

Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters on the *Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Ensuring Fair Representation of the Northern Territory) Bill 2020*

To Chairperson the Hon James Mc Grath and the members of the JSCEM

My name is Chris Su and I write from the Australian Non-Self Governing External Territory of Christmas Island in the Indian Ocean.

Christmas Island votes in the Lingiari Electorate for Federal Elections. Although WA laws apply on Christmas Island as Commonwealth instruments, we do not vote in WA elections, nor Territory elections.

I would like to present a short history of how Australia came to acquire Christmas Island as it is relevant to the terms of reference. Up until 1958 Christmas Island was under the control of the Straits Colony of Singapore. Singapore laws were in effect on the island and it was administered by the British via their Singapore colonial office. The Commonwealth Christmas Island Act 1958 was the transfer instrument between the British and Australian Governments to transfer sovereignty of the Island to the Commonwealth of Australia. October 1st is our Territory Day to mark the occasion.

No input was asked from the residents on the island in this process. The Union Jack was lowered one day and the Australian flag was raised the next.

Even though we became an official territory that day the Australian flag was raised on October 1 1958, we were not recognised as citizens nor were Australian laws practiced on the Island. The same can be said for our neighbours to the west, the Cocos (Keeling) Islands who became part of Australia two years earlier. As a matter of fact, Singaporean Laws in some instances were in force until 2017 on our islands when the last one was finally repealed¹.

This was unacceptable. The laws of a foreign parliament whom the citizenry cannot vote representatives into applied to the Islands.

I submit to the JSCEM that this was still the case on Christmas Island until the 1984 Federal Election when the Australian Government let us vote for the first time.

We had been part of the nation for 36 years at that point and it was the first time we had the ability to vote, which we did in the then Northern Territory Division.

For 36 years we had no political representation.

Laws of a foreign parliament in Ngunnawal Country whom the Islanders could not vote representatives into made laws that applied to our Island.

In those years Asian people like myself were disenfranchised on a social, economic and political level. I am 38 and not old by anyone's standards, but I remember racial segregation of swimming pools and water fountains in my youth and an Asian school where people like me were to be educated separate than our Caucasian counterparts on the Australian Non-Self Governing External Territory of Christmas Island in the Indian Ocean.

¹ Explanatory Statement, minute no.16 of 2017 – *Repeal the Co-operative Societies Ordinance (of the Colony of Singapore in its application to the Territory*
<https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2017L01133/53bc959a-c6d5-42b2-b4af-82f740a478ab>

Voting as you can see if of utmost importance to me.

And I view this reverting of the two Northern Territory divisions back into one to be most objectionable as it further marginalises my representation which we waited 36 years for after Australia took us into the nation.

The AEC's most recent March 2020 statistics² show the combined electors of Solomon and Lingiari to be 140,007. If combined it would be the largest division by population according to that AEC document. Distant second is South Australia's Sturt Division with 124,594.

I submit that the good people of the 85sqm Division of Sturt³ can have their elected representative travel throughout the four corners of their electorate several times in one day.

To complete the same feat in a single Northern Territory Division would take more than two weeks and no less than four international airports – the Cocos (Keeling) Islands International Airport, Christmas Island International Airport, Darwin International Airport and Perth International Airport. In addition, two ferries would need to be taken for Cocos (Keeling) and the Tiwi Islands respectively.

The distance from the Cocos(Keeling) Islands to Alice Springs as the crow flies is 4,113km.

Dublin to Cairo is 3,975km.

4000km is *one tenth of the circumference of the Earth*.

The Division of Sturt at its width of 6km represents 0.00015 the circumference of the planet and an order of magnitude 666 less in distance than Alice Springs to Cocos.

The Lingiari and Solomon Divisions must be preserved to ensure that the citizens of these electorates maintain their access to their elected representatives as limited as they are already, in particular the electors in Christmas and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

For failure of the system to allow Christmas Island to have its own seat in the House of Representatives perhaps alongside our Cocos neighbours or our own Act of Self Determination to allow for a Legislative Assembly of our own, the present situation of inclusion in the Lingiari electorate as one of the two electorates in the Northern Territory is the most optimal.

Up until 1984 my citizenship was electorally worthless. In 2020 is my citizenship to be electorally worth less?

If you have any questions about my submission, I am available at contact details enclosed.

Yours sincerely

Chris Su

2nd July 2020

² https://www.aec.gov.au/enrolling_to_vote/enrolment_stats/elector_count/2020/elector-count-mar-2020.pdf

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Division_of_Sturt