

**ELECTORAL ACT — REGIONAL REPRESENTATION**

*Motion*

**MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt)** [4.00 pm]: I move —

That this house calls upon the Western Australian Labor government to amend the Electoral Act 1907 to raise the calculation metric of the large district allowance from 1.5 per cent to three per cent, thereby providing assurance of continued regional representation in this house that Western Australian communities deserve.

I understand we have an agreement on the timing for private members' business, so I am the only speaker on this motion.

I want to talk a bit about how we arrived at bringing this suggestion to the Attorney General. Many Western Australians, particularly those who live in regional communities, will not forget that one of the first matters this government pursued with its massive majority after the 2021 state election was to deliver on a long-held ideological ambition of the Labor Party to permanently reduce regional representation in the state Parliament.

As I look around the chamber, I wonder, when these conversations were being held in caucus, what the regional members of the Labor Party contributed to that debate and how they will face their constituents and tell them that they essentially voted for a reduction in the representation of regional communities in the state Parliament. Instead of standing up to the party machine and being the voice that many of them were entrusted to be, they chose to follow the lead of their then Premier to concentrate power and influence in this state even more. It is well understood that Western Australia has a highly concentrated population in and around the Perth metropolitan area and the south west corner of the state; that is irrefutable. This decision will actually concentrate the power and influence of decision-makers even more.

Being a member of Parliament and a voice for your community means something. Members should take action and be fearless in their representation when they know that something is going to be detrimental to the communities they represent. As a result of the legislation that every member of the Labor Party supported, we will see a permanent reduction in the representation of regional Western Australia. I want to make it very clear to members that if they think that by the time we get to 2025 the electorate people will perhaps have moved on from this, there will be a reminder from those who have watched how this Labor government has used the Parliament to push this agenda through and what it will mean in real terms. We are not necessarily talking about the individuals who are currently holding those seats. It is not about Mia Davies or Peter Rundle or other members in the regions; it is actually about the electorates, and about being able to have that regional member come to this Parliament and be part of a democratic decision-making process. That is now being dismantled.

I will give a quick recap of how we arrived at this point. When it was evident that the Labor Party had won the numbers in both the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council after the 2021 state election, the government very hastily convened a panel to provide it with advice on how to achieve what it already knew it wanted to achieve. The report that was eventually delivered was the only one that could be delivered, because the terms of reference were so very narrow that the esteemed academics and individuals who were asked to participate on the panel really did not have a lot of choice about what they could provide back to the government. The report, *Ministerial expert committee on electoral reform: Final report*, was completed and tabled. On the same day, the government gave notice that legislation would be read into the Parliament to enact the majority of the report's recommendations. I think the government managed somehow to sneak an extra member of Parliament in there, which was not a recommendation of the Ministerial Expert Committee on Electoral Reform. It was all done very quickly.

We have had a number of debates over the last two days and before the winter break in which we talked about the government's use of its numbers in this Parliament, and this is one example that we go back to: it hammered the final nail in the coffin of any semblance that the government would look forward and provide equity for regional voters in this Parliament. This came on top of a previous Labor government's move, pre-2008, in which we saw six country seats in the Legislative Assembly removed and a number added to the metropolitan area.

The Labor Party has doggedly pursued this reform, so when the opportunity arose to ram through changes in the upper house, including the removal of the metropolitan boundary line, it had a significant impact on the boundary redistribution that is currently underway under the Electoral Act. That will also have an ongoing impact on regional representation. That has been very much downplayed by members of the Labor Party during this debate, and also out in the electorate when the Labor Party was prosecuting its argument. The Premier at the time was fairly disingenuous about his agenda, which was not well articulated before the election. Although this had been a long-held desire of the Labor Party, the Premier specifically said before the election that it was not on the agenda. He was not asked about it in a way that allowed for any ambiguity; there was a specific question, put by multiple journalists, asking "Are you going to pursue electoral reform?" when it became evident that there would be significant numbers for the Labor Party in both houses of Parliament. On multiple occasions his response was, "It's not on our agenda." They

were very clear questions, so the then Premier failed to be up-front with the community prior to the election, and that really set the tone for the remainder of his term in Parliament.

