



6 July 2020

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

By email: em@aph.gov.au

To whom it may concern,

Submission: Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Ensuring Fair Representation of the Northern Territory) Bill 2020

The Northern Territory Council of Social Service (NTCOSS) is a peak body for the Social and Community Sector in the Northern Territory (NT) and an advocate for social justice on behalf of people and communities in the NT, who may be affected by poverty and disadvantage.

NTCOSS welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Ensuring Fair Representation of the Northern Territory) Bill 2020 (the Bill).

The NT is Australia's third largest geographical area; with almost 40% of the population residing in remote and very remote areas. Approximately one third of the population is Aboriginal, with 80% of Aboriginal people residing in remote and very remote areas. More than 100 Aboriginal languages are spoken in the NT, and it is one of the most linguistically diverse areas of the world. The NT has a number of other unique population characteristics including the high level of people who experience disadvantage, particularly amongst Aboriginal people; and high levels of remoteness and regional disadvantage.

The two NT Divisions of Solomon and Lingiari have relatively low populations, however the interests and perspectives of Territorians are complex and diverse.

The Division of Lingiari has the largest Aboriginal population in Australia, at approximately 40% of the population, and covers 1.3 million squares kilometres including all remote and very remote communities.

This is in contrast to the Division of Solomon, which largely covers the Darwin and Palmerston metropolitan areas, with Aboriginal people making up 8.5% of the population.

Overall, the Aboriginal population of the NT reflects 25.5% of the NT's population. Arguably, at 40%, the Aboriginal population of Lingiari has the potential to be one of the most politically influential

populations in Australia. The loss of one member in the House of Representatives would result in the NT being the least-represented jurisdiction in Australia, and will reduce the electoral power of Aboriginal voters from remote and very remote NT. This would represent a significant backwards step for reconciliation and a significant loss in the representation of Aboriginal people in the Australian parliament.

The task of representing the vastly different interests from the urban Darwin centre to very remote communities, across a vast geographical area, is insurmountable.

Tasmania, no matter it's population, is currently awarded 5 seats in the House of Representatives merely by virtue of being a state. In the NT it is the immense need, not to mention its diversity and geographic challenges, that requires a legislative change to ensure a minimum of two.

NTCOSS supports the Bill and its move to ensure equitable representation of the NT in the Australian Parliament.

Please contact admin@ntcoss.org.au or (08) 8948 2665 with any questions relating to this submission.

Yours sincerely,



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