You're asking a future Member of Parliament to drive a very large area on a multitude of issues and I would put it to you that that

is something you need to consider seriously and I want to point to you a few areas and I will give you a little bit more on my background.

PN1098

Prior to this I worked with two state Members and a federal Member on personal staff and I have some understanding of the workload of an MP and I think that one of the things that you are missing if you don't live in these areas and if you haven't worked in these areas and no fault of your own, I think that that is probably something I can say of you, is that you haven't lived out here, you haven't worked out here and some of you haven't even worked close to the political system in the sense of representing at a constituent level. We are a minority, it's a reality in New South Wales, most of the population is on the coast.

PN1099

Now, the workload for a Member representing a minority group is far greater than the workload for a Member representing the majority and not only the majority if you're talking about city seats, 35 or so, not only a majority, they are relatively homogenous within the areas. If you can pick a block of five seats you will find areas that are quite homogenous and that cannot be said for this area. We are not different in the sense that we have huge differences but we are an economy based on resource use and resource use is site specific, so you cannot do that over a telephone. If you want to sort out the resource management issues in these areas and these economies are resource management based, they are resource use based.

PN1100

They are agricultural. In the Namoi Valley there are some \$400 million produced every year on average and the great bulk of that comes from, in terms of agricultural production, the great bulk of that comes from irrigated agriculture. The pressure on us is intense. We have a very city-based agenda, a majority exerting a desire for conservation and all sorts of outcomes and ideals that they possibly don't particularly understand, but we feel the brunt of that, we feel the brunt of that. We are the people who have to not only continue to produce that 400 million a year for the benefit of our community for the investment for the people who live here, we actually now have to defend on a political basis every week that production, not on environmental issues I would say but on political issues and the association of my organisation with the political structure is very close.

PN1101

It's not that we're cosy, it is very close that we need to work together and we need access to a local Member and that production and that value for this community, the economic outcomes are dependent these days very much on close working relationships with MPs and you are asking us not only to be a minority and in New South Wales a minority very much is on the wrong end of the resource management argument, with all the economic and social outcomes that are damaged for our communities by not having access to that political argument you're asking us to be a marginalised minority and that is what you are doing.

PN1102

Now, I would put it to you that if the issue is that New South Wales has to lose a seat then let's lose it somewhere where there's a block of seven, next to another block of seven, next to another block of seven, next to another block of seven,

next to another block of seven that are quite homogenous. Take a seat out of there. If the issue is losing a seat then lose the seat there. You will have to do boundary adjustments out here and those boundary adjustments will extend the area a little, but as other people have pointed out today, distance isn't the only issue. It is marginalised in the capacity of people to get to their Member and many of our issues are site specific.

PN1103

They can't be done over a 3D phone hook up, great technology for rural areas, but in terms of getting access, political access, we need to get access to a Member on site. And as I said, I was out at Menindee Lakes in Broken Hill last week and talking with indigenous people out there on water issues, as we should, and very interesting enough, I can verify the statements made by the Member for Parkes who is not present just now, the indigenous people out there have a close working relationship with them. That will never be conducted by a telephone hook up, it needs to be face to face, and my trip to Menindee Lakes where I needed to talk to people at Wagga, at Wilcannia, at Menindee and at Broken Hill took me five or six days by the time I got back and I only had one issue to talk about.

PN1104

You're asking a Member to represent on a number of issues and to represent that area and people who need face to face contact, people who are a political minority and therefore need more access to a Member than anybody who sits in a city seat with the same issues side by side by side. We need access to our Members. We need first hand access to them. Many of our issues are site specific, they need to travel. I'm in regular contact with my two federal Members and my two state Members and that contact is important. It is not only important for me as the representative of my organisation but it is important for my members and in the regular course of events we see these people.

