

Peter Andren M.P.  
Federal Member for Calare

24 July 2006

Redistribution Committee for NSW  
PO Box 20014  
WORLD SQUARE NSW 2002

Dear Committee Members,

Please accept this letter as my objection to the NSW Redistribution Committee's proposed redistribution of federal electoral boundaries for NSW.

With general reference to the community of interest principle expressed in *The 2006 Proposed Redistribution of New South Wales into 49 Electoral Divisions – Report of the Redistribution Committee at:*

*Par 52: Often areas separated by geographic and physical features share commonality and community through their reliance on local government, public utilities and service industries. In this context local government areas are also indicators of community of interests, though more so in rural and regional areas.*

*Par 53: Other ways that communications and social networks unite communities can be found in health services, welfare support, air and land transport routes, and even newspaper circulation areas.*

*Par 54: Further contemporary indicators include communications and transport infrastructures, shopping and service catchments, health, sporting and other social networks. These all serve to unite and identify communities in different but related ways, often overcoming geographic barriers, including mountain ranges, waterways and distance;*

and to the specific paragraphs noted below, the proposed redistribution of federal electoral boundaries in NSW should be rejected on the following grounds:

#### **Abolition of Gwydir**

*Par 78: The flow on effects of the amalgamation of Gwydir and Parkes led the committee to reconfigure all inland rural divisions. As a result, it became possible to link areas west of the Great Dividing Range through the Hunter, Blue Mountains and Hume corridors with population centres towards the east. In so doing, the committee was able to lessen the impact of some of New South Wales' most significant geographical and physical features on the drawing of electoral boundaries.*

*Par 79: As a result of this strategy, the committee was able to maintain the number of divisions with major rural composition, despite a declining enrolment share.*

**1.1** The suggested elimination of the seat of Gwydir reduces country representation from NSW by one seat, when this could have been

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avoided by following the suggested boundary options outlined in my submission (*Public Suggestion No.18*).

- 1.2 This would have acknowledged the trend (on current indications) of a diminishing rural population over time, but still allowed for a gradual 'outer-urbanisation' of one of those country seats (Hume) along the most logical of available corridors: the Hume Highway from the Southern Tablelands into Camden LGA.
- 1.3 As proposed, the new boundaries for rural NSW seats have prematurely abolished one electorate when a more gradual approach to this demographic trend should have been adopted over the next several redistributions.
- 1.4 A long-established principle, retaining the names of federation seats, has been broken with the loss of Gwydir.

### **Lithgow, Oberon & part-Bathurst Regional LGAs to proposed Macquarie**

*Par 93: As outlined in its general strategy, the committee viewed the Blue Mountains region as one of the areas providing a strong link between the coastal hinterland and the west.*

*Par 94: Following this strategy, the committee decided to extend the proposed division of Macquarie to the west thereby including Lithgow and Oberon LGAs and part of Bathurst LGA including the city of Bathurst. This change resulted in the transfer of a significant number of electors from the division of Calare. The committee considered that each of these regions shared communities of interest amongst each other and with the Blue Mountains centred on domestic and international tourism, national parks, wilderness and weekend recreational activities. The committee observed that major road and rail transport routes linked these communities.*

- 2.1 The incorporation of the eastern half of the current Calare electorate into a redrawn Macquarie electorate defies any substantial community of interest, apart from the Great Western Highway. *Refer to Pars 52-54 above.*
- 2.2 Macquarie is an outer Sydney electorate, while the Lithgow-Bathurst region is a rural/ regional area. Such a wedding of two geographically and socially incompatible areas defies the Electoral Commission's own stated position over many years that the western escarpment of the Great Divide provides a natural barrier to any community of interest between the two areas.
- 2.3 Apart from that, another benchmark of 'community of interest', the local television and radio footprints, don't apply to the Blue Mountains portion of the new Macquarie boundaries.

