



Northern Territory Branch
PO Box 38333, Winnellie 0821
Tel: 08-8941 5489
Fax: 08-8941 0829
Email: nt.dems@democrats.org.au

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

Dear Sir

**Inquiry into Representation of the Northern Territory
and the ACT in the House of Representatives**

Statehood for the Northern Territory has been placed on the political agenda, so as an interim measure, the Australian Democrats NT support **having a minimum of two seats** in the House of Representatives (HoR) for the Northern Territory until the issue of Statehood has been resolved.

The NT is clearly under-represented in comparison with the States under the built-in mechanism of at least five seats per State as required under the Australian Constitution.

Even if the two existing NT seats are retained, the population per seat would be 99,880 and would **exceed population in each Tasmanian seat by 5,206**.

If the number of HoR seats for the NT is reduced to one (as per the *Electoral Newsfile No.110, April 2003*) then the population of that one NT electorate would be:

- 66,391 (49.99%) **greater than the Australian quota** of 133,369 people per seat; and
- **greater than twice the population of Tasmanian seats.** (see table 1)

Each of the five Tasmanian seats has a population of 94,674, which is 38,695 (**29.01%**) **less than the Australian quota** of 133,369 people per seat. (see table 1)

Table 1 (Note that quota is 133,369)

Area	Pop.	Result	Seats	Pop. Per Seat
NSW	6,657,478	49.9176	50	133,150
Vic	4,888,243	36.6519	37	132,115
Qld	3,729,123	27.9609	28	133,183
WA	1,934,508	14.5049	15	128,967
SA	1,522,467	11.4154	11	138,406
Tas	473,371	3.5493	5	94,674
ACT	322,871	2.4209	2	161,436
NT	199,760	1.4978	1	199,760

Has the population for Christmas and Cocos Islands been included in the NT figure?

The Northern Territory is made up of 1,346,200 sq km, stretching from the Tiwi Islands to the South Australian, Western Australia and Queensland borders, and the Islands off the Arnhemland coast. The present seat of Lingiari also includes Christmas and Cocos Islands.

It would be geographically challenging for one HoR member to adequately represent the whole Northern Territory, Christmas and Cocos Islands. We have diverse groups of people living in the Territory, including Indigenous people and Pastoralists who are entitled to full and proper representation. That diversity in itself creates further challenges to the adequate representation and attention to the needs and aspirations of all Territorians.

Darwin and the surrounding region in the current seat of Solomon have a growing population that is demanding more attention from their HoR member. If the NT representation is reduced to one seat that member's time and attention would increasingly be taken up with the interests of those in the major centres. With the large travelling distances in the NT there would be little time left for just one member to attend to the needs of people in remote and rural regions.

The Territory population needs to have adequate representation in their Parliament. They also need to have reasonable access to their members. Therefore we feel it is necessary to have at least two HoR members so that the urban and non-urban 'communities of interest' can have due attention.

The Australian Democrats believe that the people of the Northern Territory are entitled to equal and adequate enfranchisement in the Federal Parliament, as are all Australians.

Yours faithfully

Fay Lawrence
Secretary