



RESEARCH NOTE

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Possible Electoral Redistributions During the 38th Parliament

Main Features:

- A redistribution in Western Australia will commence in May 1996.
- Redistributions in New South Wales, South Australia and Tasmania scheduled for early 1999 are likely to be deferred.
- Redistributions in Queensland and the ACT are likely to be held in early 1997, with Queensland gaining an additional seat and the ACT losing a seat in the House of Representatives.

Introduction

Section 59 of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* (CEA) sets out the conditions for electoral redistribution. Briefly these are:

- Passage of time—a redistribution must be held in a State or Territory at least every seven years.
- Equality of Divisions—a redistribution must be held if the number of electors in more than one third of the Divisions in a State or Territory deviates from the average enrolment in that State or Territory by over ten per cent for three consecutive months.
- Representation entitlement—a redistribution must be held if the number of Members of the House of Representatives to which a State or Territory is entitled has changed.

Passage of Time

Table 1 sets out the dates of the most recent electoral redistributions held in each State and the ACT and the date of the next scheduled redistribution under this provision.

Under this provision a redistribution in Western Australia was required to commence in March 1996. However, under sub-section 59(3)CEA a redistribution cannot be held within one year before the date of expiry of a House of Representatives. Thus the redistribution scheduled for March 1996 under this provision had to be deferred till after the 1996 election. The redistribution in Western Australia is now required to commence within 30 days after 30 April (the day of the first sitting of the new House of Representatives).

Should the 38th Parliament serve its full term, then redistributions in New South Wales, South

Australia and Tasmania scheduled under this provision for early 1999 are likely to be deferred. The term of the 38th Parliament will expire on 30 April 1999. Thus, redistributions scheduled for early 1999 will have to be deferred until after the 1999 elections, assuming that the 38th Parliament serves its full term.

Equality of Divisions

When drawing electoral boundaries, Redistribution Committees are required to ensure that no Divisions deviate by more than ten per cent from the average divisional enrolment at the time of the redistribution and that three years and six months after the redistribution, no Divisions deviate by more than two per cent from the average divisional enrolment at that time. Given the rather strict deviation criteria, it is extremely unlikely that this provision will trigger a redistribution during the term of the 38th Parliament.

The latest monthly enrolment figures (February 1996) show that Western Australia is the only State where there are any Divisions that deviate from the average divisional enrolment by ten per cent or more.

In Western Australia two Divisions, Brand and Moore, deviate by more than ten per cent

Table 1 Electoral Redistribution Dates

	Most Recent	Next Scheduled
New South Wales	31 January 1992	Jan 1999
Victoria	20 December 1994	Dec 2001
Queensland	1 December 1994	Dec 2001
South Australia	17 January 1992	Jan 1999
Western Australia	31 March 1989	Mar 1996
Tasmania	1 April 1992	Apr 1999
Australian Capital Territory	30 September 1994	Sep 2001

from the average. For this provision to apply in Western Australia five Divisions would need to deviate from the average by more than ten per cent.

Representation entitlement

During the tenth month after the first meeting of a newly elected House of Representatives, the Electoral Commissioner ascertains the population of the States and Territories from the Australian Statistician.

A quota is calculated by dividing the population of the six States by twice the number of Senators from the six States. The entitlement for each State and Territory is then determined by dividing the population of the State or Territory by the quota. The resultant figure is rounded to the nearest whole number. Each original State is guaranteed at least five Members under section 24 of the Constitution.

The first meeting of the House of Representatives elected on 2 March 1996 took place on 30 April 1996. Thus, during February 1997, the Electoral Commissioner will be required to ascertain the latest population figures from the Australian Statistician.

Table 2 shows the Representational entitlements of the States and Territories based on the latest available population statistics (September 1995).

Representational entitlement calculations based on September 1995 population statistics show that Queensland will gain an

Calculation of Entitlements

Step 1 $\frac{\text{Population of 6 States}}{2 \times \text{number of State Senators}} = \text{Quota}$

Step 2 $\frac{\text{Population of State}}{\text{Quota}} = \text{Entitlement}$

The following example calculates Queensland's entitlement based on September 1995 population estimates.

Step 1 $\frac{17632100}{2 \times 72} = 122445$

Step 2 $\frac{3297900}{122445} = 26.93$

Rounded to the nearest whole number = 27

additional seat while the Australian Capital Territory will lose a seat. All other States and Territories will remain unchanged. Although the above calculations are based on the latest available population statistics and not the statistics that will be available in February 1997, it is doubtful that the result would be any different from the above.

No State or Territory, apart from the ACT, is sufficiently close to a change in entitlement from the above to suggest that population statistics available in nine months will give a different result. However, the situation in the ACT is less clear cut with the ACT achieving 2.49 quotas. For the ACT to retain its existing three members, population growth in the ACT in the next nine months will have to exceed the population growth rate of the

six States. Given recent government announcements on public sector employment (both Commonwealth and ACT Administration) it is doubtful that the ACT will experience population growth in excess of the six States in the next nine months.

Given the above, electoral redistributions based on changes in representational entitlements of the States and Territories are likely to be held early in 1997 in Queensland and the ACT.

**Gerard Newman
Statistics Group
Parliamentary Research
Service**

Phone: 06 277 2480
Fax: 06 277 2454

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Table 2 Representational Entitlement Based on Latest Population – September 1995

	Population Sep 1995	Quotas	Entitlement
	'000		
NSW	6135.0	50.10	50
Vic	4511.1	36.84	37
Qld	3297.9	26.93	27
SA	1474.7	12.04	12
WA	1740.1	14.21	14
Tas	473.3	3.87	5
NT	174.7	1.43	1
ACT	304.9	2.49	2
Six States	17632.1		148
Quota	122.4		