



# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

13<sup>th</sup> Assembly

## SOCIAL POLICY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

### Public Hearing Transcript

#### Electoral Amendment Bill 2018

9.30 am, Monday, 15 October 2018

Litchfield Room, Level 3, Parliament House, Darwin

**Members:**

Ms Ngaree Ah Kit MLA, Chair, Member for Karama  
Mrs Lia Finocchiaro MLA, Member for Spillett  
Ms Sandra Nelson MLA, Member for Katherine  
Mr Chansey Paech MLA, Member for Namatjira

**Witnesses:**

Iain Loganathan – Northern Territory Electoral Commissioner

Maria Mohr: Acting Chief Executive Officer, Department of the Chief Minister

Jean Doherty: Executive Director, Federal Policy and Strategic Coordination, Department of the Chief Minister

Catherine Pledge: Principal Policy Officer, Department of the Chief Minister

**Electoral Amendment Bill 2018**

**Northern Territory Electoral Commission**

**Madam CHAIR:** Ladies and gentlemen, we will now be proceeding to a public briefing on the Electoral Amendment Bill 2018. Good morning, everyone, and thank you for joining us.

I am Ngaree Ah Kit. I am the Member for Karama and Chair of the Social Policy Scrutiny Committee. On behalf of the committee, I welcome everyone to this public hearing into the Electoral Amendment Bill 2018. I welcome to the table to give evidence to the committee Ian Loganathan, Northern Territory Electoral Commissioner.

I also welcome from the Social Policy Scrutiny Committee other members: Lia Finocchiaro, Member for Spillett, and Chansey Paech, Member for Namatjira and Sandra Nelson, Member for Katherine on the phone.

Thank you for appearing before the committee this morning. We appreciate you taking the time to speak to the committee and look forward to hearing from you today. This is a formal proceeding of the committee and the protection of parliamentary privilege and the obligation not to mislead the committee apply.

This is a public hearing and is being webcast through the Assembly's website. A transcript will be made for use of the committee and may be put on the committee's website.

If, at any time during the public briefing, you are concerned that what you will say should not be made public, you may ask that the committee go into a closed session and take your evidence in private.

I will ask you to state your name for the record, and the capacity in which you appear. I will then invite you to make a brief opening statement before proceeding to the committee's questions. Could you please state your name and the capacity in which you are appearing.

**Mr LOGANATHAN:** Ian Loganathan, Electoral Commissioner.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Loganathan. Would you like to make an opening statement?

**Mr LOGANATHAN:** Yes, I would, Member for Karama.

First, there is minor error in our written submission. On the second page where we have proposed amendment to section 145B, I have used the word 'or' rather than 'and' on parts (a) and (b). I will table an amended version.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you very much.

**Mr LOGANATHAN:** I start by saying that overall, the Electoral Commission is very supportive of this bill. It enacts recommendations in the election report to modernise and enshrine greater independence in the redistribution process. The election report made six recommendations and all six of these recommendations are addressed in the bill as they relate to redistribution. This is the first time that amendments to the redistribution process have been considered since the *Electoral Act* came into existence in 2004.

The Electoral Commission has a very good working relationship with the Chief Minister's Department and it has been very open and cooperative in drafting this bill. There are many changes in this bill. All we are really focusing on is one minor point, but we show our appreciation to the Chief Minister's Department for the involvement the Electoral Commission has had to get to this point.

As stated in our submission, we have some concerns regarding the possible consequences of the quantitative trigger of 15% proposed in the bill that will compel the Redistribution Committee to undertake an additional consultation phase.

I provided a written submission and give this verbal submission and do it on the following understanding: that as an independent statutory authority, the commission will, at times, have positions that differ from political parties, governments and other stakeholders. I also note that it is not the role of the Electoral Commission to determine electoral laws—that is a matter for parliament. The role of the Electoral Commission is to provide relevant information to enable parliament to make fully informed decisions.

Before I start talking about the change, is it worthwhile briefly outlining the redistribution process?