### **Bathurst Regional LGA**

*Par 23: However, within limits imposed by the numerical criteria and other considerations, the committee acknowledged that it is also highly desirable that electoral boundaries be readily recognisable. Therefore, local government boundaries, locality boundaries, main roads, railways, waterways and other linear features able to be used as boundaries, guided the committee.*

*Par 64: The committee was mindful of the need to consider community of interests in proposing new boundaries. Local government area boundaries were used extensively in rural and provincial areas as indicators of community of interests. The committee adopted this approach based on the prominent role that local government plays in providing a significant range of services to, and in representing the interests of, their communities in rural New South Wales. The committee considered that population density in larger provincial*

*centres and the greater Sydney area meant that local government boundaries were less than significant given the diversity, accessibility and availability of economic, social and regional services and interests within those more closely populated regions.*

- 3.1 Again defying established guidelines the northern section of Bathurst Regional Council area has been crudely excised and retained within the new Calare boundaries.
- 3.2 This has further emphasised the essentially artificial nature of the new Macquarie boundaries and their defiance of community of interest.

### **Proposed Calare**

*Par 131: The committee examined two possible approaches: move the city of Dubbo and Wellington LGA into Calare; or move the LGAs of Mid-Western regional, Parkes, Forbes, Weddin and Wellington into Calare.*

*Par 132: In considering these possibilities the committee noted that the removal of Dubbo from Parkes would result in that division not containing a major regional centre. The committee noted that such a move would have extended Calare further west to obtain the required electors and would have created a division based on tenuous communities of interest;*

- 4.1 The proposed boundaries of the revised Calare electorate have also been forced to incorporate incompatible elements.
- 4.2 There is no community of interest between Weddin Shire and the Mid-Western Regional Shire area.
- 4.3 The number of service centres has gone from four (Lithgow, Bathurst, Orange, Cowra) to seven (Orange, Mudgee, Wellington, Parkes, Forbes, Cowra, Grenfell) making it difficult to provide the level of service to all towns and villages currently enjoyed by the constituents in the current seat.
- 4.4 I doubt any electorate in the state or the Commonwealth would have as many major and moderate population centres, which each require a minimum of two days a month visitation for any adequate representation.
- 4.5 The electorate office centre (currently Bathurst) requires a substantial presence of probably 20 days a month.
- 4.6 I challenge any party representative to match this level of face-to-face communication, which I believe is an absolute minimum. Yet such a level of constituent contact in the Calare electorate would require 34 days a month, without 20 weeks of Parliamentary sittings! Impossible!
- 4.7 Compare that with the mileage and suburban constituent contact commitments of city electorates.

### **Proposed Parkes**

- 5.1 The amalgamated Gwydir/Parkes electorate appears to be ‘what remains’ after all other seats have been allocated their quota. It thus emerges as an absolute nightmare of a seat wrapped around the north-west corner of the state with no apparent logic or community of interest. Sometimes, as with Grey and Kalgoorlie, large electorates need to be created when there is no other option, but options other than that proposed for the new Parkes electorate are clearly available.
- 5.2 There are other options for NSW and they are spelt out in submissions made to the Committee, options that don’t abolish a country seat. I again refer Committee members to my submission (*Public Suggestion No.18*).

### Three Linking Regions Strategy

Par 48: *Geographic features which figured in the analysis included:*

*The Great Dividing Range  
The Hawkesbury River  
Sydney Harbour and the Parramatta River  
Botany Bay and the Georges River*

Par 49: *In some cases the impact of these geographic features – whilst being seen as barriers by former redistribution committees – has now been significantly reduced. Improved transport infrastructure and modern communications have improved links between communities.*

Par 55: *More recent developments such as the Internet and ever increasing mobile telephone coverage have also assisted in changing the way in which contemporary society travels, communicates and interacts.*

Par 56: *These modern methods of communication and travel continue to unite communities on either side of the urban/rural divide. This is evident in the way that development has continued to the southwest of greater Sydney, along the Hume corridor.*

Par 57: *Past redistributions have recognised this, with the division of Hume (a largely rural division) having been reconfigured to unite urban, semi-rural and rural communities, in successive redistributions.*

