

Committee Secretary
Finance and Public Administration Committee
Department of the Senate
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Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

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Dear Senators,

**Re: COMMONWEALTH ELECTORAL AMENDMENT
(DEMOCRATIC PLEBISCITES) BILL 2007**

I am pleased the Government has seen fit to introduce this Bill to ensure the right of Australian citizens to be consulted continues.

It is noted that the Explanatory Memorandum informs that a plebiscite may be undertaken on the proposed "**amalgamation** of any local government body in any part of Australia"¹.

The proposed Bill (Schedule 1) amends the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 by inserting the following:

Item 1 – After subsection 7A(1B)

4. This item inserts subsections (1C) to (1G) which are intended to give effect to the announcement by the Prime Minister on 7 August 2007 that the AEC undertake any plebiscite on the **amalgamation** of any local government body in any part of Australia.

The words used would seem to restrict the AEC to conducting a 'plebiscite' only if councils are 'amalgamated'.

The definition of "amalgamation" is to merge, unite, combine.

Some councils in Queensland are to be 'amalgamated' with their near neighbouring councils, but others are to have their boundaries redrawn and in the past some councils have been dismissed.

In our particular situation segments of the Gold Coast and Beaudesert shire are to be excised from their respective local councils and relocated into Logan City Council by the process of re-drawing the boundaries. The word "amalgamation" does not seem to cover this action, neither does it cover the dismissal of a council.

Could you please consider expanding the defining events that enable the AEC to hold a plebiscite if you feel the word "amalgamation" does not cover all prospective situations.

Financial Restrictions:

Apparently Section 7A(1) of the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918² already provides that the AEC may make arrangements for the supply of goods or services to "any person or body", which may include a local government body³.

¹ Commonwealth of Australia, House of Representatives 2007, Explanatory Memorandum, COMMONWEALTH ELECTORAL AMENDMENT (DEMOCRATIC PLEBISCITES) BILL 2007, p.2.

It would appear that an **ordinary person** or **bodies** seeking a plebiscite will be charged a 'reasonable fee' for the services provided by the AEC⁴. As such this would eliminate most "**ordinary persons**" from accessing this service unless extremely wealthy. It seems the only way a plebiscite might take place is if a council or other body makes the application to the AEC.

The area of Beenleigh and its surrounding suburbs has been subjected to re-assignment on more than one occasion. After fifty years as the Beenleigh Shire Council, in 1949 the three Councils of Beenleigh, Coomera and Nerang were amalgamated under the name Albert Shire Council. In 1995 Albert Shire was taken over by the Gold Coast City Council.

I seriously doubt whether either the Gold Coast City Council who are losing Beenleigh and its surrounds or the Logan City Council who are gaining these areas including a substantial part of Beaudesert would be willing to apply for a plebiscite. The attitude appears to be "the decision has been made, let's get on with it, whether one likes it or not", which was exactly the response the Premier of Queensland sought by his 'rough-shod ride over' Queenslanders' right to be consulted.

Unless the Electoral Act is amended to enable an 'ordinary or any citizen' to apply for a plebiscite with a guarantee of funds to pay the AEC its required fees, the Bill would seem to fail in its objective.

Australians' rights will not be protected, whilst citizens are unable to access the procedures to ensure our voices are heard.

Would you please give these points some consideration as you review the Bill?

Kind regards

Sue Price

² Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 Act No. 27 of 1918 as amended, Section 7A, p.14.

³ Commonwealth of Australia, House of Representatives 2007, Explanatory Memorandum, Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Democratic Plebiscites) Bill, 2007, p.2.

⁴ Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 Act No. 27 of 1918 as amended, Section 7B, p.15.