PN1105

We see the Member for Gwydir sitting here today. We see him on a regular basis and we need access to him. We see our state Members, one of them here today. We need face-to-face access. We need groups of people who can sit in a room and negotiate issues which are important to us because we are a political minority struggling in a political debate that is having a significant economic impact on us. I would ask and I would say to you we understand that the minority issue will not change and with leadership we need good access to our Members but what you are doing, you are actually marginalising us as a minority by not allowing us access to Members on very site specific issues. Thank you.

PN1106

MR BURCHETT: Mrs Margaret Illingworth. Is Mrs Margaret Illingworth?

PN1107

MRS ILLINGWORTH: Yes, I'm sorry

PN1108

MR BURCHETT: That's perfectly all right. You're doing well.

PN1109

MRS ILLINGWORTH: Thank you.

PN1110

MR BURCHETT: Thank you.

PN1111

MRS ILLINGWORTH: Thank you very much indeed, Chairman and gentlemen. Yes, I'm on the short side too, and thank you indeed for coming here to Narrabri, it's very, very much appreciated. My name is Margaret Illingworth. I don't really represent anybody at all except the minority and the disadvantaged because I've been a member of Red Cross for over 50 years so it's the people that are disadvantaged that I'm very concerned about and I believe that the proposal that is before us of abolishing Gwydir and creating Parkes an enormous seat will further disadvantage people.

PN1112

I had a brother who was a federal politician and he had a seat in Sydney and it was a 20 minute plane flight and I'm reiterating what so many people have said about this, flew to Sydney and then he could cope in the day with many. I don't know, I brought some maps with me which I will pass up, but in this area that you're proposing the aerodromes are Gunnedah, Narrabri and Moree, Cobar and Bourke, otherwise it's Dubbo or Broken Hill. If you look at the map they're very, very far apart those aerodromes and I think that it makes it very more difficult when you have to hop on the plane from Canberra and then do all those things and those points have been well and truly covered by other people in this meeting here today.

PN1113

I think that one of the things that should be remembered, and we're talking about diminishing populations, one of the things that should be remembered is that there's a very great degree of optimism within the country towns within these areas and I think that that is very much epitomised in this building in which you are sitting today, the Narrabri Crossing Theatre. It's a fairly substantial sort of an enterprise in a small country town and it's very, very used by a variety of people and I do a fair amount of travelling in the seat of Gwydir and Parkes and throughout those areas there are many country towns which are building attractions which are doing things, setting up facilities for schools, setting up facilities for this, that and the other thing, there are various things, tourism which is a very big generator of jobs and of wealth in these western areas.

PN1114

People like coming out here. They like driving around. There are some bitumen roads and quite frankly, some of you like to go four wheel driving on the non-bitumen roads. So those are the sorts of things that are pointing towards the optimism of these two seats. Now, people have really drawn up the need for two Members. I couldn't agree more, in fact I think we need three, but you're not going to come at that, I know, but I do think that you could perhaps look very closely, as we've all asked you to, to saving the Gwydir Federation seat and to saving two things, please, here in this western part of New South Wales.

PN1115

Just around here in Narrabri and I'm aware that it's so in other parts of this western area we have tremendous research facilities. We have Siding Springs telescope, the Myall Vale Hutton Research I think it's called, the R A Watson Wheat Research. Those sort of research facilities are scattered throughout the whole of

the western area that's not only based here in Narrabri, there's others in Moree and all the other places that people come from, Bourke, those sorts of places, all have a uniqueness, all have something special that they work and strive for, need their Members support for, welcome people to come and visit and see what's going on and welcome people to come and see what sort of jobs that we can offer because we can offer a wide variety and we will certainly offer a very warm welcome, a warm welcome to you here today and to others who may follow and to many who may follow.

PN1116

I would thank you very sincerely for hearing us all and me especially, a country housewife that is concerned, as Red Cross members are, and as so many are throughout this whole area. Please save Gwydir. Thank you.

