



## Possible electoral redistributions during the 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament

### Introduction

On 30 November 2004, the Australian Electoral Commission directed the commencement of a redistribution of Commonwealth electoral boundaries in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT).<sup>1</sup> The redistribution in the ACT is only one of a number of redistributions that are likely to occur during the anticipated life of the 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament.

Section 59 of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* (the Act) sets out the three triggers for electoral redistributions. Briefly these are:

- 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 10 per cent for three consecutive months. This has never been a trigger for a redistribution since the current provisions were introduced in 1984
- 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, or
- passage of time—if neither of the above occur within seven years of the previous redistribution, then a redistribution must be held in a state or territory.

The redistribution in the ACT has been triggered by this last provision, the last redistribution having occurred in December 1997.

### Representation entitlement

Under sections 45 and 46 of the Act, the Electoral Commissioner ascertains the population of the states and territories from the Australian Statistician 12 months after the first meeting of a newly elected House of Representatives.

The first meeting of the House of Representatives elected on 9 October 2004 took place on 16 November 2004. Thus, on 17 November 2005, the Electoral Commissioner will be required to ascertain the latest population figures published by the Australian Statistician.

Section 48 of the Act specifies the manner representation is calculated. A quota is ascertained 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 Australian Constitution. Thus Tasmania has five members even though it is only entitled to four under the representation formula.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics publication schedule, the latest published population figures available at 17 November 2005 will relate to March 2005.<sup>2</sup>

Table 1 shows the representation entitlements of the states and territories based on projected population estimates for March

Table 1: Representational entitlements based on projected population, March 2005

	Population Mar 2005 (a)	Quotas	Entitlement	Change (b)
NSW	6 769 604	49.333	49	-1
Vic	5 019 777	36.581	37	0
Qld	3 939 507	28.709	29	1
SA	1 540 413	11.226	11	0
WA	2 005 583	14.616	15	0
Tas	485 199	3.536	5	0
Six states	19 760 083			
NT	201 282	1.467		
Cocos (Keeling) Islands	600	0.004		
Christmas Islands	1510	0.011		
Margin of error (c)	2600			
Total NT	205 992	1.501	2	0
ACT	324 415	2.364		
Jervis Bay	560	0.004		
Total ACT	324 975	2.368	2	0
Total	20 291 050		150	0

(a) Based on population movements between September 2003 and September 2004. For representational entitlement purposes, Cocos (Keeling) and Christmas Islands are included in the Northern Territory and Jervis Bay is included in the Australian Capital Territory.

(b) Change over 2003 Entitlement.

(c) Two standard errors of measure of net Census undercount.

2005.

The table shows that Queensland should gain an additional seat in the House of Representatives (an increase from 28 to 29) while New South Wales should lose a seat (a decrease from 50 to 49). The situation in the Northern Territory (NT) is discussed below. All other states and territories should remain unchanged.

The above calculations are based on population projections for March 2005 estimated by applying the annual population growth rates for the latest period available (September 2003 to September 2004) to the September 2004 population figures. The projections assume a continuation of current population growth rates for the next six months. Although there is likely to be some change in population growth rates in that time, it is doubtful that they would be of sufficient magnitude to invalidate the population projections in the table.

A change in a state or territory's entitlements automatically triggers a redistribution in that state or territory. Thus redistributions are likely to commence in New South Wales and Queensland in November 2005.

## Northern Territory

At the 2003 determination of entitlements the NT's representation was reduced from two to one. In a subsequent inquiry into increasing the minimum entitlement of the territories, the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters recommended that the margin of

error in the territory's population estimates be taken into account when determining the two territories' entitlements.<sup>3</sup> Legislation was subsequently passed to set aside the 2003 determination in respect of the NT and to give effect to the Committee's recommendation.

However, the NT's population relative to the other states has continued to decline and there is some doubt that the inclusion of the margin of error in the NT's population will be sufficient to entitle the NT to a second seat at the next determination. Given a continuation of current trends, it is possible that the inclusion two standard errors of the net Census undercount may be just sufficient to entitle the NT to a second seat.

## Passage of time

Table 2 sets out the dates of the most recent electoral redistributions held in each state and territory and the date of the next scheduled redistribution under this provision. A redistribution must commence within 30 days after the expiration of the seven years.

Under this provision, a redistribution was commenced in the ACT on 30 November 2004 and redistributions are scheduled in New South Wales (if no change in entitlements at the next determination) and Tasmania during the life of the 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament. However, under subsection 59(4) of the Act, redistributions scheduled within 12 months of the expiration of a House of Representatives are deferred until 30 days after the first meeting of the new House. Thus

redistributions triggered by the seven-year rule for New South Wales and Tasmania in March 2007 will likely be deferred until after the next election. However, a redistribution in New South Wales is still likely because of the change in entitlements discussed earlier in this brief.

## Conclusion

Based on a continuation of current population growth patterns and the 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament serving its full term redistributions will be held in the ACT and are likely to be held in New South Wales and Queensland during the life of the Parliament.

1. Australian Electoral Commission, *Electoral Commissioner announces redistribution in the ACT*, media release, Australian Electoral Commission, Canberra, 30 November 2004.
2. Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian Demographic Statistics, September Quarter 2004*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra, 24 March 2005.
3. Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, *Territorial representation: report of the inquiry into increasing the minimum representation for the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory in the House of Representatives*, November 2003, p. 24.

Table 2: Electoral redistribution dates

	Most recent	Next scheduled
New South Wales	11 February 2000	March 2007
Victoria	29 January 2003	February 2010
Queensland	25 November 2003	December 2010
South Australia	17 December 2003	January 2011
Western Australia	20 November 2000	December 2007
Tasmania	11 February 2000	March 2007
Northern Territory	21 December 2000	January 2008
Australian Capital Territory	10 December 1997	January 2005

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