

**PUBLIC INQUIRY OF THE AUGMENTED ELECTORAL COMMISSION FOR THE
NORTHERN TERRITORY**

CONDUCTED DARWIN ON TUESDAY 22 NOVEMBER 2016

BEFORE:

THE HON. D. COWDROY OAM QC

(Chairperson of the Australian Electoral Commission)

MR D. KALISCH

(Australian Statistician and member of the Australian Electoral Commission)

MR T. ROGERS

(Electoral Commissioner, Australian Electoral Commission)

MS J. CRISP

(Auditor-General for the Northern Territory)

MR M. SHERRY

(Australian Electoral Officer for the Northern Territory)

MR C. SANDY

(Surveyor-General of the Northern Territory)

1 CHAIR: We'll commence at the appointed time, it's 8.30. Might
2 I say good morning to everybody who's here in this room.
3 Welcome to this hearing of the augmented Electoral
4 Commission for the Northern Territory. I'd like to begin
5 by acknowledging the Larrakia People, the traditional
6 custodians of the land on which we meet today, and pay
7 our respects to their Elders both past and present.

8 My name is Dennis Cowdroy, I am the Chair of the
9 augmented Electoral Commission. The other members of the
10 augmented Electoral Commission present are
11 Mr David Kalisch on my right, who is the Australian
12 Statistician. On my left Mr Tom Rogers who is the
13 Electoral Commissioner. The other members who make up
14 the augmented Electoral Commission are Ms Julie Crisp,
15 the Auditor-General for the Northern Territory on my far
16 right. And on my far left is Mr Mick Sherry, the
17 Australian Electoral Officer for the Northern Territory.
18 And to his right is Mr Craig Sandy, the Surveyor-General
19 for the Northern Territory.

20 Part IV of the Commonwealth Electoral Act sets out
21 the requirements to be followed in conducting
22 redistributions. This redistribution in the Northern
23 Territory is required because more than seven years have
24 elapsed since the last redistribution was determined.
25 And by the Electoral Act there must be a redistribution
26 every seven years at the latest.

27 In accordance with section 66 of the Electoral Act,
28 the redistribution committee for the Northern Territory
29 has prepared a proposal for the redistribution of the
30 Northern Territory into two Federal electoral divisions.
31 The proposal together with written reasons for the

1 proposal required by section 67 of the Electoral Act was
2 released by the Redistribution Committee on 9 September
3 of this year. In accordance with section 68 of the
4 Electoral Act, interested individuals and organisations
5 were invited to make written objections to the proposed
6 redistribution and to provide written comments on those
7 objections. A total of four objections and one comment
8 on objections were received by the required timeframes.

9 The augmented Electoral Commission is required by
10 sub-section 72(1) of the Electoral Act to consider all
11 objections lodged in relation to the redistribution
12 proposal and all comments on objections. The inquiry
13 here today provides the opportunity for members of the
14 public to make oral submissions about those objections.

15 The Electoral Act specifies how the redistribution
16 process is conducted and which factors are to be taken
17 into account. Sub-section 73(4) of the Electoral Act
18 states that the primary consideration for the augmented
19 Electoral Commission is that each electoral division meet
20 certain numerical requirements in the form of the current
21 enrolment quota, and the projected enrolment quota and
22 acceptable tolerances around those two quotas.

23 Subject to an electoral division satisfying those
24 numbers, sub-section 73(4) also requires we have regard
25 to communities of interest within electoral divisions.
26 That is economic, social and regional interests. We have
27 to have regard to the means of communication and travel
28 within the electoral divisions, and the physical features
29 and area of the electoral divisions. The boundaries of
30 existing electoral divisions are also considered although
31 that is of lesser importance. Boundaries may change and

1 often there has to be compensating adjustments to make
2 sure that the electoral divisions are within those
3 numerical tolerances.

4 The inquiry today will be recorded and transcripts
5 of proceedings will be made available as part of the
6 augmented Electoral Commission's report and therefore
7 will be on the Australian Electoral Commission website
8 once this report has been tabled in parliament. We would
9 ask people making submissions to come to the table in
10 front, and please state their name before they commence
11 their presentation.

12 After this inquiry we will deliberate and we shall
13 finalise our considerations by Tuesday, 20 December at
14 the latest. We shall endeavour to make a public
15 announcement as soon as practicable. We would ask
16 speakers to be as concise as possible. I see that in the
17 room today Ms Gardner, you are present.