PN1117

MR BURCHETT: Thank you very much, Mrs Illingworth, and thank you for drawing all our attention to this fine building and the optimism and energy it represents and also exudes. We do, I can assure you, very greatly appreciate this building and that we've appreciated the opportunity to come here. We haven't quite finished. We were to have a break now but I think in view of the way it's gone and relatively small number to go it would be preferable to carry on. I have on the list is it a Ms Adga Martin or have I got the - I'm not sure I'm reading the name correctly. It was added later in ink if I got it wrong, but perhaps you can tell us.

PN1118

MS MARTIN: Thanks, Mr Chairman, Angela Martin.

PN1119

MR BURCHETT: Angela, thank you.

PN1120

MS MARTIN: Angela. Yes, I'm an angel, Executive Councillor with New South Wales Farms Association and also chair of our local district council. I'm speaking today on behalf of some of our membership but I'm also speaking as a wife and a mother of two small children and also a business partner in our grain production enterprise in the Mullaley area. It's a pleasure to be here and speak with you and also I would like to thank you for coming to Narrabri to hear these public submissions. I think they have lent an awful lot of weight to this argument, it's an argument - objections have been wide-ranging and consistent. I know myself going to the Australian Electoral Commission website reading through some of those objections there's been a diverse variety of community groups that those objections have come from.

PN1121

Some of the ones I have noted have been the Lower Namoi Cotton Growers Association, The Diocesan Council with the Bishop of Armidale and the Knights of the Southern Cross. There are "lies, damned lies and statistics", Benjamin Disraeli quoted, stated those words when he was the British Prime Minister I believe. I loathe statistics and I loathe them even more now because I'm passionate about sound policy for rural and regional people and I feel that this proposal is going to diminish that representation and the main premise of my argument today is are we serving the Electoral Act or is the Electoral Act serving

us? I feel we might find ourselves in some kind of a legislative time lock if you like. I really believe that when the Electoral Act was designed that surely the people who designed it at the time had no idea of the sort of situation we find ourselves in today and of course that other pillar of statistics if you like is the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and they say that productivity growth in the agricultural industry has grown, particularly in the cropping industry.

PN1122

So over and above we find less people, larger farms, less people in our country communities. But they still require representation and they still require sound policy. I would particularly like to acknowledge the advice of the Honourable Member for Gwydir. He's been great role model for myself and I think his arguments today putting forward stated very clearly that a Member of Parliament would find it incredibly difficult to be a cabinet Minister as well, that holds great weight today. That has the most important part of this whole argument if we want to get a fair deal for our constituents.

PN1123

I acknowledge the population projections, particularly the 2010 numbers that you are basing this on and perhaps that is the primary reason that we find ourselves in this situation. Gwydir is an electorate on the move. I think with developing coal industries, ethanol and hopefully stimulated regional growth we will continue to improve the electorate, we will continue to have improved fertility rate. I was standing too close, okay, fine. Thank you. So I was really speaking about the importance of representation today as well as we have had in the past. Some of those initiatives I might just mention include the \$12.1 billion Auslink initiative that was directly attributable to having a Deputy Prime Minister, a \$20 million structural adjustment package for the Namoi Valley irrigators and also the farm management deposit scheme which has been so vital to our primary producers during the recent drought.

PN1124

I might just quickly touch on an area I see as disparity between representation and that is when I look at the current Member for Sydney, Ms Tanya Plibersek, she's a mother like myself, she's got two small children and her electorate is the size of the Narrabri business district. How different is that to an electorate that we're suggesting might cover 379 000 square kilometres representation. It's quite a disadvantage. Let's face it, let's be completely frank, and the idea of the House of Representatives I believe is to, you know, formulate sound policy on behalf of the nation and are we respecting that democratic right of our constituents? Are our constituents worth the same, if you like, as a constituent residing in Sydney?