Yesterday the new Premier, Premier Cook, did a backflip on legislation that the Labor government had rammed through the Parliament, just like the electoral reform legislation. We spoke about this at the beginning of the current term: there is a salutary lesson for governments in the fact that they may have significant numbers and the power to do things, but just having the power does not mean that it should be used. It is important to observe and respect the processes of Parliament and to use the time frames that are built into our Parliament to ensure that the opposition and the community have time to digest, understand, provide feedback on and engage with legislation that the government has every right to bring forward. When a party wins government, it is perfectly entitled to bring forward legislation, but time frames and committee processes exist to allow us to make sure we get good outcomes. If the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act is that salutary lesson, it will be a very difficult one to take, because of the chaos it caused. We are likely to see a much longer burn with the electoral reform legislation and the changes that are coming through because it will get done bit by bit. We will lose one seat in regional Western Australia at the next election; no doubt, further down the track, we will lose another one. The upper house changes will all come in one go and that will cause some real challenges. Unlike the previous Premier, I will give this Premier some credit. He did say sorry for the debacle surrounding the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2021, but I note from today's question time that no apology will be forthcoming for the appalling comments made by the Premier about the opposition when we raised concerns on behalf of the community. I suspect we will be waiting for that apology for a long time. I do not expect that we will get an apology for that. I do not expect we will get an apology from the Premier on the electoral reform legislation.

I will be interested to hear how the regional members of this house explain the issues they would like to see on the government's agenda in this Parliament. It will be much harder for those arguments to be prosecuted because the legislation is essentially designed to marginalise regional voters. It will lead to a reduction in the number of regional members in the Legislative Council. I guess we should not be surprised, because when this government came to power in 2017, it made some very arbitrary cuts to regional education. We have spoken many times about the cuts to the Schools of the Air, which had to be overturned because the government was forced to consider what they would mean. The government left Moora Residential College with no funding and under threat of closure. The federal government had to step in and provide funding to ensure that it could still exist. It is now at capacity, if not needing an extension. This government conducted a dodgy poll from the office of the Minister for Environment on the future of the native timber industry and then proceeded to close it down on the back of that, without any consultation. Following that was a very disingenuous consultation process. Local reference groups feel they have been used as a rubber stamp for decisions made within government. Again, a regional local member from the Labor Party presided over the decimation of a legitimate and sustainable business industry, and we have not seen so much as a whimper of objection. That is very challenging for those communities that look to those members for representation in this Parliament.

This government attacked the rock lobster industry until it was forced to back down. The minister in charge at the time attacked the industry. It is strange that that minister is no longer in charge of that portfolio, but the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs is still in charge of his portfolio. This government has systematically stripped funding from the state's only dedicated regional development fund after using taxpayer dollars to fund an inquiry, with recommendations from John Langoulant, whom it employed, which it has ignored. We had a discussion during estimates on Infrastructure WA and how that is being used on major projects that the government is developing. The government picks and chooses the bits of advice that suit its agenda.

Royalties for regions was once a program that could be relied on to support growth and innovation for our regional communities, but it has been pilfered every year. We use the term "cost shift" because it is now funding things, and has done so for the last six years, that ordinarily would have come out of the consolidated revenue fund. If it was used like that when we were in government, programs like telehealth, which I hear members speak about regularly and which is now a feature of all regional hospitals, would not have come about as a business-as-usual funding decision by the health department or the government of the day. The government was given the opportunity to think differently about how it delivered services in regional communities by virtue of using royalties for regions and partnering with the Department of Health and the government to deliver that outcome. The upgraded residential colleges in our regional towns were facilities that had been neglected for many years. Students have the option of being educated at their local high schools and senior high schools in residential facilities that are modern and appropriate. If the Department of Education had made a business-as-usual decision during its planning, we would not have seen that funding rise to the top. Royalties for regions allowed us to make sure that we provided choices for parents living in regional centres so they did not feel they had no option other than to send their kids away.

