

**ELECTORAL AMENDMENT BILL 2001**

*Second Reading*

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

**HON ROBYN MCSWEENEY** (South West) [9.22 pm]: The passing of this Bill will result in eight seats being taken out of the country and put into the city. Why is beyond my understanding. It is ludicrous to move those seats to the city when the country is suffering the most. Vote weighting in country electorates should not be reduced in any way. The Labor Party wants to divide the State's total enrolment by the total number of electorates. That is unfair to country people. Ending country vote weighting would reduce country representation by eight seats. Labor's legislation seeks to introduce so-called one vote, one value in the Legislative Assembly, with a 20 per cent tolerance - that is, 10 per cent above and 10 per cent below the quota - and to provide that seats covering more than 100 000 square kilometres can have an enrolment 20 per cent below the quota.

I will refer to my electorate of the South West and bring the timber industry into this debate. Many city people stated that logging in old-growth forest was no longer acceptable. We had a dressmaker with no scientific background and no education in forest management sprouting that logging should be stopped. We had high-profile sporting people who knew nothing about forest management saying that logging should be stopped. Anyone else who could further this cause was used in the media. We had a city-based media repeatedly showing the same old picture of clear-felled patches. We also had all the left-wing loonies. Emotion rather than fact was used to destroy an industry, livelihoods and a way of life.

Dr Gallop, political opportunist that he is, latched onto this emotion in the election campaign and promised to stop the logging. I note that he did not come down to the south west and say that to the people who depended on this industry for their income. He still has not faced the south west communities affected by his political opportunism. When is he coming to our part of the State? He does not care about those people; he sold them out to the chardonnay set in the city. He does not care about the people in the south west nor people all over the State who will be affected by Labor's push for one vote, one value.

I sit in this House and look at the people who represent my seat of the South West. Not only are many of them city-based but also they have never lived in the country. How do they know what it is like to represent the south west? They do not. Prior to this year, I had never heard of Hon Adele Farina, and I certainly had not seen her in the south west. I have never seen Hon John Cowdell outside Mandurah. I may need glasses, but in the past 10 years I have not seen either member in my area. The south west Liberals work and live in the south west, and have done for many years. Country people need and deserve country representation. If a member does not work and live amongst his or her community how can he or she know what is going on? People deserve better than being statistics on a piece of paper. The South West, Agricultural and Mining and Pastoral Regions account for more than 99 per cent of the State's total land area. Under this Bill, barely 15 members of Parliament would represent those regions. Under Labor's plan, 26 per cent of the people in the Assembly will represent 90 per cent of Western Australia. I cannot see why it is necessary to shift eight seats out of the country and put them in the city.

Hon Alan Cadby: To entrench a Labor Government in power.

Hon ROBYN MCSWEENEY: It must be for political gain. Exactly, Hon Alan Cadby, it is for the Labor Party's political gain. It is totally unacceptable. Mitchell MLC Dan Sullivan was right when he said that this Bill -

Hon Barry House: Surely Hon Robyn McSweeney means MLA?

Hon ROBYN MCSWEENEY: Yes, that is right; I am sorry. Mr Sullivan said that this Bill should be called the transfer of districts from regional to metropolitan area Bill. I am not meant to be picked up by my own people!

The PRESIDENT: Order, Hon Barry House!

Hon ROBYN MCSWEENEY: Thank you, Mr President. It is a bit rough when they start on their own side!

Hon Barry House: I did not want Hon Robyn McSweeney to elevate someone from that other place to the status of an MLC!

Hon ROBYN MCSWEENEY: The Mining and Pastoral Region has six representatives. Under this Bill, it will be reduced to four. In my South West Region, 10 members will be reduced to seven, which is a loss of three. In the Agricultural Region, the number will be reduced from seven to four. At present there are 23 country members, but this number will be reduced to 15. I did not see any information on this in the electorates during the election campaign. The Government claims it has a mandate for electoral change, but if it was hardly mentioned, how can it make this claim? The only true way to judge whether a Government has a mandate is to

go to the people and ask them what they think. When challenged to go to the people with a referendum, the Government said no. Could the refusal be because the result would not be in the Government's favour? Commonsense would have prevailed in the electorates, even city electorates, because many people have their beginnings in farming areas.

Winning government on 30 per cent of primary votes in hardly a mandate. On 31 July and 1 August, the Premier referred to the idea of holding a referendum as being lunacy and a joke. On 8 August, the Minister for Electoral Affairs said, in opposing a Liberal Party motion for a referendum -

The idea that the Australian people will support any proposition that has any merit is horribly mistaken because of the complexity of the issues and the understanding that Australian people have of a lot of broader issues involved in their processes

This was rather arrogant and demeaning of him. Australians do have brains and know when they are being hoodwinked.

Labor wants one vote, one value to move seats from the country to Perth, but the ALP's own internal preselections do not conform to the same principle. The unions control 60 per cent of Labor Party preselection voting. The ALP acknowledges this hypocrisy. Larry Graham was forced out of ALP preselection. The member for Pilbara was done over because he did not fit a particular image that the Labor Party was trying to create. When I look around at the Labor Party today, Larry Graham scrubs up extremely well, so I do not really understand what all the fuss was about.

