

**Answers to Questions Taken on Notice at the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral  
Matters Hearing, Parliament of New South Wales, 12 August 2016**

**Professor Rodney Smith  
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**1. Whether malapportionment should be introduced to reduce the number of voters in geographically large electoral districts (e.g., Barwon) (Question from the Hon. Dr Peter Phelps, MLC)**

I support equality of individual voting power ('one vote one value') and therefore would argue in general against deliberate malapportionment schemes, such as the current Queensland and Western Australian large district allowances for electorates over 100,000 square kilometres.

In practice, these schemes have not been terribly successful. They have had marginal effects but have not eliminated large and very large electorates, such as Mt Isa and Gregory in Queensland, and Pilbarra and Kimberley in Western Australia. The overall growth of state populations, as well as population shifts from rural to urban areas, both work against the aim of reducing the size of electorates via a formula based on area and population. Area would have to be given considerably more weight in the formula than it is now (and the weight would have to be increased over time) to ensure significant reductions in the size of very large electorates. The result would be increasing inequality of individual voting power between individuals in larger and smaller electorates.

Since the rationale for reducing the size of very large electorates primarily has to do with the link between citizens and parliamentarians—to allow MPs to better serve the needs of people in their electorates and allow people better access to their MPs--other alternatives might be considered.

One (perhaps unpopular) alternative would be periodic increases in the number of MPs to reduce the area of electorates across the board, while retaining one vote one value.

A second approach would be to increase further the electorate support provided to MPs from large electorates. Large electorates already attract some additional support but the adequacy of this support should be reviewed.

A third, more unorthodox approach has been suggested by Professor Graeme Orr from the University of Queensland Law School. He proposes that very large electorates elect 'dual MPs' from the same party who then essentially job share. They only have one vote in parliament but share parliamentary and, perhaps more pertinently, electorate duties.<sup>1</sup> I can

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<sup>1</sup> Graeme Orr, submission to the Legal and Community Safety Committee, Parliament of Queensland on the *Electoral (Improving Representation) and Another Act Amendment Bill*

see principled and partisan objections to this suggestion but it deserves further consideration.

## **2. CALD and Informality (Question from the Hon. Dr Peter Phelps, MLC)**

The overall 3.44 percent informal vote for the NSW Legislative Assembly in 2015 was lower than the overall 6.17 percent informal vote for NSW electorates in the House of Representatives election in 2016, probably because of the use of optional preferential voting in NSW elections and full preferential voting for House of Representatives elections.

The previously observed positive relationship between levels of informal voting and proportion of CALD populations in electoral districts was again apparent in the 2015 NSW General Election.

Different measures of the cultural and linguistic diversity of electoral districts are possible. I have used the proportion of people born in non-English speaking countries.<sup>2</sup> Not all of these people will have been eligible to vote in 2015 but the measure gives a good indication of the ethno-linguistic diversity of an electoral district. The proportion ranged from 51.4 percent (Auburn) to 2.1 percent (Tamworth).

The proportion of informal votes for the NSW Legislative Assembly in 2015 ranged from 6.1 percent (Bankstown) to 2.08 percent (Balmain).<sup>3</sup> The Pearson correlation between the CALD measure and informal voting was 0.47. Although the overall absolute differences in informal voting might be seen as relatively small, they are closely related to the proportion of CALD communities in an electoral district.

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2015. 17 November 2015. Available at:  
<https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/documents/committees/LACSC/2015/08-ElectorallRAAAB15/submissions/001.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Montoya and Jack Finegan, *NSW State Electoral Districts Ranked by 2011 Census*

<sup>3</sup> NSW Electoral Commission, *NSW State Election Results 2015. Legislative Assembly Informality and Voter Participation by District*. Available at:  
<http://pastvtr.elections.nsw.gov.au/SGE2015/la/state/turnout/index.htm>