I think of little projects like the ones in my electorate, particularly ones in Cunderdin and Pingelly that I have spoken about in this house, and the aged-care solutions that have come about as a result of that expenditure. We have seen business-as-usual cases funded through the Department of Health. I understand that we have to prioritise

the funds, but those sorts of things would not have come about without royalties for regions. So much innovation has come off the back of that investment to change the model of delivery for health services, particularly in Pingelly, and Cunderdin has the same opportunity. That has also occurred in other areas, where we have seen innovations continue to grow because we provided the opportunity for public servants and health practitioners to think outside the square when it came to delivering services into thinly populated areas and places with a tyranny of distance that makes it difficult for people to access services, whether they be for education or health.

We have programs like the regional centres development plan, which supports community planning for population and economic development in places such as Katanning, Northam, Esperance and Moora. Those planning decisions were backed up with some funding. That program came about because people who had lived experience and understood what it was like to live in those communities were sitting there thinking, “We need to ensure that these communities have an avenue within government to address what we see are built-in biases towards decision-makers who do not truly understand what it is like to live and work in regional communities.” It gets harder when we have fewer of those voices sitting around the decision-making table or in the government of the day.

I could provide so many more examples. Perhaps I will return to them at the end of this speech if I get to the crux of what I am trying to suggest that the Minister for Electoral Affairs might consider. There is so much evidence to support the fact that this Labor Party and previous Labor Parties truly do not turn their mind to how to grow our whole state. The Labor Party is transactional in the way it approaches those policy decisions instead of thinking in the long term. It has to come back to the way that people are represented in this Parliament and how our government and cabinet is formed. I have looked at comments made by the Minister for Fisheries, who is also the Minister for Regional Development. Some fairly significant policy decisions are being made around the fisheries on the south coast at the moment, which are basically throwing small and regionally based businesses under the bus. In response to questions about what will happen to these small and regional businesses, the Minister for Fisheries said, “Well, this is the sort of churn we see whenever there’s a change within the fisheries framework, and the commercial sector just has to adjust to it.” I am unconvinced that that is the right solution to that problem. I am happy that we have members who are prepared to take up that fight on behalf of those communities. I might also add that the same minister, Minister Punch, is on record in the *Hansard* of 15 September 2021 saying that the important distinction in the debate around electoral reform is that the upper house is the house of review and the lower house is where the business of government is formed. As the people of Western Australia know, and as the Premier mentioned, the issues around regional representation in the lower house will remain unchanged. Yet, as a result of those changes and the distribution that is occurring now, we will potentially have one fewer member of Parliament from a regional area and an additional seat in the metropolitan area. What the minister said was disingenuous. I will not say he lied because we do not say that in this place, but he was definitely misleading. There was this view that the changes that the government is making will not have any impact on what this Parliament looks like. It is not true.

**Dr D.J. Honey:** Not on his agenda.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** The Premier said it was not on his agenda and then as a result had to move past that. Then we saw ministers and members saying the change would not impact how many voices we had from regional communities in this place. That is simply not true. Our shadow Minister for Fisheries has said in relation to the comments around the fisheries debate that the minister is involved in that smaller locally based operators are being thrown under the bus to make life easier for the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, and, judging by the minister’s statements, it seems he is more than happy for that to occur.

The Labor Party is very fond of referencing historical policy positions that the members of the Nationals WA and the Liberal Party had in the past—I am talking about back when I was still at school, in some cases. This is a party that had a Minister for Health who denigrated the Royal Flying Doctor Service and called it nothing more than an interest group. This was the very same minister, Minister McGinty, who was the architect of the first round of changing representation in this place to make sure that there would be fewer regional members of Parliament and more metropolitan MPs.

