



**THE FEDERAL
REDISTRIBUTION
NEW SOUTH WALES**

Comment on Objections 175

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3 pages

Objection to the proposed electoral boundary redistribution resulting in abolition of the current North Sydney Electoral District.

The following matters are of grave concern to many of the electorate in North Sydney.

Historic Matters

North Sydney has existed since the first federal election some 123 years ago. It has a long-established and cohesive community of residents, businesses, and social organisations. The connections across this community have endured though all of the historic upheavals since federation. This historic electorate has provided the nation with a Prime Minister, a Treasurer and one of the earliest and most renowned political independents, Ted Mack. To disperse this strong community of interest among younger electoral districts for the sake of electoral numbers, is to disrespect that history.

A clear marker of the commonality of community interest across North Sydney is that this is one of the few electorates that voted in favour of an Indigenous Voice to Parliament. It seems disingenuous to dissolve this community of interest and disperse it among electorates that expressed their antipathy to such a Voice.

It would be reasonable to ask why it is appropriate to abolish one of the oldest electorates in Australia when there are other alternatives available to achieve the balance of electoral numbers sought by the Electoral Commission. More on this below.

Communities of Interest

North Sydney is home to many sports, humanitarian, environmental, educational and religious groups. Some of these have historic links dating back to the beginning of the last century. Many maintain collegial links with their spin-off social organisations in surrounding metropolitan areas but they are recognised for their origin in and connection to North Sydney – the proposed redistribution of boundaries assumes away this cohesive community of social interest.

North Sydney is home to the third largest (until recently the second largest) business centre in the metropolitan area. The electorate contains some 28,000 small to medium size businesses whose needs do not overlap with those of the newly proposed areas of Bradfield, Bennelong or Warringah. These businesses and industries have always enjoyed the attention of a dedicated local member who understands the special concerns and requirements of a complex CBD electorate.

Again, all of these groups have a strong North Sydney identity, one which is unlikely to sit comfortably in electorates which are principally suburban in style and origin.

Projected Growth

The AEC proposed redistribution appears to rely primarily on Australian Census data for its growth projections. These do not take into account the growth in housing already underway in the existing district nor the proposed additional 5,900 new homes the State Government expects to see built in the North Sydney Local Government Area by 2029.

The pressure from the NSW government for increased density in inner areas and the likelihood that significant growth will occur in the next 5 years in the 4 adjoining LGAs within the electorate would suggest that abolishing the seat of North Sydney at this time is premature. This commitment to inner city growth will be amplified by recent changes to NSW planning rules allowing more medium density development in existing residential areas. It seems likely that pressure from the Federal Government to encourage growth in housing will also result in more residential development in the existing electorate.

It seems counterintuitive to make such significant changes to the electorate when all indications are that the balance of elector numbers is likely to change significantly well within the next term of the AEC consideration of boundary criteria.

Alternative Redistributions

There are several alternative ways to revise electoral district boundaries that would yield results which would equally satisfy AEC criteria for electoral district size. Perhaps more importantly, and in consideration of many of the matters raised above, it is possible to design alternative boundary changes that

reduce the number of electorates from 47 to 46; that more effectively address the AEC concern to maintain cohesive communities of interest; and that would have a much longer life span.

The changes would require adding relatively small geographic elements of Warringah, Bennelong and Bradfield to North Sydney. Perusal of the AEC electoral district map indicates that a slightly enlarged and geographically contiguous North Sydney electorate could absorb approximately 11,000 electors from these three electoral districts while maintaining their capacity to satisfy the 2028 AEC size criteria. This would bring North Sydney up to approximately 123,000 not including the projected growth discussed above.

In addition, by combining parts of Berowra (formed in 1969) with Mackellar (formed in 1949) and parts of Bradfield, a viable and still growing new electorate could be created. This new electorate would satisfy the requirement to reduce from 47 to 46 electoral districts but would present many fewer of the social, business and historic issues that the AEC, in its discussion of electoral district criteria, wishes to avoid.

Conclusion

There are many reasons why North Sydney should remain one of Australia's longest existing electorates. One of the prime drivers of the proposed change is to reduce by one the number of NSW electorates while attending to the electoral district size criteria and, at the same time, remaining true to the other social and community values identified by the AEC. I suggest, most respectfully, that these objectives can be more effectively achieved and with longer effect by adopting an alternative strategy.

I strongly object to the AEC proposal to abolish the electorate of North Sydney.

Dr R. W. Robertson