- 6.1 The Committee's 'three linking regions' strategy is flawed, in that instead of using *only* the more logical Southern Highlands connective corridor between rural and urban NSW, it gives greater emphases for the less logical Blue Mountains option..
- 6.2 At paragraph 56 of its report the Redistribution Committee says: *"modern methods of communication and travel continue to unite these communities on either side of the urban/rural divide. This is evident in the way that development has continued to the southwest of greater Sydney, **along the Hume corridor**"*.
- 6.3 For all the reasons outlined in point 2 above, the Blue Mountains approach is flawed. The Committee did not have to 'look beyond' its historical approach, as my submission detailed.
- 6.4 There are very few 'existing social' and few 'communications' linkages' apart from rail and road between the Blue Mountains and Lithgow-Bathurst. They may as well be Austria and Switzerland. *Refer to Par 55 above.*
- 6.5 The Liberal Party suggested such a seat in the 1998 redistribution process, in an apparent attempt to improve its political chances. The suggestion was firmly rejected.
- 6.6 No amount of 'communications improvements' in that time have made enough difference to warrant a complete turnaround in this assessment.
- 6.7 At paragraph 79 of the AEC booklet the committee states: *"the committee was able to maintain the number of divisions with major rural composition, despite a declining enrolment share"*.
- 6.8 This may be true, but in doing so the committee has distorted that composition by needlessly forcing the artificial connecting of the Blue Mountains with the eastern portion of the Central Tablelands, when the far more logical Hume/Southern Tablelands corridor should have been used.
- 6.9 The Hume/Southern Tablelands corridor delivers true community of interest, for example: Camden, The Oaks and Oakdale are still in the

Group 6 Rugby League competition, which also includes Bowral, Mittagong, Picton, Robertson and Moss Vale.

- 6.10 Bathurst wouldn't know or care if Katoomba played tiddlywinks, and vice versa. True community of interest is not delivered via a Blue Mountains "connective corridor".

### **Rural & Regional Perspective**

*Par 41: A decline in the share of State enrolment is also evident in the north and north-west of the State with the electoral divisions of New England, Parkes and Gwydir collectively experiencing low enrolment growth.*

*Par 42: On the other hand, the four electoral divisions in the central and southwestern parts of the state (Calare, Hume, Riverina and Farrer) are projected to maintain or increase their share of New South Wales enrolment.*

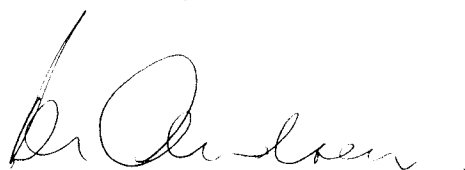
- 7.1 The 1998 redistribution committee included the then Surveyor General Don Grant who was based in Bathurst and had a deep appreciation of the relative communities of interest in various rural electorates.
- 7.2 I believe that understanding played a crucial role in the sensible rejection of the Liberal Party's "Macquarie option" at that time, which closely resembles the most recent proposal.
- 7.3 With the greatest respect I believe the now urban-centric committee has lost that rural perspective, hence its acceptance now of an option rejected quite recently (the last redistribution) for very valid reasons.

### **Conclusion**

*Par 79: As a result of this strategy, the committee was able to maintain the number of divisions with a major rural composition, despite a declining enrolment share.*

- 8.1 The committee has not maintained the number of divisions "with a major rural composition". It is indisputable that the proposed redistribution has reduced the number of rural divisions by one with the abolition of the seat of Gwydir.
- 8.2 I urge the committee to accept calls for public inquiries into the proposed redistribution to be held in the north-western areas of the state.
- 8.3 Finally, I also urge the committee to hold a public inquiry in Bathurst so the concerns I have raised, along with those of community organisations and individuals, can be properly aired and scrutinised by a public that believes there is little real prospect of significant changes to the proposed boundaries.
- 8.4 I would be ask the Committee to reconsider the electoral boundaries for rural NSW along the lines of those I suggested in my original submission.

Yours sincerely,



**PETER ANDREN**  
Federal Member for Calare