The reality is that this Labor government, and Labor in general, is hell-bent on concentrating power and control in the metropolitan area. That reality flows through to decisions like the ones that my electorate is grappling with and the ones that the electorates of the member for Moore and the member for North West Central are grappling with. For example, the member for Moore rose today and said, “I want some understanding from this Parliament about live export and why we are not doing more to protect it.” There are simply not enough people within government and this Parliament who understand the value of that industry and, as a result, a legitimate industry is about to lose its future. It will have an economic impact, and I know it will because Labor Party members are happy to stand by and watch the industry fade away because there is nothing political in it for them. There are two regional seats in the federal Parliament and two to three seats in the state Parliament. It will be no loss to them politically, and so they will let it go through, and we will be back to the mathematics and ideology that this Labor Party brings to decisions like that. I hope that there are members who will stand and speak to that from a regional perspective.

I want to address why I feel very passionate about this issue, because I see members stand again and again and talk about equality in this house. International Women's Day this year was about the debate between, and the definitions of, equity and equality. When we talk about one vote, one value, and when we talk about regional representation in the way that Parliament is formed, we often hear the phrase "every person's vote is equal", and that is okay when there are equal levels of service and infrastructure and equal access to those services, infrastructure and decision-makers across the state. However, in Western Australia, we know that that is not true. Therefore, I will agree to Labor's ideological position when I actually see that the way government delivers services and infrastructure to our regional communities is the same as the way it delivers them in the metropolitan area. Only then can we have the ideological debate.

The equity argument is that we accept that people start on different levels, and that we—a person living in Halls Creek, a person living in Moora, a person living in Wyalkatchem—are not all on the same playing field. The government makes decisions every day about providing different levels of resourcing and funding to make sure that people have basic access to services and infrastructure, yet when it comes to the electoral math, we do not see any of that equity argument in the act. It is purely about equality. It does not actually translate when we are trying to make real decisions about real people, Minister for Electoral Affairs and Attorney General. My argument is that I see nothing being done to try to address the equity argument; in fact, I see us going backwards.

The proposition that we suggest to the Minister for Electoral Affairs, which can be done before the WA Electoral Commission and the commissioners make their final decision on the boundary redistribution, is that he change the large district allowance from 1.5 per cent to three per cent. It is a really technical and dry argument, and I will read through exactly why the opposition and I think this is something that should be considered. Currently, 98 per cent of our state's landmass is represented by seven people. These seats are in the old Mining and Pastoral Region and the old Agricultural Region. The government's decision to create an entire state electorate—essentially one seat for the upper house—means that we will no longer have six members in the upper house specifically assigned to the Mining and Pastoral Region, the Agricultural Region, the South West Region and the metropolitan area. For instance, the member for Kimberley is currently supported in her work in an enormous electorate by six members who are dedicated to the Mining and Pastoral Region; her constituents have access to those members of Parliament as well. We talk about ourselves sometimes—it is a little bit self-centred—as members of Parliament, but what we are actually here to do is to make sure that our constituents have access to us as decision-makers and as people who are there to provide feedback and represent their voice in Parliament.

As a regional MP, it is still difficult to create and afford people those opportunities to have access to their local member of Parliament. I know that members sitting in front of and next to me, and many on the other side of the house, will understand that if one is in those bigger regional seats, it takes an enormous amount of effort to get around and have face time with constituents, and that is important because politics is about people. No matter what telecommunications, digital access or transport improvements have been made, nothing replaces face-to-face conversations. It is why the member for North West Central spent the entirety of July driving 8 000 kilometres, according to the odometer in her car, and I suspect that other regional members probably get close to doing that in those big electorates that have the large district allowance. There is a reason for that. It is because if we actually went down the pure one vote, one value path, we would have an even lower allowance allocated so, in some way, the government has already acknowledged that we have to accommodate those very thinly populated areas and acknowledge that this is something that we in Western Australia need to deal with. But the reality is that we will see a reduction to one seat at the next distribution if that Labor Party proposal goes through. Our take, from this side of Parliament, is that there is an opportunity within the confines of what the act has already proposed—to retain all the seats and make sure that we do not lose that regional voice.