Hon N.D. Griffiths: He simply did not have the numbers.

Hon Barry House: The Labor Party shafted him.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Yes; fairly and squarely.

Former Labor Premier Dr Carmen Lawrence stated that one vote, one value - the prime condition for democracy - is not observed in Labor Party rules. She said that not only did it rob the Labor Party of the active commitment and participation of union members, but also disfranchised ordinary branch members. She said that only individuals should be permitted to sign up as members and everyone's vote should have the same value. It is funny how Dr Gallop and the Attorney General, Jim McGinty, can be so adamant about one vote, one value for the community of Western Australia, when they do not practice it in their own party.

Broadacre farming electorates will be the big losers under Labor's plan. I have already said that the Agricultural Region will go from seven seats to four seats if this goes through. One of those four seats will be centred on the city of Geraldton. That means that the entire wheatbelt and great southern farming areas will have just three seats. Within my own electorate three seats out of 10 will go, which means that rural-based seats like Stirling and Murray-Wellington are the most likely to disappear. What will we get instead - more facilities, more offices and more staff? People want to see the person they elect.

Hon Peter Foss: It is more red tape.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Yes; it is more red tape. They do not want to see some lackey or bureaucrats. I do not put electorate officers in this category. My electorate officer is superb, but people want to see me and it is their right to do so.

City politicians can kick a football from one end of their electorate to the other. If this reform goes through the ALP will have a footy team kicking footballs all over the city. They will probably be able to handball the footy to each other, their offices will be so close. Why does the ALP want to penalise country people? This does not say much for Dr Gallop's supposedly egalitarian philosophy.

Clearly the ALP is looking to favour the remote areas, where it held all the seats previously, at the expense of the South West and Agricultural Regions. The Minister for Electoral Affairs, Jim McGinty, said that debate over electoral reform should not be linked to the difficult circumstance endured by the Western Australian farming community. This is reported in *The West Australian* of 10 July. Of course, it is linked; everything about this so-called reform is linked to rural areas. We are the ones being cut off at the knees. I cannot even begin to imagine a mostly city-based Parliament with members who have never lived on the land making decisions for the farming community.

The Government has expressed support for giving the President a deliberative vote, even though in 1997 Dr Gallop was firmly against this idea. He said then that the proposal to upgrade the President's voting rights was a cynical attempt to subvert the will of WA voters. This remark was reported in *The West Australian* of 21 January 1997. In four short years Dr Gallop has changed his mind in a huge way. In 2001 it is Dr Gallop who is

being cynical and attempting to subvert the will of the Western Australian voters. Perhaps his long-term memory has run out of RAM. Labor is intent on winning at all costs.

In July in *The West Australian* Liz Tickner reported the results of a Westpoll in which only one in three voters supported one vote, one value. Thirty-three per cent supported one vote, one value; 57 per cent supported the existing electoral system and seven per cent were undecided. Forty-two per cent of Perth voters and 17 per cent of country voters supported one vote, one value, while 51 per cent of Perth voters and 76 per cent of country voters supported the existing system. Forty-two per cent of Labor voters supported one vote, one value, while 51 per cent backed the existing system. Twenty-five per cent of Liberal voters backed one vote, one value compared with 70 per cent who supported the existing system. Thirty per cent supported constitutional change, while 57 per cent did not; and only 38 per cent of Labor voters and 21 per cent of Liberal voters supported changing the Constitution for one vote, one value.

Labor consistently argues that Western Australia is the only State in Australia not to have one vote, one value. In fact, Queensland has country vote weighting for large areas and the Australian Senate also has six senators elected for each State and Territory regardless of population. Attorney General Hon Jim McGinty says that maybe there was some justification for electoral malapportionment 100 years ago in the days of the horse and buggy. He says that today with modern transport and communication we should embrace a clear principle. We nearly had to go back to using a horse and buggy until a Liberal federal Government came to the rescue of Skywest of Ansett. So much for Hon Jim McGinty's stance on equality. The Government did not even have the decency to underwrite the airline, the only transport system for the vast areas of the north west. Once again, country people would have missed out under the Labor Party. Thankfully the Liberal Party had the foresight to see what a mess our State was in and the chaos a Labor Government was causing by sitting on its hands. The politicians from Kalgoorlie northwards would have been grateful for the federal intervention - even some of the Labor members perhaps.

Returning to the Attorney General's comment on communication, I believe he was referring to the Internet as being one of the ways in which country people communicate. Phone lines in country areas drop out. Many people do not have the money to put costly systems into their homes. Mobile phones do not have the coverage they should have. There is nothing like face-to-face communication. It is the best communication people can have. Machines are fine at times but they can never take the place of face-to-face communication. People take in 70 per cent of body language and 30 per cent of speech. Misunderstandings are very easy over the Internet. The written word has no expression and can seem harsher than if people were explaining face to face. I realise that newer technology allows a person to be seen, but this is not a friendly atmosphere to be in. It is totally strange - a room, a camera, a TV and oneself - a totally sterile environment. Country people do not have those facilities.

