

Submission: Electoral Districts Redistribution Proposals 2020

Reference: NSW200701/35

National Party of Australia NSW proposal – Clarence electoral district

Summary

Richmond Valley Council (RVC) supports the National Party proposal to maintain the existing boundaries of the Clarence electorate. Council believes this provides the best opportunity to maintain and develop existing community, economic and cultural links within the Richmond Valley local government area. The current electoral boundaries for Clarence are an appropriate fit for our community and we do not wish to see them changed in any substantial way. RVC is responsible for planning holistically for the future of our valley, including the communities of Casino, Coraki, Broadwater, Woodburn and Evans Head. We feel we can deliver the best results for these communities by developing working relationships with a single State representative who is focused on the needs of our entire local government area.

However, Council acknowledges that the neighbouring electorate of Ballina is growing at a faster rate and may exceed its margin of enrolment allowance in the future. In this regard, RVC would support a minor adjustment to the National Party proposal to transfer the Wardell region to the Clarence Electorate, as there are existing communities of interest between Wardell and Broadwater.

Strategic alignment

Richmond Valley Council is responsible for planning for the future of our local government area (LGA) under the Integrated Planning and Reporting provisions of the *Local Government Act 1993*. Council has developed long term strategies for community growth, major transport and tourist links and economic development of the entire LGA and is systematically working to deliver these outcomes in partnership with other levels of government.

A key component of our success has been Council's capacity to develop productive working relationships with a single State representative who has responsibility to represent our entire LGA. Council believes the two rural centres of Casino and Grafton are sufficiently far apart not to actively compete with each other for investment and funding opportunities. The current situation where both centres are served by the same representative is harmonious, with each centre receiving appropriate representation and support. Council is concerned that this would not be the case if centres such as Casino shared an electorate with larger cities such as Lismore, or our smaller coastal communities were compelled to share representation with centres such as Ballina.

Maintaining our entire local government area in a single electorate has allowed our council to successfully advocate for the staged upgrade of major freight and tourist routes (such as the Woodburn-Casino Road and the Summerland Way between Grafton and Casino). It has also assisted us in developing our local agricultural industries and attracting investment to our region. We believe the current electoral boundaries offer the best strategic alignment for our region to grow and prosper.

Economic, social and regional communities of interest

There are significant socio-economic and cultural ties between the communities of Casino and the Mid-Richmond encompassing Coraki, Woodburn, Broadwater and Evans Head.

This was demonstrated some 20 years ago, when members of these communities supported a voluntary amalgamation of their former local government areas to form Richmond Valley Council. In presenting their proposal to the NSW Governor, the communities highlighted the cultural and historic ties between the various communities and expressed a willingness to work together and share a common future. The new Richmond Valley Council was proclaimed in 2000 and, since that time, the relationships between these communities have strengthened, with Casino serving as the administrative centre for the region.

Of particular importance to our community is the need to respect and support the cultural links between our Aboriginal communities. The traditional custodians of the land surrounding the Richmond River form the southern part of the wider Bundjalung Nation. There are significant Aboriginal populations in Coraki and Casino who share cultural links and have close ties with the coastal areas. One of the annual rituals of these communities was the movement from the mountain ranges to the coast during the winter months. Evans Head has special status as a traditional meeting place for local Aboriginal communities of the extended Bundjalung Nation. We believe it is important that these traditional ties with the Richmond River and coastal areas are maintained and that existing patterns of service delivery for these communities remain.

There are also significant links between the inland and coastal communities for the wider Richmond Valley population. Historically the Richmond River played a pivotal role in the development of communities such as Coraki and Casino as the main passage for transporting timber and other agricultural produce. The river has helped to shape a common identity for our region and continues to draw our settlements together. In summer months, residents from the inland towns have traditionally gravitated to the coastal villages for recreation, social gatherings and holidays. Organisations such as the Evans Head-Casino Surf Lifesaving Club reflect these traditional links, and relationships between the two communities remain strong.

Agriculture is also a significant unifier and part of the Mid Richmond / Richmond Valley identity, with beef, dairy farming and sugar cane being the predominant industries. Beef producers in the Mid-Richmond rely on the Northern Rivers Livestock Exchange in Casino to sell their cattle, while cane producers in the Casino district rely on the sugar mill at Broadwater. There are traditional links between the farming practices of our valley – as distinct from the macadamia, coffee and more niche farm products grown on the Alstonville plain towards Ballina and Byron. Our farming communities rely on a consistent approach to the care and maintenance of key freight routes within our region to ensure their success. This is best achieved by ensuring this critical infrastructure is contained within a single electorate, with the opportunity to develop working partnerships for advocacy and funding.

Existing electoral boundaries

The National Party proposal maintains the existing boundaries of the Clarence electorate. RVC believes that this is the most appropriate solution. These boundaries are working well for our communities and we see no reason to change them in any substantial way. Should there be a need for minor adjustment to accommodate the growing Ballina region, Council believes the transfer of the Wardell district to Clarence electorate would be the best means of achieving it without major disruption. Wardell has social and economic links with the Broadwater community and is of an appropriate scale to share representation with the Mid-Richmond settlements.