The explanatory statement that was made by the electoral redistribution commissioners when they published the draft boundaries for public comment states —

The Act requires the Commissioners to calculate the Average District Enrolment ... across all Legislative Assembly seats as at the "relevant day" by dividing the number of electors in Western Australia by the number of Legislative Assembly districts. The total number of electors on the State electoral roll as at 13 March 2023 was 1,795,461.

Sorry, Hansard; I will provide this later. It continues —

Divided by the total number of electoral districts (59), this results in an ADE of 30,432 electors.

With the one exception set out below, the number of electors in each district must be within 10 per cent (plus or minus) of the ADE. For the 2023 Distribution this means that enrolment figures in each district must not exceed 33,475 electors or be lower than 27,389 electors (except for certain very large districts).

The exception referred to above applies to districts which exceed 100,000 square kilometres in geographical area. In accordance with section 16G(3) of the Act, these districts receive a Large District Allowance (LDA), which is calculated as 1.5% of the number of square kilometres in the district. The geographical area of

proposed districts was calculated using publicly available data files sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

The LDA is added to the number of actual electors enrolled in the district to arrive at a notional enrolment figure.

That is “phantom” voters. It continues —

In districts that have a LDA, the Commissioners must set boundaries so that the notional enrolment figure is within minus 20 per cent and plus 10 per cent of the ADE. For the 2023 Distribution, the notional enrolment figure for districts that received a LDA must therefore be no less than 24,346 and no more than 33,475.

I have a table that goes through what those calculations look like. Essentially, we get to a point at which, as of 13 March 2023, there was a total LDA of 36 129 phantom voters spread across the seven electoral districts that make up the old Mining and Pastoral and Agricultural Regions. If we just changed the 1.5 per cent to three per cent, it would add additional votes and result in a surplus across those districts and we would not have to go down the path of abolishing a seat and the regional voice could be maintained. The spirit of the act could be maintained by allowing the plus or minus variation within all those seats. When considering the legislation, I look at what is happening in the seat of Roe. A seat that is pretty close to within allowance is being fiddled about with. It makes no sense to try to mess about with things if we can simply change the large district allowance to reflect the fact that this state is unique in geography and is unlikely to have significant population growth in certain parts.

It is an argument of equity rather than equality to ensure that constituents who live there will not be further disenfranchised because the Labor Party’s ideological pursuit is to see one vote, one value applied in the purest sense. Voters are already disenfranchised by the tyranny of distance and the challenges that exist in the delivery of services and infrastructure in regional communities. To us, that proposal is a very sensible amendment. I know that the Attorney General has considered amendments to the act. We spoke about it during estimates; it could be done relatively easily. The process prior to the next election would then see regional representation less impacted. I will not say that it would be an ideal situation in Western Australia, but the consequences of changes to the Legislative Council would be lessened by the fact that the number of regional MPs would not be reduced, along with the wisdom, lived experience and capacity they bring to decision-making in this place. We ask that the minister and government give this real consideration.

I remind members that this is not on party lines. It is not about National Party, Labor Party or Liberal Party members of Parliament. It is beyond that. It is about making sure we have regional voices in our Parliament, which already concentrates very much upon the metropolitan area. Our amendment to the act would allow for that by including a larger district allowance. We ask for that consideration and for some thought by the minister so we can go back to the community and say, “When governments and future Parliaments make decisions, we know that your voices will be heard effectively and that your needs and your aspirations will be reflected in those decisions.”

