



Electoral redistributions during the 42nd Parliament

Stephen Barber
Statistics and Mapping Section

Executive summary

- The periodic redrawing of electoral boundaries is required by law to maintain electoral divisions of roughly equal enrolment size within a state or territory. Redrawing of boundaries is known as a redistribution.
- During the expected life of the 42nd Parliament there will be redistributions in Western Australia, Northern Territory and Tasmania because of the seven year provision. The number of electoral divisions in each case will remain unchanged.
- Redistributions of Victoria and South Australia scheduled for later in the Parliament will probably be deferred until after the next election of the House of Representatives.
- There are also expected to be redistributions in New South Wales and Queensland brought about by the representation entitlement trigger. This is predicted to see New South Wales lose a division and Queensland gain one.

Contents

Executive summary	1
Introduction	2
Redistribution provisions	2
Representation entitlement	2
Expiration of seven years	4
Conclusion	5

Introduction

Each state and territory is divided into electoral divisions for the House of Representatives. The number of divisions is determined by population and the Constitution. To ensure equal representation within each state and territory, the boundaries of these divisions have to be redrawn or redistributed from time to time.

On 14 December 2007 and 16 January 2008, the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) directed the commencement of redistributions of Commonwealth electoral boundaries in Western Australia and The Northern Territory respectively.¹ These redistributions are two of a number of redistributions that will or are likely to occur during the next three years of the 42nd Parliament.

Redistribution provisions

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

- 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 changes
- Malapportioned 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 a period of more than two months (this has never been a trigger for a redistribution since the current provisions were introduced in 1984), and
- Expiration of seven years—if neither of the above provisions triggers a redistribution in a state or territory within seven years of the previous redistribution, then a redistribution must be held in that state or territory.

Representation entitlement

Under sections 45 and 46 of the Act, the Electoral Commissioner ascertains the populations of the states and territories from the Australian Statistician 12 months after the first meeting of a newly elected House of Representatives. Section 48 of the Act specifies the manner in which representation entitlements are calculated from these population numbers.²

-
1. [AEC media release: Federal electoral redistribution to take place in Western Australia](#) and [AEC media release: Federal electoral redistribution to take place in Northern Territory](#), accessed 21 January 2008.
 2. An initial quota is ascertained by dividing the total population of the six states by twice the number of senators from the six states. A quota for each state and territory is then determined by

The first meeting of the new House of Representatives will take place on 12 February 2008; thus, on 13 February 2009, the Electoral Commissioner will ascertain the latest population figures published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).³

According to the ABS' latest publication of demographic statistics, the population figures that will be available at 13 February 2009 will relate to June 2008.⁴ Using the most current population growth figures, June 2006 to June 2007, and assuming those rates of growth continue to June 2008, gives the estimated populations and representation entitlements of the states and territories shown in Table 1.⁵

Despite New South Wales and Queensland having had redistributions that concluded only in 2006, the entitlement estimates show that these two states will each have to undergo another redistribution. Queensland will again be entitled to an additional electoral division in the House of Representatives (an increase from 29 to 30) while New South Wales will lose a further division (a decrease from 49 to 48). All other states and territories will remain unchanged, leaving the House of Representatives membership at 150 divisions.

As a change in a state or territory's entitlement automatically triggers a redistribution in that state or territory, redistributions should commence in New South Wales and Queensland in February/March 2009.

dividing the population of the state or territory by the initial quota. The resultant figure rounded to the nearest whole number determines the entitlement.

3. The Electoral Commissioner adjusts the ABS' population estimates to include eligible Norfolk Island voters (see also sections 38A and 95AA of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*). These adjustments are very small so no estimates of these adjustments have been included in Table 1 because they would not affect the outcome.
4. Australian Bureau of Statistics, [Australian Demographic Statistics, June Quarter 2007](#), Canberra, 4 December 2007, accessed 16 January 2008.
5. It should be noted that section 24 of the Australian Constitution guarantees that each of the original states is entitled to at least five members. Therefore, Tasmania has five members even though it only would be entitled to three under the representation entitlement formula.