PN1125

My central argument today, premise of the argument is just that we continually continue to look forward and continue to argue the difference between the city and country electorates. I really feel that the Electoral Act is not serving us well at the moment if we find ourselves in a position where country electorates are based on quotas, they're based on the number of registered electors. I don't believe that's the best situation going into the future, that may need to be changed, and today I might just say I've really enjoyed listening to all the representations given by various constituents of the Gwydir electorate and I'm heartened to say that there

aren't many people wearing black today, perhaps some of our committee Members and parliamentarians because this is certainly not a funeral. Thank you.

PN1126

MR BURCHETT: Mr Trewin is the Australian statistician, have you any comments for us on "lies, damned lies and statistics"?

PN1127

MR TREWIN: I've heard it before.

PN1128

MR BURCHETT: He says he's heard it before. Yes, very well. Well, I will now call upon Wendy Buns. Wendy Buns.

PN1129

MS BUNS: Sorry for my appearance, I actually didn't realise the meeting was on and I was taking my car to be serviced and heard on the ABC that it was on in Narrabri and I thought I can do that, dropped the car at the Toyota service department and promptly grabbed the car and drove down, which is broken down I might add but I'm here and thank you all for coming. Obviously my name is Wendy Buns, I'm from Moree and I'm here just as a concerned environmentalist I suppose really and an individual. I appreciate you all coming along here today to hear our concerns about this proposal and I hope that you'll all agree that there is very great need for your Electoral Commission to prevent and stop this proposed joining of Gwydir and Parkes electorates into one overly huge electorate.

PN1130

My concern is for the individual to actually cope adequately with representing the diversity of the people in Gwydir and Parkes and I believe it may actually be placing undue amount of stress on one individual that may actually cause life-threatening concerns for that individual. Because such a proposal is so unrealistic and inhumanely high expectation upon one person, I think that how would we be able to do it ourselves? Could we do it, on our own? I don't think so. I think what needs to be considered by us urgently, is that the proposal doesn't take into consideration just how physically and mentally straining that would be upon the elected representative.

PN1131

Also imagine the despondency of the people who live in Gwydir and Parkes regions should this dreadful proposal be allowed to proceed. We would all very quickly, I believe, become aware of the impossible mission of this poor elected individual to actually represent our concerns. In fact, we would become ignored. I don't believe there's anything worse in the human feeling than to feel ignored. Democracy was designed to make sure that people were not ignored, and with this proposal, no one Member could possibly have any hope of representing all of our diverse and grave concerns, even if they wanted to. It's not humanly possible. Thus, we will effectively all be ignored in our own democracy. Thank you.

PN1132

MR BURCHETT: Thank you. Well, that leads us to the close, I think, of the people who have notified that they wished to participate by way of direct speeches. It's been indicated to me that a couple of people wanted to make some comments. I think we have enough time, Mr Easson, if you wish to make some

comments for five minutes. I think we can give you five minutes. Or someone on your behalf. Is that it? Not on your behalf, Mr Easson? Very well.

PN1133

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: It would be a first in Australia if he was speaking on your behalf, I think, wouldn't it?

PN1134

MR BURCHETT: I think it's happened occasionally, but anyway.

PN1135

MR JAESCHKE: It's Graham Jaeschke. I'm the State Director of the Liberal Party, New South Wales Division. I can predict now that Mr Easson probably would be a lot braver yesterday than he would be today. But I just wanted to, I think, reinforce what the Honourable Member for Gwydir said about the size and it is fact that there are seats bigger than the seat proposed. I just wanted to use that personal experience and anecdote from my experience to I think show that there are differences with some of those seats that are larger than the proposed seat of Parkes. I come from the federal seat of Grey in South Australia, born and bred, our family farm is still in the seat of Grey and I also lived in Port Augusta for 12 months, helping to win the seat in 1993.