**MR J.R. QUIGLEY (Butler — Minister for Electoral Affairs)** [4.33 pm]: The member for Central Wheatbelt started off talking about apologies. I was educated at Nedlands Primary School and brought up in Nedlands. All my friends were Liberals and so was my family. I know their handbook; I know their rulebook. The number one rule in the Liberal handbook is never say sorry or apologise before hell freezes over—never! It was in this very chamber that former Premier Colin Barnett, when sitting in the very seat that the member for Central Wheatbelt occupies, and I was sitting on the government back bench, stood up and outrageously called me corrupt because I was going down to give honest evidence at the Corruption and Crime Commission—evidence for which I was complimented by the CCC. That did not hold him back. I knew he would not say sorry. I knew he would not apologise because he is a Liberal. He is a conservative and the first rule of the conservative side is: not before hell freezes over do we ever admit a mistake.

I will not labour on this for long, but the most obvious proof of this is former Prime Minister Scott Morrison. He brought in robodebt, over which people were hanging themselves. A royal commission said that he misled cabinet and lied—it nailed him—and what did he do? Did he say sorry? No, he was not going to break the number one rule in the rulebook, which is never apologise, never say sorry and never admit a mistake. Hypocrisy has been put before the chamber today about statements said in this place in rhetorical flourish.

Having said that, I must say that the chamber, or the opposition at least, will have a great loss when the member for Central Wheatbelt leaves, because she can sort of dress up an indefensible argument and make it sort of sound plausible. She will be a great loss to that side when she leaves because she makes that which is indefensible sounds sort of believable.

It is true that former Premier Mark McGowan said before the state election that he was not contemplating great change to the Legislative Council. We all know that because it was part of the Labor manifesto to get rid of the

Legislative Council; it has been an ambition for decades to get rid of the Legislative Council! The former Premier said, “No, we’re not going to go down the road of radical change.” When we got in, we had to have a look at what had happened. Someone was elected to the Legislative Council with about three votes! People were saying, “Is this democracy?” Something had to happen. We became a laughing-stock when someone got into the Legislative Council with three votes. I think one of those votes might have been his dog, too, but it is uncertain! I commissioned the Ministerial Expert Committee on Electoral Reform to look into what we could do, headed by a former Governor of Western Australia, the Honourable Malcolm McCusker, AO, KC, advised by academics in the area.

When the member for Central Wheatbelt talks about regions, she is talking about the wheatbelt region. I know that the member used to reside in a lovely home in Northam, so she is intimately familiar with Great Eastern Highway.

**Ms M.J. Davies:** I reside in Northam; it’s my home.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I did not hear that; too much rock-and-roll has hurt my ears.

**Ms M.J. Davies:** For the record, my home has always been in Northam.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Then the member drives home through Wooroloo and Wundowie. She skirts around the fact that Wooroloo is less than 10 kilometres from Wundowie but Wundowie gets about four times the vote of people in Wooroloo. Hello! People in Kalgoorlie get about four times the vote of people in Albany. Both those two regional towns have an airport, but Kalgoorlie, with a bigger weighting, has a bigger airport, which jets land at regularly. Kalgoorlie has a national rail network passing through it. Both areas have hospitals. The south west district includes Madam Acting Speaker’s home patch of Albany. Why does Kalgoorlie have about four times the weighted vote of Albany? It is absolutely nonsense and a conundrum that is difficult to solve unless everyone is given an equal vote. We do not hear the opposition complaining about the Senate vote. Everyone in Western Australia votes for the Senate, but they do not vote for the south west, or this or that, or have six or 12 senators coming from Western Australia, a few from here and a few from there, because the voting would be well out of kilter. It is one district: Western Australia, and Western Australia votes for the Senate. There is never any complaint because everyone gets an equal vote.

The argument is: What will the regional members say? What do the regional members say to the government? The regional members bring their problems to the government, be they ALP members, Liberal members or Nationals members. They bring the problems to the government and we try to solve them. I will not name them, but there are members of the opposition from the regions who have brought their problems or their constituents’ problems to me. No member over there would object to my next statement, which is that I have done my very best to service their constituents; they are not in an ALP seat. My wages are paid from the consolidated revenue, which is everybody’s taxes. I work for the people in the regions and I work for the people in the metropolitan area.