Table 1: Representation entitlements based upon estimated June 2008 populations

	Population Jun 08	Quotas	Entitlement	Change (a)
New South Wales	6 961 720	48.264	48	-1
Victoria	5 283 275	36.628	37	0
Queensland	4 274 580	29.635	30	+1
South Australia	1 600 992	11.099	11	0
Western Australia	2 153 582	14.930	15	0
Tasmania	496 784	3.444	5	0
Six states (b)	20 770 933		146	0
Northern Territory	219 364	1.521		
Cocos (Keeling) Islands	593	0.004		
Christmas Island	1 418	0.010		
Total NT (c)	221 375	1.535	2	0
Australian Capital Territory	345 600	2.396		
Jervis Bay	390	0.003		
Total ACT (c)	345 990	2.399	2	0
Australia	21 338 298		150	0

Note: For representational entitlement purposes, Cocos (Keeling) and Christmas Islands are included in the Northern Territory and Jervis Bay in the Australian Capital Territory.

- (a) Change over current entitlement.
- (b) The original states at the establishment of the Commonwealth of Australia. Section 24 of the Constitution entitles each original state to at least five members.
- (c) Section 48 of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* allows for the addition of a margin of error to the population estimates of NT and ACT if it will affect the outcome of the entitlement. In this case the outcome is unchanged so the margin of error is not shown. The margin of error is twice the estimated (by the Australian Statistician) population undercount at the last Census.

Expiration of seven years

This provision sets out that a redistribution in a state or territory must commence within 30 days of the expiration of seven years after the most recent redistribution in that state or territory. 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.⁶

Under this provision a redistribution of Western Australia was commenced on 14 December 2007 and a redistribution of The Northern Territory was commenced on 16 January 2008.

6. New South Wales and Queensland's dates will be different to those shown in Table 2 if they undergo redistributions in 2009 if their representation entitlement changes.

Table 2: Electoral redistribution dates due to expiration of seven years

State/Territory	Most recent	Next scheduled
New South Wales	22 November 2006	November/December 2013
Victoria	29 January 2003	January/February 2010
Queensland	22 November 2006	November/December 2013
South Australia	17 December 2003	December 2010/January 2011
Western Australia	20 November 2000	December 2007
Tasmania (a)	11 February 2000	February 2008
Northern Territory (b)	21 December 2000	January 2008
Australian Capital Territory	9 December 2005	December 2012/January 2013

- (a) The previously scheduled redistribution for March 2007 was deferred because it was within 12 months of an election.
- (b) Northern Territory reverted to a single division on 19 February 2003 as a result of the determination of entitlement. On 28 April 2004 it then reverted to two divisions as a result of the passage of the *Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Representation in the House of Representatives) Act 2004*. Neither of these was a redistribution for the purposes of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*.

Under subsection 59(4) of the Act, however, redistributions scheduled within 12 months of the expiration of a House of Representatives are deferred and held within 30 days after the first meeting of the new House of Representatives. Thus, the redistribution of Tasmania that was to have occurred in March 2007 (as triggered by the seven-year rule) was deferred until after the 2007 election. This redistribution will now commence in February 2008.

Similarly, the redistribution scheduled in early 2010 for Victoria will probably be deferred until after the next House of Representatives election. If the 42nd Parliament runs its full term then the next election must be held in the period 7 August 2010 to 16 April 2011.⁷

It is safe to say that the redistribution scheduled for South Australia in late 2010/early 2011 will occur after the next election as the scheduled date will be either after the next election or definitely within 12 months of the election.

Conclusion

Redistributions are already underway in Western Australia and The Northern Territory and a redistribution is about to commence in Tasmania.

Assuming the 42nd Parliament serves its full term then, based upon current population estimates, redistributions will likely be held in New South Wales and Queensland in early 2009. However, the redistributions of Victoria and South Australia scheduled for the latter

7. Rob Lundie, 'Timetable for the next Australian elections', *Research Paper*, to be released January/February 2008, Parliamentary Library, Canberra, 2007–08
<http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/rp/index.htm>.

part of this Parliament will probably be deferred until after the next election of the House of Representatives.

The outcome of these redistributions should see a House of Representatives going to the next election with an unchanged 150 electoral divisions.

© Copyright Commonwealth of Australia

This work is copyright. Except to the extent of uses permitted by the *Copyright Act 1968*, no person may reproduce or transmit any part of this work by any process without the prior written consent of the Parliamentary Librarian. This requirement does not apply to members of the Parliament of Australia acting in the course of their official duties.

This work has been prepared to support the work of the Australian Parliament using information available at the time of production. The views expressed do not reflect an official position of the Parliamentary Library, nor do they constitute professional legal opinion.

Feedback is welcome and may be provided to: web.library@aph.gov.au. Any concerns or complaints should be directed to the Parliamentary Librarian. Parliamentary Library staff are available to discuss the contents of publications with Senators and Members and their staff. To access this service, clients may contact the author or the Library's Central Entry Point for referral.
