

**Submission by the Liberal Party of Australia**  
**to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters**  
**Inquiry into Territory Representation**

The Liberal Party of Australia welcomes this opportunity to present its views to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters regarding the representation of territories in the House of Representatives.

Specifically, we express our firm support for the objectives of the private member's bill introduced into the House of Representatives on 16 June 2003 by Mr David Tollner MP, Member for Solomon. His bill would ensure that there is at all times a minimum of two seats each for the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory. (At present the Commonwealth Electoral Act prescribes a minimum of one seat each for those two territories.)

The matter has particularly come to public attention because of the determination announced in February 2003 of the number of seats that states and territories would have in the House of Representatives following the next general election. The Northern Territory had gained a seat with effect from the 2001 election to bring its total to two seats. The determination brought the Northern Territory back to one seat, but by the slimmest of margins. If the population of the Northern Territory had been higher by fewer than 300 people, then the second seat would not have been lost.

In these circumstances, it seems pointless to have the disruption of a loss of a seat when it may well be for only one Parliament before the second seat is restored anyway. When such a very slight movement in population around the mark of 1.5 seats, fractionally above or fractionally below, makes a difference, the most sensible approach is to place a minimum requirement of two seats into the Act.

This will stabilize the position for the Northern Territory, while no other state or territory is in a directly comparable situation.

There is one further point that we wish to emphasise. It is, in our view, quite unnecessary for there to be a fresh redistribution (with all the processes of inquiry and report involved in that) if the Northern Territory

is to immediately revert to an entitlement of 2 seats. The legislation should ensure that the present two seats can simply continue with their present boundaries.

We urge the committee to report in favour of a minimum of two seats for the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory and in favour of maintaining the present boundaries for the 2 Northern Territory seats.