We understand the regions and that is why, before the farmers came out yesterday, I sat down and worried about the regions. We understand that at this time of the year, the seeds are in and that a lot of farmers would have borrowed money to get their crop in and would be facing rising interest rates, hoping that the predicted El Niño is not going to wreck the tail end of the season. They are facing rising interest payments and do not need another \$40 000 or \$50 000 in unbudgeted expenditure dropped on top of them at any time, really, but especially not in these challenging economic times.

In Western Australia we have had two issues that have caused great anxiety in the community. The first was the pandemic—people were stressed during the pandemic. They have come out of the pandemic and this government steered Western Australia—it is beyond dispute—to the best position in the world during the pandemic. Nonetheless, everyone was stressed. We came out of the pandemic wondering what the economy was going to be like; we all had to go back to our offices to work, and then the interest rates started going up and then inflation started going up and then anxiety levels went up. The proclamation of the regulations of the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act caused further stress. The Premier has said there was a miscalculation. It was wrong, and he apologised. He was doing that for the regions. He was doing that for the regions because he did not want the people in the regions who have blocks larger than 1 100 square metres left with the anxiety and uncertainty of having to purchase a survey for their property. That would cause further anxiety. We have done away with that; it is dead.

There is a new bill before the chamber. On the radio this morning, the member for Central Wheatbelt was heard to say that she supports the amendments but wants to see what the regulations are. Those regulations, member, will be about the review and appeal procedure to make sure everything runs efficiently.

The member for Central Wheatbelt went on to say that we are not funding the regions. Hello, have a look at Albany. Look at how Albany has been, not rebuilt, but re-modernised with its lovely entertainment centre and coffee shops and the Albany ring-road —

**Ms S.F. McGurk:** Collie.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Collie—the money we have spent in Collie.

**Mrs R.M.J. Clarke:** Murray–Wellington has got the biggest investment we’ve ever seen!

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Murray–Wellington has had the biggest investment, and Collie. Look around the state. It is not because of any particular voting mechanism that the opposition has been reduced to a rump. It is a fact of democracy that the people witnessing all of this have supported us.

I recently had the pleasure of going to Kununurra. We know that royalties for regions was used for the Ord River irrigation scheme stage 2, but the way it had been put together was a colossal failure. We came into government and sorted that. I had the pleasure of going to breakfast with a gentleman called Ron Greentree, who is putting in a new cotton enterprise. I think he is spending \$200 million of his own money. Down here in Perth, we were imagining it, but it is unimaginable. I said, “Who is your contractor?”, because there were graders and levellers and scrapers. It looked like a yard out in Guildford, like WesTrac, or something like that. I said, “Mr Greentree, who’s your contractor?” He said, “Oh, we don’t trust contractors. We’ve purchased it all ourselves. We’re doing it ourselves.” That is the faith he has in our regions. That is the faith he has in this government to look after the regions. He is one of the biggest grain growers in the eastern states and he was prepared to come over here to our state and put his money on the line and invest in Western Australia because we are looking after the regions.

The member says, “Look at the remoteness of the regions and people not being able to access politicians or decision-makers in Perth.” I will not name them—I do not want to embarrass them—but conservative members of the upper house have their offices in Harvest Terrace and Parliament Place, because it is convenient, and they rent in Perth.

**Dr D.J. Honey:** A number of your members are in my electorate!

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** That is because they are seeking preselection. They will knock you off!

The point being, they have access. It was this government—not the last government, not the Liberal conservative government—that, realising the tyranny of distance the member referred to, put in capped airfares of a couple of hundred bucks to get to Perth, because it was too expensive previously and that prejudiced the people in the regions. The previous government did not do that. The previous government could not afford to do that because it just kept running up debt to nearly \$40 billion. We have helped the regions by reducing debt. A lower interest bill has enabled us to put more money into the regions and into health and schools. We have talked about royalties for regions. I was shocked when I went to Kununurra—this was not my last trip, but the one before—and I was taken around and shown this huge glass courthouse that was built with royalties for regions expenditure. It is probably the best courthouse outside the metropolitan area. It is probably better than the ones in the metropolitan areas! It cost a fortune, and it all came out of royalties for regions. That is where they take the Indigenous kids before they post them down to Banksia Hill Detention Centre. But did they think to build them a police and citizens club? Did they think to build proper bail houses so that we do not have to bring them down to Banksia Hill? It was a total disaster. We have not had to start at ground zero. We have started behind the eight ball in the Fitzroy Valley because of the neglect.

