

2016-17 Legislative Council Electoral Boundaries Initial Redistribution Proposal

Comments from the perspective of Apsley

Introduction

These comments are provided to the Legislative Council Electoral Boundaries Redistribution Committee by the current member for Apsley. I have served the Tasmanian people and this Division as the elected member since 2004, and was re-elected for a six year term in 2016. My long-term residence in and commitment to, this Division has provided me with the background to comment on the proposed changes to Apsley and other Divisions. I have sought and received local expert opinion on these issues, and this response reflects the consensus of those opinions.

While I understand the requirement for the Redistribution Committee to determine a whole-of-state solution, my comments are primarily concerned with the proposed changes to the areas within or surrounding the current Division of Apsley. My commitment, however, is to arrive at the best solution for the people of Tasmania.

The essence of my comments, provided in more detail in this response, are:

1. I do not believe that there is sufficient evidence for making the major changes proposed at this stage, and would prefer the Committee look at making only minor adjustment changes for this iteration. Future ABS Census data will be available for the next redistribution cycle and will provide greater certainty for longer term planning.
2. The proposed new Division of McIntyre does not, in my opinion, meet the requirement for identifiable communities of interest and could potentially result in a loss of identity and representation for the people of the north-east and east coasts.
3. I believe that there may be alternative models to meet the requirements of this redistribution.
4. If the Committee decides to implement the currently proposed model I have additional comments.

My understanding of the reasons for the proposed changes

I understand the requirements of the *Legislative Council Electoral Boundaries Act 1995* and the primary need to ensure the number of electors within each Division remain within the defined quotas. I also understand the past and projected proportionate increased number of electors in the south and south-east of the State, and the difficulty this poses for maintaining the Division numbers.

I also note that the Committee's other primary priority is to take into account 'communities of interest' within each Council division. However, the term 'community of interest' is not clearly defined, and the Committee's methodology for identifying and rating the relative importance of various overlapping communities of interest is not specified.

The *Initial Redistribution Proposal* paper mentions as a reason for change that '*short term decisions*' could '*potentially result*' in less stability and consistency for electors and their representatives, and that '*long term boundaries*' are therefore favoured. The paper continues that '*the current redistribution is making enrolment adjustments to an ongoing configuration of divisions, and is therefore mindful of maintaining consistency with the current arrangement as far as practicable*'. I must admit to not fully understanding these points. Is the Committee favouring long-term stability, or does it want to maintain consistency with current arrangements? It is not clear from the currently provided reasons.

Page 12 of the paper provides the reasons for the proposed changes to the Division of Apsley. It cites the current and projected population numbers in Murchison, Montgomery and Mersey as the key

drivers for change i.e. there is a need for more electors within these Divisions. The only possible Division from which these can be gleaned is Western Tiers as it is the only contiguous Division. This then requires Western Tiers to gather more numbers, hence the need to impinge on other Divisions. Rather than push Western Tiers further to the South, or more across the centre, the proposal is to merge the Western Tiers Division with the northern part of Apsley to create a newly-named Division of McIntyre. The current southern portion of Apsley would be merged with parts of the current Rumney to create a newly-named Division of Prosser.

Point 1: insufficient justification for major changes

My first major point is to question the justification for making such major changes to the current Divisions of Western Tiers and Apsley.

In the north-west the differences from the quota for current (2016) to projected (2021) are: Murchison (-3.08% to -6.56%), Montgomery (-2.94% to -5.06%) and Mersey (-2.85% to -4.20%). The requirement for the Redistribution Committee is to ensure that these numbers do not vary by more than 10% within 4½ years' time. It would appear that these numbers are within this range i.e. if nothing changes then these Divisions are still well within limits. Even extrapolating out to nine years (the timing of the next redistribution) Murchison would be likely to be around -10.02%, and then perhaps due for a change.

As I understand it, the remit of the Committee is only to keep Divisions within the 10% within 4½ years, not to try and get them as close to 0% as possible. The current proposal seems to aim to smooth out the numbers, in the interests of 'long term stability', but this does not appear to be a requirement of the Committee.

To further argue this point, the data is based on ABS population projections which are themselves based on 2011 Census data. Appendix III provides the detail of the projections, and notes that the projected (2021) figures are based on 2015 ERP (Estimated Resident Population) which are derived from the *Population Projection 2012* ABS publication which uses data from the 2011 Census. Using this data to extrapolate out to the next iteration of the boundary redistribution would mean that population figures in 2026 would be assessed from data collected in 2011. It is clear that these projections are sometimes wrong (for example, see Rumney with its current +10.15% despite the best efforts of the previous Redistribution Committee), and are therefore perhaps not sufficient basis for the Committee to make major changes unless the need is absolute (as is clear with the current situation in Rumney).

In conclusion, my assessment is that the numbers provided in the paper justify a change in the Division of Rumney, which can perhaps be accommodated by other changes around the Hobart and south-east region, but the justification for such major changes as the creation of McIntyre and Prosser are not clearly apparent.