18 MS GARDNER: Yes.

19 CHAIR: And might I first of all commend you on the interest
20 you have taken in the redistribution and the fact that
21 you took the trouble to make a submission. And I'm going
22 to ask you to come to this table here and we would very
23 much like to hear what your particular concern is. We
24 don't debate but we take into account what you say and in
25 our deliberations your thoughts and your views will
26 certainly be considered.

27 MS GARDNER: Thank you.

28 CHAIR: Thank you. If you just state your name Ms Gardner, for
29 the record.

30 MS GARDNER: Good morning, my name is Lorraine Gardner.

31 CHAIR: Yes.

1 MS GARDNER: And I'm a resident of the Wagait Shire. The
2 Wagait Shire and the Wagait community is actually only
3 10 kilometres away from Darwin and it's directly behind
4 you across the harbour. You can actually see the land
5 from here.

6 CHAIR: I can see it.

7 MS GARDNER: We are linked to Darwin by both ferry and road.
8 The ferry trip takes ten minutes and the road trip an
9 hour and a half. The Darwin bus service meets the ferry
10 timetables and many of the residents have their second
11 car parked at Cullen Bay.

12 The area within the Solomon electorate is the main
13 supply chain for the Wagait Beach community. Any
14 political outcomes for Solomon have an immediate and
15 direct impact on our community. Our children attend pre,
16 primary, middle and secondary schooling in the immediate
17 Darwin area. They use all of Darwin's sporting
18 facilities and are included in Darwin's sports clubs.
19 Most of their recreational and entertainment activities
20 with their school friends and their family are in the
21 Darwin area.

22 For the adults their employment, healthcare,
23 entertainment, retail and trade shopping is also in the
24 Solomon area. They also use the roads within the
25 electorate on a daily basis. The retired residents of
26 Wagait Beach also use Darwin as their main supply chain
27 as they get reduced fares on the ferry and it's a lot
28 cheaper for them to come across than it is to drive.

29 I understand that I missed the advertisement for
30 suggestions and yes, Wagait Beach is joined to Lingiari
31 electorate by road. But the service ferry is our road.

1 Apart from the road, the residents within the shire have
2 little or no connection with any of the communities or
3 towns in the Lingiari division.

4 I also understand that the division of Solomon needs
5 to reduce electors. Given that there are approximately
6 300 voters within the Shire of Wagait, this will have
7 little or no impact on voting numbers. And as there is
8 an NT electoral office person here, I would also
9 recommend that if there are any boundary changes within
10 the NT electorate, that the Wagait Shire should be
11 included in the Port of Darwin because exactly the same
12 argument applies. So thank you, that's my view. If you
13 have any questions.

14 CHAIR: Just to clarify. You said - was it one and a half
15 hours by road to Darwin?

16 MS GARDNER: Yes, it's 130 kilometres to Darwin by road.

17 CHAIR: Could I ask you, what is the make up of the population
18 largely in the area where you live. Is it residential?

19 MS GARDNER: It is residential and sadly we have no
20 infrastructure for employment apart from a local shop and
21 the shire. So the majority of the residents all come
22 here to Darwin. The ferry service has just put in a new
23 boat which is \$2.5m and so, you know, they know that
24 everything that we do is here in the Darwin area.

25 CHAIR: What's the nature of the population in the sense that
26 are they young, middle aged?

27 MS GARDNER: It's a real - quite a mixture. There's a lot of
28 retired people over there but then there's - yeah, it's a
29 whole - yeah, an amazing mixture of people, so. And I
30 couldn't get the latest stats because the ones on the
31 internet were I think it was 2011 I think the last one

1 were but the most recent would have it better up to date.

2 CHAIR: What happens if there's some medical emergency, is
3 there some transport to bring you across?

4 MS GARDNER: Yes, we have - because the Belyuen community, the
5 Aboriginal community is 15 kilometres away, we do have
6 access to those medical staff and we contact the
7 Darwin Hospital, let them know what's happening and they
8 assess what we need and a plane will be - or a helicopter
9 will be flown in if it's a real emergency. Otherwise
10 again if it's not a big emergency, on the ferry, or there
11 is an ambulance that will do the hour and a half. But it
12 meets another ambulance half way. So.

