

The Greens NSW: Comments on Submissions to NSW Electoral Districts Redistribution 2020



Introduction

The Greens NSW boundary submission noted that within the goal of ensuring close compliance with the electoral quota for each district it was important to “make the fewest boundary adjustments to achieve enrolment parity.” Substantial changes to boundaries work to confuse electors and communities as well as incurring significant costs and inconvenience.

The Greens have focused on maintaining communities of interest and the criteria for redistribution as set out in the Electoral Act 2017. The Greens NSW urge the Commission to focus on the communities of interest over any party political interest.

General Comments on Submissions

It is to be expected that boundary submissions from political parties will be drafted with the political advantage of the party in mind, and we have made specific reference within these comments in cases where this appears to be the overriding motive for the proposed boundary amendments.

Nonetheless, The Greens NSW observes that the submission from The Liberal Party of Australia seeks to radically redraw a number of boundaries with little or no justification in either geographical or community of interest terms and which would cause significant confusion. We are concerned that their submission has been dominated by political motives rather than keeping communities of interest together.

Whilst it can be argued that the submissions from all political parties have party political aims the submissions from the other political parties (The Nationals, The Australian Labor Party, The Greens NSW, The Shooters, Fishers and Farmers) have generally sought to maintain communities of interest in their submissions and generally restrict changes to those that are required due to population changes.

The Greens NSW support the concerns raised in submissions from Leeton, Coolamon and Temora shire councils in regards to the consideration around voter representation and being connected to their representatives.

Regional analysis and comments

1. Central and Eastern Sydney

The Greens NSW notes that a number of submissions (A Greenwich, The Australian Labor Party, The Nationals) have sought to resolve some issues in the central Sydney boundaries specifically around the borders of Sydney, Newtown, Heffron, Coogee and Summer Hill with similar principles.

On the whole, these suggestions are in keeping with the principles we outlined in our submission of maintaining connections between communities of interest, which we maintain is an important consideration.

That said, we note that the submission from the Australian Labour Party in relation to Newtown makes changes to the district boundary in a number of suburbs - in Surry Hills, Waterloo, Erskineville, and Lewisham.

In relation to the Surry Hills boundary, we do not believe there needs to be a change to this boundary.

Specifically, to the points raised in the Member for Sydney's submission, we contend that this community shares as much in common with parts of East Redfern, Erskineville, Chippendale and Newtown as it does with similar suburbs such as Darlinghurst and Paddington. It is true that all of these communities have 'large areas of terrace houses with pockets of medium-rise apartments', they also share a strong presence of a diverse rainbow community. In addition to this, there are many similar experiences, needs and supports provided to the public housing communities of Surry Hills that mirror those in similar communities in Redfern and Waterloo.

We do not support the suggestion to remove Prince Alfred Park and the new Inner City High School from the Newtown district as this green space and public school are as closely connected to communities living in Redfern as they are to other neighbouring suburbs to the east.

While we recognise that there was certainly surprise and confusion with people living on the edges of the district of Newtown in 2015, as the electorate was newly created, there was a similar response in Petersham and Stanmore as there was in Surry Hills. A program to increase community awareness of the district has been conducted from 2014 to now. It is to be expected that there is going to be some adjustment for the community in relation to a new district being created and is a strong reason to not make significant changes to the district again at this time. More generally, it is another reason why consideration should be given to using Aboriginal place names or other names of significance not linked to suburbs when naming districts.

In relation to the Erskineville and Lewisham boundary changes proposed by the Australian Labor Party, we note that again this is a significant change that would not be required if no change was made to the Surry Hills boundary in the district of Newtown. We also make the observation that these proposed changes would see an allocation of two areas of significant population growth in high-density housing, the bottom section of Erskineville and the edge of Lewisham. We would ask that consideration be given to this, and the risk that it would cause Newtown to go above the 5% margin in future years.

We also wish to note our opposition to the deviation of the boundary in the Australian Labor Party's submission from Mitchell Rd onto Renwick St and then back to Mitchell Rd. If changes were made to this boundary, it would make logical sense to maintain the boundary as Mitchell Rd, not to detour onto a side street and back again.

For these reasons, it is our view that all of these changes are not warranted if the Commission used The Greens NSW suggestions for the borders of Sydney, Coogee and Heffron.

In relation to the Waterloo boundary addressed in the Australian Labor Party submission, we acknowledge it was always an anomaly that the community living in the Waterloo public housing areas were split in two by a state district boundary. We support this community of interest being rejoined in either the district of Newtown or Heffron.

We reconfirm our position that keeping communities of interest together is an important principle and in this regard recognise that these submissions, along with our own, have made a range of suggestions in line with this.

It is important to respond briefly to the Liberal party submission in relation to Newtown as this is the only submission which seeks to make very substantial changes. It is clear that these proposed changes do not reflect any of the principles of communities of interest, or other factors that the Commission considers. It is, in fact, remarkable that such a significant change is proposed without any explanation or justification.