PN1136

Yes, the Coalition did pick up some seats in 1993. One of them happened to be the seat of Grey. The federal seat of Grey makes up 93 per cent of the state of South Australia, and while I haven't got the exact figures from the polling booths, I estimate that about 10 per cent of the seat is agricultural, with some large service cities which are sometimes called the Iron Triangle, but I think they've actually broken that mould now, and Port Pirie, Port Augusta, Whyalla, and the large fishing and agricultural city of Port Lincoln. That's about 10 per cent of the seat of Grey. But it makes up about 90 per cent of the population of the seat. The remaining 90 per cent of the seat is what you'd call outback, pastoral and desert. Port Augusta is the main service centre for that 90 per cent of the seat. Port Augusta, as you might know, is called the crossroads of Australia, and effectively the crossroads of the seat of Grey.

PN1137

The people in those outback-pastoral areas do gravitate towards Port Augusta and it's not unheard of that I think most people would go through Port Augusta at least once a year, they'd have a reason to go through Port Augusta. Port Augusta is the only base in the seat for the Royal Flying Doctor Service and the great School of the Air is based in Port Augusta as well, serving that area. It is a hub and it is a spoke for that large area and size for the seat of Grey. In a short period of time, the Liberal Party will hold a pre-selection in Grey and it's a what's called a plebiscite, where every party member in the seat of Grey and the Liberal Party member is eligible to attend, and that will be held in Port Augusta for one reason, and that is it's the logical choice for the whole of the seat.

PN1138

So I just wanted to put that point to you, that I think the proposed seat is a lot different to the sort of seats like Grey, and not knowing too much about Kalgoorlie and Kennedy and the Northern Territory seats, but I think Grey is a good example where a very large area is serviced by a very small population and I

think the proposed seat is quite different to the seat of Grey. I would still like to point out that Barry Westland, when he campaigned for the seat of Grey, by the election day was on his third car, even though he - most of the population was only in 10 per cent of the seat, he still went through three cars to get himself elected to the seat of Grey. I think this reinforces the point that Mark Speakman made yesterday, making the seats more manageable, and I do reinforce the points made not only by the Member for Gwydir, but for the Member for Parkes. Thank you very much.

PN1139

MR BURCHETT: Mr Easson, you do want to say something?

PN1140

MR EASSON: Yes. Surprisingly. I'll try and be brief. I just want to cover a few points. What's a community? Some of the general points made by people end with the name of the division and the seven per cent problem. Now, with a community, we've heard today talk about 130 towns in Parkes spheres of influence and so forth and so on. But I think we should be generous about what constitutes a community. I can belong to a town, regard myself as part of that community, belong to a Local Government Area or region, a division even, and regard myself as part of a community. Moreover, it should not surprise the commission to find that country people have a much stronger identification, as being part of a community than do metropolitan people.

PN1141

So it should not surprise if a country division which is proposed to be abolished, that there will be far more objections from those electors affected than were such a division to be a metropolitan division. We acknowledge those things. However, numbers are numbers and we did have a numerical shortfall in the inland country. Second matter, I found John Anderson's submission to you today extremely interesting and very well put. I can remind you of one of the points which he made and that was that - - -

PN1142

MR BURCHETT: Unfortunately, Mr Easson, before you do so, my attention has been drawn to the fact that you did not announce who you represented, which was - may be sure enough when you're speaking to us, but there are people in the audience who do not know.

PN1143

MR EASSON: I represent the Australian Labor Party. The Australian Labor Party. Mr Anderson said that in an ideal world, it would be great if you could represent, say, no more than say six Local Government Areas. Well, in the current division of Gwydir, there are 16 Local Government Areas, either all or part in his division. Under the Committee's proposal, the division of Parkes would have, all or in part, 18 Local Government Areas, the same number as does Farrer. Farrer also has all or in part 18 Local Government Areas. We haven't had so many objections re Parkes - re Farrer, but I can understand that in the sense that the division of Gwydir is proposed to be abolished.