Having been in local government, I was interested to see that country shire councils have opposed one vote, one value. Some 112 councils voted against this legislation, yet still the Attorney General and Dr Gallop push on with their cynical legislation. Whatever happened to "Listen to the people, listen to the people". The 112 councils represent many rural Western Australian people. Many of them felt that the current system did not represent them well and could not work out how taking eight members from the country was to be to their advantage. This Government needs to be reminded that country people are not fools and should not be treated as such. We want fair representation.

People choose to live and work in country Western Australia because it affords them a different kind of lifestyle from that of the city. The regional areas of Western Australia are very diverse and it is this diversity that should be acknowledged by Governments. To say straight out that seats should be based on numbers is to deny country people fair representation. Country people have vast distances to travel before getting to a regional centre. They go without doctors, dentists and infrastructure that city people have at their fingertips. Fair representation is what is needed, not so-called equal representation. There is nothing equal about putting more seats into the city region.

What this Government is effectively doing is centralising everything. If this harebrained scheme goes through, what it will effectively do is rip the heart out of the country. Most people realise that if they do not have a country member in Parliament to bat for their territory, it is extremely hard to put a case forward for more infrastructure or whatever it may be the community is wanting. Country towns, which are the backbone of our community spirit, will inevitably deteriorate. Schools, hospitals, police stations and major government agencies will struggle against the bigger city-based agencies because the city, where the biggest population is, will attract most of the budget.

Mr McGinty says that every citizen in this State is equal before the law and deserves an equal say in electing his Government. Just as a matter of interest, I did not see the word "her" mentioned. His-her - not particularly equal is it? I have pointed out that we are not equal; city-based people are more equal than country voters. The

services that are provided in the city far outweigh those of the country. The Pastoralists and Graziers Association of Western Australia and the Western Australian Farmers Federation - powerful lobby groups - have joined forces to lobby against this reform. They would not be doing this if they felt this legislation was good for country people. They realise what a sham it is.

The Australian Labor Party is not offering equal enrolment. The additional large district number referred to in clause 4, new section 16A, is the polite term for dummy electors. This is a device lifted from the Queensland Parliament and transferred to Western Australia for the electoral benefit of the ALP. It is not one vote, one value but a serious modification of the principle. What this does is assist a few country seats with huge land areas at the expense of other country seats where the population is more evenly spread over small agricultural towns. It means that the Mining and Pastoral Region will lose two seats instead of three, yet the city will still gain eight seats at our expense. The ALP would hope -

Hon Kim Chance: Do you think that is wrong?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: If the member had been listening to my speech he would have realised how much I thought that was wrong. The ALP would hope that a distribution would politically swamp Kalgoorlie and Ningaloo and leave the ALP holding all four seats with additional large district numbers.

Government members interjected.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: If you boys would stop talking and listen you would hear how much I am against it.

In Queensland this device affects only five out of 89 seats, but in WA it will affect four or five out of 57. The new seat of Gascoyne, for example, would get 7 000 imaginary or dummy voters allocated to it. There should be weighting for such a seat and for other country seats, but not in this clumsy manner. Dummy electors are not much help to remote but more compact areas like Kalgoorlie. There will be only one member for the eastern goldfields and only one member to speak for the Pilbara. Dummy voting does not mean the Labor Party - well, it probably does. Dummy voting - or dummy speaking; good one - means that areas greater than 100 000 kilometres squared -

Government members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I beg your pardon?

The PRESIDENT: Order! The member should not respond to the interjection.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Will the member repeat what he just said?

A Government member interjected.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: Is it unparliamentary to say get - you know?

The PRESIDENT: It would be unparliamentary if the member said it, but she has not.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: No, I have not; I am a lady, Mr President, and I would not say things like that in this House.

Areas greater than 100 000 square kilometres will have their land area multiplied by 0.005, which is 0.5 per cent. The figure obtained will be treated as dummy voters, so these seats will require fewer real electors to fall within quota.

Megan Anwyl, the ALP candidate for Kalgoorlie at the last election, said in her brochure that there would always be two goldfields MLAs, and that, under Labor, country seats would have 17 000 electors and city seats 23 000. She was not re-elected. The voters know when they are hearing porkies, but at least the voters of Kalgoorlie heard something, unlike most of the other areas around the State, which heard nothing.

Another Labor brochure distributed in the Mitchell electorate said that there would always be at least two members of State Parliament for the Bunbury-Mitchell region. When the next election comes around, if this harebrained scheme goes through we will not let the electors forget what was said and also what was not said during the previous election. I hope every Liberal Party, National Party and One Nation member will vote against this legislation. I hope that commonsense will prevail on the part of the Greens, and the Bill will be defeated.

Debate adjourned, on motion by Hon Barry House.

*House adjourned at 9.55 pm* \_\_\_\_\_