**Madam CHAIR:** Yes, please.

**Mr LOGANATHAN:** The redistribution process starts with the electoral commission gazetting it and advertising it in the paper and allowing interested parties 30 days to lodge a submission in terms of what they propose the boundaries should be.

We will provide an information guide to assist in that process in terms of data, existing boundaries and other relevant information such as division names. Once these submissions are received they are placed on the website and people have a two week period to provide comments on the submissions by other people.

At this point, the redistribution committee will then publish draft boundaries and those draft boundaries are then put out for public consultation. Those comments are also placed on our website.

The current process allows three components of public consultation in the redistribution process. What we are talking about here is if there are significant changes regarding the next lot of boundaries after the draft boundaries, should there be another public consultation phase.

The electoral commission supports the possibility of having another public consultation phase—it is a recommendation that we have made in the report. We think that the proper process would be for the redistribution commission to have the discretion whether it is required rather than having a quantitative trigger in the Electoral Act that will compel the redistribution committee to undertake an additional public consultation phase.

Redistributions are by their nature contentious. Political parties put in their submissions in line with what they think will give them electoral advantage at the next election. Sometimes boundary reviews result in preselection contests between sitting members. While conscious of potential political implications, the redistribution committee must remain focused on meeting the objectives of the redistribution prescribed in the act. This is a process that requires MPs, political parties and candidates to accept the determination by the independent redistribution committee.

The point I am trying make is that if there is an additional public consultation phase and there are no grounds for is except that it is prescribed in the act that we must do it—we have already received three submissions from candidates and political parties. If we go through this process and then do not accept the changes they have proposed, all it does is drag out the process by what we think would be a minimum of six weeks. We do not think that it is overly helpful.

The other point that I have made in the submission is that history tells us—in terms of draft boundaries—the redistribution committees of the past have proposed some ideas and sought feedback on those ideas. I give the example in terms of the last redistribution, we proposed moving Marrara out of the division of Sanderson and moving it to the division of Fong Lim. That proved very unpopular and we received that feedback and did not make those changes in the final boundaries.

In the last redistribution we initially proposed abolishing the division of Araluen and then we received feedback on that proposal and in the end, the division of Greatorex was abolished in Alice Springs and Araluen was retained. In the previous redistribution in 2011, the Redistribution Committee then proposed significant changes to the division of Barkly. That proposal received a lot of feedback that was not supportive and proposed changes were abandoned.

The point I am trying to make here is that the point of draft boundaries is sometimes just to propose some ideas and seek feedback on them. History tells us that if those ideas are not supported by the community, then the Redistribution Committee reverts back to making adjustments to the existing boundaries to try to fit the criteria in the act.

If you start implementing triggers like 15%, it will make the Redistribution Committee conservative in its draft boundaries, in an attempt to try not to trigger that 15% change from what would be the next version of boundaries, compared to draft boundaries.

Overall, this bill in its entirety is good for democracy in the Northern Territory. We think that the quantitative trigger in regard to the addition public consultation phase may have some unintended consequences, and following the precedent in other jurisdictions, it should be left at the discretion of the Redistribution Committee.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Loganathan. I will now open it up to the committee for any questions. On the phone, Members for Namatjira and Katherine, do you have any questions?

**Mr PAECH:** None for me, Madam Chair.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you. Member for Katherine?

**Ms NELSON:** Yes. I have one to start off with. The redistribution process commences 18 months prior to the next General Election?

**Mr LOGANATHAN:** That is correct. The next redistribution will start at the end of February 2019.

**Ms NELSON:** Okay. I just wanted to confirm that.

**Mr LOGANATHAN:** The timetable, as it stands, is that the redistribution starts 18 months beforehand. Under the current process, it should take about six months to complete. What I have said in the submission is that if there is a requirement for an additional public objection period, that will take another six weeks. That would give political parties less time to go through the preselection process.