PN1144

On the matter of the name of the division, the Labor Party did not object to the name being abolished. We can understand that there are arguments either way as

to whether the name should be Parkes or Gwydir. Were the augmented Commission to revert the name of the seat being abolished, the Labor Party would also have no objection. So the matter of the name, we can see arguments either way and for that reason, we play in this instance, King Solomon. I'd like to end with what I describe as the seven per cent problem. In so doing, I'd like to talk about an area that is two and a half times the size of Tasmania, or half the size of Germany, or half the size of Japan, and that is the far west of the current division of Parkes which comprises Cobar, Central Darling and Unincorporated Far West. Together, they account for 24 per cent of New South Wales; 24 per cent.

PN1145

They contain only 4 800 electors. If we looked at the Commissioners' proposed Parkes and we take the six Local Government Areas on the eastern side starting with Moree, Narrabri, Gunnedah, Warrumbungle, Dubbo, Narromine, those six Local Government Areas comprise 70 per cent of the electors in the proposed division of Parkes. The reason why the proposed division covers 47 per cent of New South Wales is because the western side of the proposed division puts together Bourke, Brewarrina, Walgett, Cobar, Central Darling, Unincorporated Far West, they are all part of the western division of New South Wales, and six areas have a clear territorial identity, western division. They have a distinct pattern of land use and they have a functional interaction with each other.

PN1146

Now, in 1993 - the division of Parkes, until 2001, covered those places. It comprised 40 per cent of New South Wales, seven per cent difference between the Parkes which the Commissioners established in 1991 and about which there were no objections from the National Party, and the proposed division of Parkes in the year 2006, there is a seven per cent difference in the area of New South Wales which that division will cover. As I explained, that difference is accounted for by the fact that more of the western division of New South Wales is in the proposed division than in the earlier division of Parkes. So what I'm trying to say to the Commission is that should the augmented Commission wish to try and change the size of the proposed division, I believe on behalf of the Labor Party, that they will be dispersing like communities in the western division which they currently have together.

PN1147

Were you to look at the Liberal Party's objection in some detail, really, that objection is about trying to divide up between three divisions, that part of the western division of New South Wales, instead of keeping it in one. They would have less of a community of interest within those three divisions than what the original committee proposal with this division of Parkes. Thank you.

PN1148

MR BURCHETT: Well, does that close proceedings? We still have Jenny Gardiner? Right.

PN1149

MS GARDINER: Thank you, Mr Commissioners, just quickly, we've noted that Mr Easson's presentation, apart from the fact that he made those same points at yesterday's hearing and I pointed out for the benefit of the audience that one of the - the second objector to these proposed boundaries was indeed the Honourable

Ralph Hunt, who was the former Member for Gwydir and also for years the Chairman of the Western Lands Advisory Council. So Mr Easson's comments would have fallen on deaf ears when it came to Ralph Hunt's assessment of the proposed boundaries. Secondly, we note that Mr Easson was representing, as what he should, the Australian Labor Party, but there doesn't seem to be any representative from Country Labor.

PN1150

Finally, Mr Commissioners, one of you asked Dr Roy Powell earlier today if he had some further statistical data to support his case in relation to the population projections and the economic development in the region, so I'd like to just hand up to you a copy of a report that I referred to, the Namoi Region Economy, which provides the further information which might assist you with the remainder of your deliberations. On behalf of the National Party, I certainly wish you well in those deliberations on this important matter. Thank you very much.

PN1151

MR BURCHETT: Mr Anderson?

PN1152

MR ANDERSON: Might I simply, on behalf of the constituents of Gwydir, I think regardless of how they vote, they would join me in expressing our appreciation for the time that you have made, with your fellow committee members, to come out here and to hear us, I think with great courtesy and good humour. I know I appreciate and I'm certain I speak for all of the people in Gwydir who have expressed a very real interest in this matter clearly in recent weeks. Thank you.

PN1153

MR BURCHETT: Thank you very much for those remarks, Mr Anderson, and I wish to reciprocate by saying, and I'm sure I'm speaking on behalf of every single member of the augmented Commission, we have very much appreciated the opportunity to come up here and to hear at first hand the objections that you so ably presented and others have presented. Thank you.

<ADJOURNED INDEFINITELY

[3.50P.M.]