All other submissions, including the Nationals, provide options for changes to connect suburbs as a way of addressing the need for meeting quotas, the Liberal's submission is a complete outlier and in the absence of further information should be disregarded.

In relation to the districts of Heffron, Coogee, Sydney and Vaucluse there is broad agreement among submissions regarding the addition of Centennial Park to the district of Sydney. There is some variety in proposals for the western and northern boundaries of Coogee. We note that The Greens NSW submission most clearly responds to the divergent communities of interest between Kensington/Kingsford and the Zetland/Green Square precincts of Heffron as well as resulting in the most modest adjustment of the northern boundary with the district of Vaucluse and also retains of the current Sydney/Vaucluse boundary.

2. North Coast New South Wales

The Greens NSW wish to emphasise that we do not believe that there is any need for changes to the boundaries of Tweed, Lismore, Ballina districts and note that that is the same conclusion as The Nationals have reached for those districts. The Greens NSW would also suggest that the suggestion from The Australian Labor party in regards to the border between Ballina and Lismore is an appropriate solution if the Commission determined that there was a need to make an adjustment.

We note that the Liberal Party submission seeks to completely change the makeup of the Northern Rivers region. We submit that it is difficult to explain the proposed changes proposed by the Liberal Party on the basis of communities of interest. We don't believe that the arguments made by the Liberal Party are sufficient to warrant such significant changes.

The Greens NSW acknowledges the submission from the Mingoola Progress Association that Tenterfield has a stronger connection to Northern Tablelands. We wish to revise our original submission in that respect. In originally noting that Tenterfield had more of a connection to the district of Lismore we were also concerned that moving Tenterfield into

Northern Tablelands would cause consequential changes to other districts that would be undesirable.

While The Nationals have proposed retaining Tenterfield within the district of Lismore, we note that the submission from the Australian Labour Party proposes changes that would allow for Tenterfield to be returned to Northern Tablelands without significant shifts in Ballina and Lismore. In that respect, we support the Lismore and Northern Tablelands boundary suggestions from the Australian Labor Party.

3. Hunter Region

The Greens NSW urges rejection of the proposal from the Liberal Party to change the boundaries of the Port Stephens district. They have proposed transfer of the Tilligerry and Tomaree peninsulas, housing more than 25,000 voters, to Upper Hunter (proposed to be renamed Gloucester), and the merger of the rest of Port Stephens with parts of Maitland to form a new district named Raymond Terrace.

These proposals make no sense other than for the electoral advantage of the Liberal Party. The Tilligerry and Tomaree peninsulas would be largely cut off from the rest of the proposed Upper Hunter/Gloucester district by the waters of the Port Stephens estuary.

Residents of the peninsulas look to Raymond Terrace, Maitland and Newcastle as their main centres and in many cases their places of work or education. There is very little interaction or affinity with even the Dungog and Gloucester areas of the current Upper Hunter. The proposal would also diverge the largely coincident boundaries of the Port Stephens district and the Port Stephens Local Government area which has many practical benefits.

There is no statistical quota balancing argument in favour of this proposal and it should be rejected.

4. North Western Sydney

The Greens NSW acknowledges the submissions from the Australian Labor Party and the Nationals who have made constructive boundary suggestions. The Greens NSW note that The Australian Labor party's submissions for the districts of Mount Druitt, Blacktown and Seven Hills, Blue Mountains broadly follows the submission that The Greens NSW put forward but have used the major roads as the boundaries.

5. Western Sydney

The Greens NSW again acknowledges the submissions from the Australian Labor Party and The Nationals. We would just note that the submission from the Australian Labor Party has proposed a number of significant changes to the districts in the Inner West and South Western Sydney compared to the submission from The Nationals. We believe that the borders proposed by the Australian Labor Party are generally more straightforward and easier for voters to understand than those that have been proposed by the Nationals.

6. Southern New South Wales

The Greens NSW observe the broad consensus among at least The Nationals, The Australian Labor Party, and The Greens NSW around the general direction of the changes needed to be made for the Illawarra and South Coast NSW. We restate our view that the district of Heathcote should become primarily based on the northern Illawarra region.

In relation to the district of Goulburn, the proposal from the Australian Labor Party produces a very odd shape as a substantial area is transferred to Cootamundra.

7. Western New South Wales

The Greens NSW notes that a number of submissions (Australian Labor Party, The Liberal Party of Australia, The Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party) have all submitted in a broad sense the same suggestion for the district of Murray which is quite different to that of The Nationals submission.

We submit that the proposal from The Nationals will likely reduce the communities of interest by splitting a part of the irrigation community by reconstituting the district of Murray Darling. The Greens NSW would suggest that the suggestions from others such as Australian Labor Party, The Shooters, Fishers and Farmers and The Liberal Party point to a more sensible approach to maintaining the communities of interest within these districts.

We are also concerned that the National's proposed reconstituted district of Murray Darling may be too large geographically for one member of parliament to be able to cover sufficiently.