



RESEARCH NOTE

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Possible Electoral Redistributions During the 40th Parliament

Introduction

On 18 January 2002 the Australian Electoral Commission announced the commencement of a redrawing of Commonwealth electoral boundaries in Victoria.

Section 59 of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* (CEA) sets out the three triggers for electoral redistributions. Briefly these are:

- Equality of Divisions—a redistribution must be held if the number of electors in more than one third of the divisions in a State or Territory deviates from the average enrolment in that State or Territory by over ten per cent for three consecutive months
- Representation entitlement—a redistribution must be held if the number of Members of the House of Representatives to which a State or Territory is entitled has changed, and
- Passage of time—if neither of the above occur within seven years then a redistribution must be held in a State or Territory.

The redistribution in Victoria was triggered by this last provision.

Equality of Divisions

When drawing electoral boundaries, Redistribution Committees are required (section 66) to ensure that no divisions deviate by more than ten per cent from the average divisional enrolment at the time of the redistribution and that three years and six months after the redistribution, no divisions deviate by more than three and a half per

cent from the average divisional enrolment at that time.

Given this rather strict deviation criteria it not surprising that none of the nineteen redistributions that have been held since the current provisions were introduced in 1984 have been triggered by this provision. It is therefore unlikely that the equality of divisions provision will trigger a redistribution during the term of the 40th Parliament.

Representation Entitlement

Under sections 45 and 46 of the CEA, the Electoral Commissioner ascertains the population of the States and Territories from the Australian Statistician, during the thirteenth month after the first meeting of a newly elected House of Representatives.

The first meeting of the House of Representatives elected on 10 November 2001 took place on 12

February 2002. Thus, in March 2003 the Electoral Commissioner will be required to ascertain the latest population figures from the Australian Statistician.

Section 48 of the CEA specifies the following representation formula. A quota is calculated by dividing the population of the six States by twice the number of Senators from the six States. The entitlement for each State and Territory is then determined by dividing the population of the State or Territory by the quota. The resultant figure is rounded to the nearest whole number. Each original State is guaranteed at least five Members under section 24 of the Australian Constitution. Thus Tasmania has five Members even though it is only entitled to four under the representation formula. See example below.

As there is generally a six-month lag in the availability of population figures, the March 2003

Calculation of Entitlements

$$\text{Step 1} \quad \frac{\text{Population of 6 States}}{2 \times \text{number of State Senators}} = \text{Quota}$$

$$\text{Step 2} \quad \frac{\text{Population of State}}{\text{Quota}} = \text{Entitlement}$$

The following example calculates Queensland's entitlement based on September 2002 population projections.

$$\text{Step 1} \quad \frac{19156100}{2 \times 72} = 133028$$

$$\text{Step 2} \quad \frac{3705500}{133028} = 27.85$$

Rounded to the nearest whole number = 28

determination will probably be based on September 2002 population figures.

Table 1 shows the representation entitlements of the States and Territories based on projected population estimates for September 2002.

The table shows that Queensland should gain an additional seat in the House of Representatives (an increase from 27 to 28) while South Australia should lose a seat (a decrease from 12 to 11). All other States and Territories should remain unchanged. The size of the House should remain unchanged at 150.

The above calculations are based on population projections for September 2002 estimated by applying the latest annual population growth rates (June 2000 to June 2001) to the latest population figures (June 2001). The projections assume a continuation of current population growth rates for the next 18 months. Although there is likely to be some change in population growth rates in that time it is doubtful that they would be of sufficient magnitude to invalidate the population projections in the table.

A change in a State or Territory's entitlements automatically triggers a redistribution in that State or Territory. Thus redistributions should commence in Queensland and South Australia in March 2003.

Passage of Time

Table 2 sets out the dates of the most recent electoral redistributions held in each State and Territory and

Table 1 Representation Entitlements Based on Projected Population(a)—September 2002

	Population Sep 2002 '000	Entitlement	Members	Change
NSW	6621.0	49.77	50	0
Vic	4907.8	36.89	37	0
Qld	3705.5	27.85	28	+1
SA	1508.7	11.34	11	-1
WA	1942.8	14.60	15	0
Tas	470.2	3.53	5	0
NT	200.3	1.51	2	0
ACT	318.2	2.39	2	0
Six States	19156.1			
Quota	133.0			

(a) Based on population movements between June 2000 and June 2001.

the date of the next scheduled redistribution under this provision. A redistribution must commence within 30 days after the expiration of the seven years.

Thus under this provision a redistribution in Victoria was required to commence within 30 days after 20 December 2001. No other redistributions are scheduled under this provision during the life of the 40th Parliament, assuming that the next election is held in late 2004.

Redistribution Process

Once a redistribution is called the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* (sections 60 to 78) specifies a process to be followed that can take anything from 6 to 12 months to complete.

The redistribution process comprises: appointing the Redistribution Committee, calling for suggestions and comments on suggestions, examination of suggestions and comments, conducting public hearings,

publishing proposals, calling for objections and comment on objections, further examination and public hearings, and finally determination and publication of final boundaries.

In making its proposals a Redistribution Committee must take into consideration: enrolments (both current enrolment and projected enrolment three and a half years after the redistribution); community of interest, including economic, social and regional interests; means of communication and travel; physical features and area; and boundaries of existing Divisions.

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Table 2 Electoral Redistribution Dates

	Most Recent	Next Scheduled
New South Wales	11 February 2000	March 2007
Victoria	20 December 1994	January 2002
Queensland	10 December 1997	January 2005
South Australia	20 August 1999	September 2006
Western Australia	20 November 2000	December 2007
Tasmania	11 February 2000	March 2007
Northern Territory	21 December 2000	January 2008
Australian Capital Territory	10 December 1997	January 2005