**Ms NELSON:** Yes.

**Mr LOGANATHAN:** I have made the suggestion that one possibility is to bring forward the redistribution. Rather than 18 months before the next election, do it 24 months before the next election, just to ensure that if there is an additional public consultation phase it is completed well before a year out from the election.

**Ms NELSON:** Yes. My priority concern is for the voters, if we have such a short time frame. If we stick with the current time frame for the redistribution and then there is additional public consultation provided, or opens up, that leads into the redistribution itself. We have less time to educate the voters that their electorate boundaries have changed and possibly they will not be voting in the same electorate they were voting in before.

**Mr LOGANATHAN:** As part of the redistribution process, electors who have been impacted by the boundary changes are contacted by the Electoral Commission and advised. As you say, Member for Katherine, if there is an additional public consultation phase, this will be delayed by approximately six weeks.

**Ms NELSON:** Yes.

**Mr LOGANATHAN:** There still will be public advertising about the changes. Obviously, we try to communicate directly with the impacted electors.

**Ms NELSON:** Yes. Mr Loganathan, I think I have asked you this before. It might have been during estimates. I will ask again to refresh my memory. With the closure of the Australian Electoral Commission office in the Northern Territory, has that has an impact on your office?

**Mr LOGANATHAN:** Member for Katherine, the office has not closed ...

**Ms NELSON:** I am sorry. The office has not closed. It has reduced staff numbers in the Northern Territory and moved them off into Queensland, which means they have less human resources in the Northern Territory. Right?

**Mr LOGANATHAN:** That is correct. It has had an impact in terms of the management of the electoral roll. We find that the AEC as a national organisation are moving much more towards automatic enrolment and using data from the Department of Human Services and from the MVR to update the roll. Those programs do not operate outside major urban centres.

I said in the estimates earlier this year that the roll quality is improving in urban areas, decreasing in remote areas - the gap in term of roll quality is widening between remote and urban electors.

**Ms NELSON:** This is not a criticism of the NT Electoral Commission in your performance, but my concern is with this bill and the tight time frame—all of those things. Especially living in a regional area, we appreciate as much notice as possible so that we have time to get to our communities.

I am concerned about all of that as well—the time frames—and the fact that we have less people on the ground to do with the electoral commission than we had before. How would we make that work if there was additional public consultation and the boundary changes did not happen until much later in the time period?

**Mr LOGANATHAN:** Member for Katherine, I understand your question and concerns but I do not know whether there is a direct correlation here. What the electoral commission is planning to do is—given we have fixed term elections, is to conduct remote fieldwork in the lead up to the election.

Given the changes the AEC has made, the plan for the electoral commission would be to do a feel program at the start of the dry in 2020—travel out to those communities undertake education and enrolment to ensure that people are correctly enrolled in the lead up to the 2020 election.

We are currently doing works now with town camps, department of local government and the education department. We plan to develop products in language which we will use for remote fieldwork and use other departments who have established networks in remote communities to promote the enrolment message.

**Madam CHAIR:** In addition to the Member for Katherine's question, if the proposed legislation remained as is, what would be worse case scenario in regards to the timing of people finding out which electorate they sit going into the 2020 NT election?

**Mr LOGANATHAN:** If we assume that the normal redistribution process takes six months, that will finish at the end of August but then we do an additional public consultation phase—that would be for a two week period—another report and new maps would have to be prepared. We estimate that it would be at least another six weeks.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Do you mind if I get you to walk through it really slowly for the benefit of people to understand how it works particularly around the quantitative triggers and what they are?

First, is a redistribution done every Territory election?

**Mr LOGANTHAN:** That is correct.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** What is the trigger for that? Nothing, it just has to happen?

**Mr LOGANTHAN:** The act says that a review commences 18 months before the next election.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Great. So then the electoral commission puts an expression of interest in the paper?

**Mr LOGANTHAN:** We would gazette that a redistribution process is commenced and would advertise that in the paper.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** So then people have 30 days to put in their submission of what they think things should look like?

**Mr LOGANTHAN:** That is correct.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Then the committee puts together draft boundaries?