Point 2: McIntyre has a questionable community of interest

The reason given for the creation of McIntyre is that it '*covers the rural areas that surround and generally have community of interest with the greater Launceston area*'. The proposed new Division will be constituted by the merger of parts of the current Launceston, Western Tiers and Apsley Divisions, with the resultant 2016 actual enrolment from the following local government areas: Break O'Day, Dorset and Flinders 10,747, Northern Midlands, Kentish and Meander Valley 15,884.

The current Apsley Division services and represents the eastern coast of Tasmania, from Flinders and Dorset through Break O'Day, Glamorgan Spring Bay down to the towns of Kempton, Orford and Campagna. The community of interest is a strong non-metropolitan, agricultural and rural population based on the east.

The proposed McIntyre Division will move the centre of this Division towards the north-west, with 60% of electors coming from the Northern Midlands, Kentish and Meander Valley communities, and

changes the community of interest to northern communities based around Launceston. I would argue that this would, over time, disenfranchise people of the Flinders, Dorset and Break O'Day areas.

In my view, the community of interest of the east coast of Tasmania, currently represented through the Division of Apsley is a stronger community of interest than that proposed for McIntyre. Creation of a Division of McIntyre would represent a major shift of the electoral base from the north-east to the centre and north-west.

Point 3: Alternative models

I am conscious of the work and effort that the Committee has already put into considering various models and scenarios, but the opportunity was provided to consider different models using access to mapping software. Inevitably this exercise comes down to one of winners and losers, with subjective judgements made about various communities of interest, and shifting boundaries based on local knowledge and views. In my experience solving a problem from one perspective will often create problems from others.

As Apsley and Western Tiers are two of the most significantly affected Divisions, people from both separately came up with alternative models. The preferred option from the Apsley perspective created problems for the Western Tiers viewpoint, and models proposed by Western Tiers similarly present some issues for the Apsley perspective.

One model proposed by Mr Hall retains Western Tiers by losing electors to Montgomery and Mersey, and gaining in communities such as Campbell Town, Ross and Kempton from Apsley. Apsley is expanded southwards to include the Tasman Peninsula and Sorell. This model obviates the need for a McIntyre or Prosser.

I would like to indicate that I would be available to assist in any detailed process in delivering the best outcome should the committee consider this beneficial. I acknowledge that 1995 Act was constructed to ensure that the sitting MP had no more a role than any other member of the community in the redistribution, however I believe that in regard to community of interest matters a sitting member would have an extensive understanding of that area.

Point 4: comments on the proposed model

If the Committee decides to implement the proposed model then I would like to provide the following comments for consideration:

- The communities of Coles Bay and Bicheno are included in the proposed Division of Prosser, but these communities naturally associate with the north (travelling to Launceston for most of their business), while Swansea residents tend to travel south. It would therefore seem sensible to move the northern boundary of Prosser southwards so that Bicheno and Coles Bay are in McIntyre and Swansea remains in Prosser.
- Page 11 of the paper makes note of the committee's intention to adhere to principal of utilising locality and local government boundaries when altering boundaries of existing divisions, however:
 - The State Government's commitment to reviewing Local Government arrangements, perhaps with a view to amalgamations, is a current political and community issue which is a long way from being resolved. Given current issues with some local government areas it would seem inappropriate to base decisions too heavily on this criteria in the short term.
 - The criteria of using 'means of communication and travel', including electoral boundaries, is a lesser one for the Committee than the two primary criteria. Communities of interest is required to be considered as a higher priority than locality boundaries.

- I would like to put forward a suggested name change for Prosser should this proposed model be implemented. My suggestion would be the electorate of 'Jordan'. From 1856 to 1885 the electoral division in the Legislative Council was named 'Jordan'. This has a strong connection to the Southern Midlands which one could argue will be around the greater part in area of the new electorate. Another connection is that two members were Edward and Isaac Bisdee, a name that remains prominent in the Southern Midlands community today. Additional to those two points is that the Jordan River is a perennial river located in the Midlands region. The Jordan River rises in Lake Tiberias below Mount Anstey, south of the settlement of Jericho, near Oatlands, the river flows generally north, then west by south. I trust that this suggestion will be considered by the tribunal in the course of its deliberations.

Summary of comments

From the perspective of the current member for Apsley the proposed change to McIntyre and Prosser represents a significant change for electors. If the Committee decides to proceed with this model then in order to communicate this to electors the reasons for the changes need to be clearly articulated through public statements. There is likely to be some resentment towards and criticism of the move and this is already being evident with comment and feedback that I am receiving as I move around the current Apsley electorate.

I would like to think that there are less disruptive models which still meet the requirements of the Act and the Committee, but which would also retain the already identified communities of interest, and reflect the work already put in in these Divisions to provide representation in the Legislative Council. I would be happy to work further with the Committee to further explore and develop these plans if required.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important process.