I will go to the figures about electoral reform that the member read out. The member was right. There are about 30 400 voters in each electoral district, if we divide the total number of voters by 59. Under the Electoral Act, a district can be within 10 per cent of that average. Section 16G(3) and (4) of the Electoral Act provides that those districts with a land mass of 100 000 square kilometres must have a total number of electors that is not more than 10 per cent greater or 20 per cent less than the average district allowance. Therefore, the large districts can have between 24 346 and 33 475 electors.

As at 13 March 2023, six districts benefited from the large district allowance. The member’s own electorate of Central Wheatbelt has a total 26 652 electors and 1 532 notional—I call them “phantom”—electors. Kalgoorlie has 20 268 actual electors and 8 332 phantom electors. The Kimberley has 16 514 electors, and—now we are getting up to 50 per cent—it has 8 000 notional electors; that is, there is a 50 per cent uplift of phantom electors on the number of actual taxpayers who are voting. The Pilbara has 23 716 electors and a further 4 383 phantom electors, and Roe has 25 387 electors and 1 500 phantom electors. Then we get to North West Central, which was an abomination for democracy. It had 11 021 actual electors and 12 275 phantom electors. That is massive. There are more phantom electors than actual tax-paying electors, and that is unsustainable. Under the electoral redistribution undertaken by the commission, obviously, that electorate had to be redistributed. It had only a mere 11 000 voters—that is less than a third of what I have in Butler; I have about 34 000 voters—but it had 12 000 phantom voters. Now it is proposed that that disparity be doubled. North West Central has only 11 000 tax-paying voters who are contributing to this state. Under the member for Central Wheatbelt’s proposal, North West Central would get 24 550 phantom voters. That is unbelievable! That would be 24 550 phantoms and only 11 000 actual tax-paying voters.

**Mr D.R. Michael:** In the recent North West Central by-election, only 2 042 people gave their first preference vote to the Nationals WA.

**Ms M.J. Davies:** Just remind me: did the Labor Party actually bother to run? You didn’t even turn up for the fight, because it’s about numbers and not people for you; that’s why.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** It is about people, member, and the people are —

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms R.S. Stephens):** Minister!

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** People are insulted when they learn that their vote is worth only one-sixth of a vote in the Mining and Pastoral Region. It is unbelievable! Why would taxpayers not be upset with that? That is not equity. Members opposite are talking about trying to maintain a system that enabled them, by a gerrymander, to control this Parliament for over 120 years. For 120 years, they have been able to control this Parliament. On the occasions when Labor did come in, on behalf of the people of Western Australia who voted us in, we had to go and genuflect before the conservators in the other place, dip our cap down and say, “Please, sir, can we have this law that the people want?”, and their lordships over there, elected on this gerrymander, would say yes or no. Those days are over. We are in a new world. Get used to it.

Yes, when I got the ministerial expert panel’s report, I have to confess, I examined whether we should have a large district allowance. Should all people not be equal? But I did not want to be that radical. We say, yes, we will leave the LDA there, and we will leave it up to the Electoral Commission to decide the carve-up. That is a democracy. The people of your electorate, Madam Acting Speaker (Ms R.S. Stephens), would not have known that the Kalgoorlie electors had twice as much say as your electors. It was an abomination. It could not stand, and the government and I as the minister totally reject the idea that we double this inequity by raising the LDA from 1.5 to three. It is not going to happen.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Ms C.M. Rowe**.