**Mr LOGANTHAN:** No. What happens at that point is that those submissions are placed on the website and people can provide comments on those submissions.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Is that effectively considered the second part of consultation? The first part is the submissions, the second part is feedback on the submissions.

**Mr LOGANTHAN:** That is correct.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Then the draft boundaries are published and currently there is no opportunity?

**Mr LOGANTHAN:** No. Currently the draft boundaries are published and there is 30 days to provide comment on the draft boundaries.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** When we talk about this quantitative measure of 15%, where does that come into this?

**Mr LOGANTHAN:** It comes in at that point there, after draft boundaries are published.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Published, yes.

**Mr LOGANTHAN:** The next lot of boundaries—what is proposed in the bill—is that if there is a 15% change in any seat ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Change in voter numbers?

**Mr LOGANTHAN:** In voter numbers, sorry. ... 15% change in voter numbers in any seat from the draft boundaries, that would automatically trigger another public consultation phase.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Okay. Only in which those seats in which the 15% ...

**Mr LOGANTHAN:** Well, that is not clear. Right? But for all intents and purposes, the redistribution is a bit like a domino. If you ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** It impacts.

**Mr LOGANTHAN:** Yes. It probably makes sense to just do it ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Put it all back out there again.

**Mr LOGANTHAN:** Put it all out there, yes.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Okay. If the bill is passed in its current form, the draft is published. If there is a 15% change in any of those, then it would go back out to consultation. So would that take the form of another 30-day period?

**Mr LOGANTHAN:** I will spell this out again. The draft is published ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Yes.

**Mr LOGANTHAN:** ... and people have 30 days to provide comment. We consider that comment and the current process is we would publish the final boundaries. But what the bill is saying is that if there is a 15% change in any seat

in voter numbers from the draft boundaries, we would not publish the final boundaries, we would publish the next draft and give a two-week period for people to comment on that draft—on the second draft.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** And then, from that, it would be approximately six weeks until ...

**Mr LOGANATHAN:** The final boundaries.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** ... the final. Yes. Thank you.

**Madam CHAIR:** Mr Loganathan, we have quite small electorates in the Northern Territory, as you know. Fifteen percent is a huge chunk of that. Would it not make sense that the Redistribution Committee would look at any of those with a 15% change from the original, to the almost final electorate boundaries drawn up, considering it is such a big chunk of the numbers we have of electors?

**Mr LOGANATHAN:** Member for Karama, on average we have about 5500 people in a division, so approximately it works out 800 electors, we are talking about. It is a very good question. I respond with two points. One is the change might be like the Marrara example. We would propose to change more than 800 electors. Then we got feedback on that idea and it was not supported, so we moved it back. In that case, there is a change of greater than 15% to the draft boundaries. But it is not a 15% change to the existing or current boundaries. It is not as though the public is not aware that Marrara is normally in Sanderson.

In that example, let us say we then wanted to move Marrara to Johnston and that is an idea that just came out of the blue and no one has had any time to consider that. I think that would be reasonable for the Redistribution Committee to go out and seek public consultation in that scenario. The point I am trying to make is rather than leave it to a trigger in the act, leave it to the discretion of the committee and the committee would do so in circumstances where they are proposing changes that the public has not had an opportunity to comment on.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you for that clarification. The final question I have—oh, actually two more. Who was on the Redistribution Committee and how were they appointed?

**Mr LOGANATHAN:** Currently, the Redistribution Committee has me as the Electoral Commission, the Auditor-General and the Surveyor-General. They are appointed under the act.

The current process has two committees—it has a Redistribution Committee and augmented Redistribution Committee that has an external chair. That external chair is someone who is a judge—or qualified to be a judge—or somebody with appropriate experience.

One of the proposed changes in the bill—that was a recommendation that appeared in our election report—was to move away from this two committee process. To have it as a one committee process and to have an externally appointed chair from the beginning with that externally appointed chair has to be a judge or someone qualified to be a judge.

