

THE HON GRANT TAMBLING JP FAIM

DARWIN. N.T. 0801

Mr Petro Georgiou, MP
Committee Chair, Joint Standing Committee
on Electoral Matters,
Parliament House,
CANBERRA. A.C.T. 2600

Dear Mr Georgiou,

I write in reference to your Committee's Inquiry relating to Northern Territory representation in the House of Representatives.

By way of background I should state that I have previously been an elected politician in the Northern Territory for 20 years – specifically as the Member for Fannie Bay in the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly (1974-1977), the Federal Member for the Northern Territory in the House of Representatives (1980-1983) and as the Senator for the Northern Territory (1987-2001). On each occasion I was affiliated with the Northern Territory Country Liberal Party (and 'in association' with the National Party of Australia in the Federal Parliament). I believe I am well qualified to reflect on the aspirations of Northern Territory residents and electors on the issues under consideration by your committee.

I unequivocally support the legislative initiative of the current Member for Solomon (David Tollner MP) to ensure that the current level of representation in the House of Representatives, ie two seats, is guaranteed as a minimum. Any retraction from the position establishing the separate electorates of Solomon and Lingiari in 2001 can only be seen as pedantic, stupid and backward in light of the minuscule population formula variation on which the rationale is based.

Importantly, **constitutional development** of the vast Northern Territory has always been a matter of "progressive steps of faith" and "maintaining the momentum". These advances have enjoyed the **bi-partisan support** of both the Australian Labor Party and the N.T. Country Liberal Party (& by association or precedence, the Liberal Party of Australia and the National Party of Australia).

The establishment of a fully elected N.T. Legislative Assembly in 1974 was legislated by an ALP Government and built on the work of the then Federal Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Constitutional Development for the Northern Territory. Self-Government was subsequently achieved in 1978 under the auspices of a Coalition (Liberal/National) Government. The Northern Territory Parliament and successive Governments are now well recognised for their maturity and responsibility. The unusual and diverse community interests are reflected throughout the political system, which in effect operates as a State Government equivalent.

In the House of Representatives there have now been 10 Federal Members (including myself). Prior to 2001 four members had held the seat of the Northern Territory from the ALP, four members from Coalition linked parties & one Independent member (during the War years). Mr Snowden (ALP) was (re)elected to the seat of Lingiari and Mr Tollner (CLP) was elected to the seat Solomon following the creation of two seats in 2001. Since 1975 there have been six Senators (including myself) elected to represent the two Northern Territory Senate positions – three from the CLP & three from the ALP. The electorate clearly makes choices and changes in representation, as it deems necessary. **Unlike other states (eg Tasmania) the Northern Territory has not enjoyed minimum representation in the House of Representatives underpinned and guaranteed by the Federal Constitution.**

Economic development of the Northern Territory (particularly since 1974) has been astounding. This has been largely due to the stimulus lead by an independent (State) entity working in close collaboration (and some creative tensions) with Federal Members and Senators. Resource/Mining, Tourism, & Primary industries have recorded unprecedented growth, and Public Administration & the provision of services to remote and Aboriginal communities have necessitated major additional workloads on N.T. Ministers and the Federal MPs & Senators. **The creation of the two Federal seats of Lingiari & Solomon in 2001 certainly complemented the representational duties of Territory MPs.** The redistribution between significantly urban/commercial interests in Solomon and the rural/remote/indigenous/small community interests in Lingiari gave fair and equitable constituencies.

My main initial concern, stated at the outset, is that minuscule population formula variation used in determining the number of seats to apply to the Northern Territory is “a nonsense”. Inevitably **large scale construction projects and defence force personnel movements** will produce changes at the margin, and I would certainly and confidently predict that in the next 12 months there will be significant increases in both sectors. Similarly a number of **16 & 17 year olds will be added to the Electoral Roll before the next election - in the order of 5,000** – surely some allowance for these changes should be accommodated

I trust these comments provide argument to support Mr Tollner’s necessary actions,

Yours sincerely,

GRANT TAMBLING

15TH August 2003.