13 CHAIR: Yes. Does anyone have any questions?

14 MS GARDNER: It's a lovely spot and if anyone has time to spare
15 it's worth going over and having a look. Darwin's best
16 kept secret it is actually.

17 CHAIR: How often do the ferries run?

18 MS GARDNER: Peak hour is in - spots in less than an hour and
19 then during the day it's every two hours.

20 CHAIR: Every two hours during the day.

21 MS GARDNER: Yeah. The last ferry during the week is at
22 11 o'clock and the last one on weekends is midnight.

23 CHAIR: In the morning or evening? In the evening, I see.

24 MS GARDNER: Midnight yeah, in the evening, and in the morning
25 it starts - leaves here at quarter to six in the morning,
26 5.45 am.

27 CHAIR: Yes.

28 MS GARDNER: So I think there's about 12 services a day.

29 CHAIR: Does anyone have any questions at all? No. All right,
30 I think you've made a very, very interesting submission
31 Ms Gardner, and as I say I commend you on your interest

1 in such an important aspect of our democracy. Thank you
2 very much for coming in. I think yes, the evidence of
3 this next witness can be read into the record please.

4 MISS TAYLOR: I'm Nicole Taylor, National Redistributions
5 Manager. I'm reading a submission from Jeff Waddell who
6 was unable to attend the inquiry. "Wagait Shire is an
7 interesting issue to be raised and certainly worthy of
8 consideration. However I would not be inclined to
9 include it in Solomon as the objective of this
10 redistribution is to reduce Solomon's enrolment and
11 increase Lingiari's.

12 In relation to the Litchfield municipality, the
13 proposed new boundaries actually unite all of the
14 Litchfield municipality in Lingiari as opposed to the
15 current split between Solomon and Lingiari. So from a
16 community interest perspective, I think the proposed
17 boundaries are an improvement on the current situation.

18 In relation to the alignment of Commonwealth
19 electoral division boundaries with Territory boundaries,
20 the only State to do that currently is Tasmania and they
21 use the Hare-Clark voting system for State elections.
22 However that alignment is the other way around, that is
23 the State aligns with the Commonwealth. What's proposed
24 here is for the Commonwealth to align with the Territory
25 and Territory redistributions are held more frequently
26 than every seven years.

27 Given that there are an even number of Commonwealth
28 divisions for the Northern Territory, and an odd number,
29 25, of Territory electorates, the risk of one division
30 being over enrolled and the other being under enrolled
31 seems to me to be enhanced if this practice is adopted.

1 On the origin of enrolment projections, I am
2 concerned that in some instances the projected enrolment
3 figures do seem to have a high margin of error. Having
4 recently completed a submission to the State
5 Redistribution of Queensland, the 2008 enrolment
6 projections were significantly out. They forecast
7 17.76 per cent increase in enrolment over eight years and
8 achieved just 11.46 per cent. A discrepancy of
9 165 759 electors.

10 Similarly the Commonwealth Redistribution of
11 Queensland which could commence next month has had
12 similar projection errors. At the 2009 redistribution,
13 the projected enrolment at the projected date was
14 143 066 electors less than was forecast. A real growth
15 of 4.66 per cent over the three and a half years, when
16 10.06 per cent was projected. The enrolment numbers the
17 AEC was expecting in Queensland by the projection date of
18 9 July 2012 were not achieved until December 2014, two
19 and a half years later. Apart from those four issues, I
20 don't think there's anything else I feel I need to add."

21 CHAIR: Very well thank you. That submission will be noted as
22 well. I think in view of the time we should perhaps wait
23 for another 15 minutes or so.

24 MR ROGERS: I think it would be wise to do that just in case
25 somebody else walks in.

26 CHAIR: Yes. We propose to wait but thank you very much
27 Ms Gardner for your attendance.

28 MS GARDNER: Thank you very much. Bye, bye.

29 CHAIR: Thank you bye. I think if it's being recorded I think
30 we can go off the record while we wait just to see
31 whether anyone else attends the inquiry.

1 (Short adjournment.)

2 CHAIR: I note that it is now 9 am and no other member of the
3 public has appeared before this hearing. Accordingly I
4 think it is appropriate in the absence of any indication
5 of someone wishing to attend, that we now close the
6 hearing. Accordingly I will conclude the hearing and we
7 thank everybody for attending and we will now continue
8 with our deliberations. Thank you.

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