The Chief Minister's department have proposed other changes to ensure independence—the person cannot be a member of a political party and cannot have made a political donation in the last five years.

**Madam CHAIR:** Very good.

My final question—I believe you mentioned something about if the changes did proceed that the redistribution committee might be quite conservative with the boundary changes so that it does not reach 15% so that they do not go to the extra six weeks. Can you explain more about that?

**Mr LOGANATHAN:** What I am saying is that if you look at it historically where there have to be changes—for example a new seat in Palmerston, Alice Springs losing a seat or should Barkly and Stuart be side by side or go across—these ideas are generally proposed in the draft boundaries.

There is a bit of out of the box thinking. Rather than just going with the status quo, what if we did it this way. The draft boundaries allow us to put forward an idea and seek public feedback. If it is not supported then we can revert back to the existing boundaries.

What I am trying to say in that point is that if we are bound by this 15% then redistribution committees might be less likely to propose those ideas because they know that if they are not supported it will automatically trigger that 15% and we will have to go to an additional public consultation phase.

**Madam CHAIR:** Which will take up to an additional six weeks?

**Mr LOGANATHAN:** That is correct.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you.

Committee members, are there any final questions for the electoral commissioner?

That concludes our public briefing, thank you for joining us this morning.

### Department of the Chief Minister

**Madam CHAIR:** Good morning, everyone. Thank you for joining us. I am Ngaree Ah Kit, the Member for Karama and Chair of the Social Policy Scrutiny Committee. On behalf of the committee, I welcome everyone to this public hearing into the Electoral Amendment Bill 2018.

I welcome to the table to give evidence to the committee from the Department of the Chief Minister Maria Mohr, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Jean Doherty, Executive Director, Federal Policy and Strategic Coordination, and Catherine Pledge, Principal Policy Officer.

Thank you for coming before the committee. We appreciate you taking the time to speak to the committee and look forward to hearing from you today.

This is a formal proceeding of the committee and the protection of parliamentary privilege and the obligation not to mislead the committee apply. This is a public hearing and is being webcast through the Assembly's website. A transcript will be made for use by the committee and may be put on the committee's website.

If, at any time during the public hearing, you are concerned that what you will say should not be made public, you may ask that the committee go into a closed session and take your evidence in private.

I will ask each witness to state their name for the record, and the capacity in which you appear. I will then invite you to make a brief opening statement before proceeding to the committee's questions.

I mention that we have Lia Finocchiaro, the Member for Spillett and on the line we also have Chansey Paech, the Member for Namatjira, and Sandra Nelson, the Member for Katherine.

Could you please each state your name and the capacity in which you are appearing this morning.

**Ms MOHR:** Maria Mohr, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Department of the Chief Minister.

**Ms DOHERTY:** Jean Doherty, Executive Director, Federal Policy and Strategic Coordination in the Department of the Chief Minister.

**Ms PLEDGE:** Catherine Pledge, Principal Policy Officer for the Department of the Chief Minister.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you very much. Ms Mohr, would you like to make an opening statement?

**Ms MOHR:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you again for the opportunity to brief the committee on the Electoral Amendment Bill and to address your written questions regarding the secondary proposed objection period and the use of the quantitative trigger.

Our comprehensive response to the written questions has been provided to the committee.

As outlined during our previous attendance before the committee, the overarching aim of electoral reform is to improve the participation and increase public support and confidence in our system of government. This is a key element of the government's integrity reform agenda.

The redistribution mechanism implements the key democratic principle of one vote, one value, which is why it is important to ensure there is an open, transparent and independent electoral boundary redistribution process. This bill amends the *Electoral Act* to provide for a simplified, more transparent boundary redistribution process. The proposed amendments underscore the important function of electoral boundary redistribution as a foundation stone of our electoral system. The introduction of a secondary objection period safeguards public participation in the redistribution process.

