



NEW INQUIRY

Should the Northern Territory and the ACT be guaranteed a minimum of two Members in the House of Representatives?

Federal Parliament's Electoral Matters Committee is to conduct an inquiry into whether the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory should be guaranteed a minimum of two seats in the House of Representatives.

This follows a determination earlier this year that the Northern Territory's representation in the House of Representatives would be reduced from two seats to one at the next federal election, based on a marginal decline in the Northern Territory's share of the national population. The ACT currently has two representatives, but had three from 1996 until the 1998 election.

Under the Constitution, each State is guaranteed at least five seats in the House of Representatives, while the two Territories are currently guaranteed one seat each by the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*. Subject to these minimum entitlements, a combination of the Constitution and the Commonwealth Electoral Act sets out a very precise manner for determining how many members of the House of Representatives each State and Territory will return at a federal election, based on official population statistics (see below for more detail). In February 2003 the Northern Territory was deemed to be just a few hundred persons below the population needed to retain the second seat it gained – for the first time – at the 2001 election.

The Special Minister of State, Senator Eric Abetz, has asked the Committee to investigate, as expeditiously as possible, whether the Commonwealth Electoral Act should be amended to provide for a minimum of two seats each in the House of Representatives for the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory.

"The Member for the Northern Territory seat of Solomon, David Tollner MP, has introduced a Private Member's Bill seeking to guarantee both the Northern Territory and the ACT a minimum of two seats in the House of Representatives. The Member for the Northern Territory seat of Lingiari, Warren Snowdon MP, has called for the Northern Territory and the ACT to be guaranteed two and three seats respectively", the Chair of the Electoral Matters Committee, Mr Petro Georgiou, said.

"The inquiry will contribute to the Parliament's consideration of whether the Northern Territory and the ACT should each be guaranteed a minimum of two House of Representatives seats".

Persons interested in making a submission to the inquiry should contact the Committee secretariat to obtain the complete terms of reference and *Guidelines on the preparation of a submission*. These are also available at www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/em. Submissions should be sent by **Friday 15 August** to:

The Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Telephone: (02) 6277 2374
Facsimile: (02) 6277 4710
Email: JSCem@aph.gov.au

For media comment, please contact:

Electoral Matters Committee Chair, Petro Georgiou MP, on (03) 9882 3677

For further information on the conduct of the inquiry:

Russell Chafer, Committee Secretary on (02) 6277 4564, or visit the Committee website at www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/em/

Further background follows

ELECTORAL REPRESENTATION INQUIRY

BACKGROUND

The Commonwealth Electoral Act requires the Electoral Commissioner to calculate the 'representation entitlement' of each state and territory during the thirteenth month after the first meeting of any newly elected House of Representatives. The calculation, which occurred in February 2003, uses a formula outlined in the Australian Constitution.

The formula requires the combined population of the six states to be divided by twice the combined number of senators from those states, to reach a 'population quota'. (In the current case the states' population of 19,205,190 was divided by 144 (2 x 72 senators), for a figure of 133,369.375.) That 'population quota' figure is then divided individually into each State's and each Territory's population to calculate a 'representation entitlement' for each. The entitlement number is rounded up or down to the nearest whole number; each of the original States is guaranteed a minimum of five Members. Population figures are official figures provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Under the formula applied in February 2003, the Northern Territory's entitlement will reduce from two to one House of Representatives seat for the next election (it increased to two for the first time at the last election). South Australia will also lose a seat (reducing from 12 to 11), while Queensland gains a seat (rising to 28). The other states and the ACT remain the same (NSW 50, Victoria 37, WA 15, Tasmania 5, ACT 2).

The changes will trigger a formal redrawing of electoral boundaries in South Australia and Queensland (the NT seat will simply cover the whole Territory).

**For more information and technical detail visit the Australian Electoral Commission's website:
www.aec.gov.au**

The members of the Electoral Matters Committee are:

Mr Petro Georgiou MP (*Chair*) (Liberal Party of Australia, Kooyong, VIC)
Mr Michael Danby MP (*Deputy Chair*) (Australian Labor Party, Melbourne Ports, VIC)
Senator Andrew Bartlett (Australian Democrats, QLD)
Senator George Brandis (Liberal Party of Australia, QLD)
Senator Brett Mason (Liberal Party of Australia, QLD)
Senator Andrew Murray (Australian Democrats, WA)
Senator Robert Ray (Australian Labor Party, VIC)
Mr John Forrest MP (National Party of Australia, Mallee, VIC)
Mr Daryl Melham MP (Australian Labor Party, Banks, NSW)
Ms Sophie Panopoulos MP (Liberal Party of Australia, Indi, VIC)