The quantitative trigger of 15% has been included so that the public has the opportunity to be consulted again on a secondary proposed redistribution where it is statistically likely to affect them. The test of what constitutes significantly different in terms of the number of electors is transparent and able to be quantified based on data available to the Redistribution Committee. There is an additional safeguard in place to offset the removal of the Augmented Redistribution Committee, which has previously provided an additional review function in the redistribution process.

The statistical trigger has been set at 15%, based on the most recently available data, including previous redistribution reports, maps and other electoral resources. This evidence is outlined in the department's submission to the written questions from the committee.

This measure provides an appropriate balance between providing a safe guard for public participation in the redistribution process and avoiding an administratively burdensome process.

In his submission to the committee, the Electoral Commissioner proposed that the methodology for the quantitative trigger should include a requirement to compare the existing boundaries and the second proposed redistribution. However, available electoral data indicates there is always significant variation between a second proposed redistribution and existing boundaries in the Northern Territory due to quota variations.

As a result, a comparison of this nature is not considered a robust indication of unexpected change in a redistribution. What I mean by that is taking the current boundaries to point 1, using the current boundaries to point 2—we believe it should go from this point to point 1, from point 1 to point 2.

Including an additional calculation comparing existing boundaries and the proposed redistribution would add unnecessary complexity to the legislation and provide no practical difference to whether the quantitative trigger applied or not.

The redistribution process is informed by a range of up-to-date data as well as public comments and suggestions. Bringing the process forward by six months would not provide the Redistribution Committee with the most recent data to determine current population trends and to calculate the quota, which is the core element of the redistribution process.

Finalising the redistribution too early may lead to a greater discrepancy from the quota at the next election and can potentially undermine the one vote, one value principle. However, the quantitative trigger is only one reason why the committee might invite a second round of objections.

The proposed bill also provides discretion for the committee to invite a second round of objections based on a range of factors including but not limited to community interests in each proposed division, the trend of population changes in the Northern Territory and the physical features of each proposed division.

Variations of up to six weeks to complete redistributions have taken place in previous elections as outlined in Election Reports from 2004 to 2015. I draw the committee's attention to table 2 of the written questions which indicates the 2015 redistribution process commenced on 25 February, was completed on 16 September and took a total of six months and 22 days.

What is proposed with the additional second objection period—as mentioned by the Electoral Commissioner—is an additional six weeks, which would take the total time for the process from six months and 22 days to eight months and three days.

Removing the Augmented Redistribution Committee—the second committee that was previously established—is expected to reduce the time taken to complete the redistribution process as it eliminates the duplication of technical and administrative processes associated with selecting and appointing two committees. There was a period of time where the additional member of the Augmented Redistribution Committee had to be selected and appointed and that process could have taken two to four weeks depending on who that person was and the process that they needed to go through.

The value of a second objection period rests in the opportunity it provides for a consultative redistribution process. There is benefit in seeking feedback from the community on electoral changes which impact voters, even if that second consultation period does not result in further change. This benefit outweighs the cost of any potential delays—which as outlined in our written responses are not likely to be significant and will not impact on the overall election process.

Further, the proposed methodology incentivises an evidence-based approach to the redistribution process using available data and informed by suggestions and comments from the public.

I now introduce Ms Catherine Pledge, Principal Policy Officer, who is available to answer questions you may have regarding the provisions of the amendment bill.

**Madam CHAIR:** Thank you very much. I will now open it up to the committee for any questions.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I want to ask about the 15% trigger in that last round. Will all seats go back out for consultation? Say, for example, out of the 25, there is only one that is over that 15% threshold, is it just on the one seat or is it on all 25 again?

**Ms MOHR:** Member for Spillett, the answer for that would be a matter of the Redistribution Committee. In short, if there was one seat, then potentially they may decide to do all of the electorates, because there may be other reasons why the committee wants to undertake a second round of consultation.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Okay. So, that is not really prescribed in the act, it is at the discretion of the committee?



**Ms MOHR:** Yes. The bill talks about the 15%—if there is a quantitative trigger, they have to go back out for public consultation.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Yes, but what I am saying, is it on that seat or is it on all seats?

**Ms MOHR:** As I said, it would be a matter for the committee. We would not want to fetter their ...

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Ability.

**Ms MOHR:** ... their ability to make those decisions, given that we have added additional discretion for them to think about whether there are other reasons why they may want to have a second consultation process.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Okay.

**Ms PLEDGE:** I can add there that statistically we looked at previous redistributions when we were looking at this. It is highly unlikely that only one change would be triggered by the 15%. But it—as I think the Electoral Commissioner made the point—has a knock-on effect once you start making changes. But it is at their discretion.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Thank you.

**Mr PAECH:** It is Chansey Paech here. I have a question about the department's position, or thoughts about the community interest, which is usually a consideration for the redistribution.

**Ms PLEDGE:** Member for Namatjira, the community interest is a matter that the Redistribution Committee considers. It is not an object of the redistribution. The object is to ensure that there are equal numbers of electors in each electorate. But it is a matter that the Redistribution Committee considers when it is making its decision, and that has not changed.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** There has been no changes to that criteria, per se?

**Ms PLEDGE:** No, there has not.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I guess it is a bit more broad—it is not particularly subject to this. It would be so nice if there was some way for Territorians to have some certainty about their seat, particularly in Palmerston, for example, a high growth area. It almost guarantees the seats change quite significantly. We are in this era where we all believe it is really important that we have greater voter engagement. We want to see those numbers going up every election, whether it is local, federal or Territory. The more people who participate in our democracy, that yields a better result.

It is such a shame that some suburbs around the Top End seem to be always caught in that firing line, so to speak. That, in my experience, causes voter disengagement because they feel as if they are the ones being shuffled from here to there—'Oh, which electorate am I in this time around?'

I suppose that is more of a comment than anything. I do not even know if it is possible to try to work through some of that future-proofing. But it is an observation that I have made, being in and around the Palmerston area, that at a time when everything we are doing is to engage more people, unfortunately, the flip side is we annoy people at the same time as well.

**Mr PAECH:** Lia, can I add on to that, if I may?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Yes.

**Mr PAECH:** I am from the other end of where Lia is coming from in this conversation. I am from a remote seat where I see numbers constantly changing because there is growth in Alice Springs or Palmerston, which then starts to put pressure on bush seats to an extent where they no longer are bush seats and you have competing priorities because you have remote Aboriginal communities and then you start to edge in on the municipalities to take in those numbers.

Has there ever been conversations about looking at the quota system so that urban cities have a different quota than those in the bush? Because it becomes increasingly difficult to represent bush constituents when the population is getting stretched and their priorities begin to compete with one another.

**Ms PLEDGE:** Member for Namatjira and Member for Spillett, the primary objective of the redistribution process is to ensure that there is an equal number of people in each electorate, and that is ...

**Mr PAECH:** Excuse me. Could you speak up? I am unable to hear you.

**Ms PLEDGE:** My apologies, Member for Namatjira. The primary objective of the electoral redistribution process is to ensure that there is an equal number of electors in each electorate. That underpins the one vote, one value. That ensures a standard and most important democratic principle—to ensure that each citizen has an equal say in their representation.

Where there has been in other jurisdictions the type of different quotas that the Member for Namatjira has proposed, they have been removed because they had an unequal effect so that, in effect, some people's votes would have more effect than others.

It is a problem in the Northern Territory because we have a small population across a large area. We also have areas of intense growth, such as Palmerston and parts of Alice Springs. Unfortunately, because the main objective of redistribution is to ensure that everyone has an equal vote, we are likely to see change. That is the advice we have had from the Electoral Commissioner during discussions.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Thank you.

**Madam CHAIR:** Does the committee have any further questions? No further questions?

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** I am good.

**Madam CHAIR:** Okay. Thank you very much. That concludes the public briefing on the Electoral Amendment Bill 2018. Thank you very much for appearing before us this morning.

**Mrs FINOCCHIARO:** Thank you.

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The committee concluded.

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