

Mr Mike Board; Acting Speaker; Mr Terry Waldron; Mr Jeremy Edwards; Mrs Cheryl Edwardes; Mr Hendy Cowan; Mr Paul Omodei; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Ross Ainsworth; Mr Rod Sweetman; Speaker

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**ELECTORAL AMENDMENT BILL 2001**

*Second Reading*

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

**MR BOARD** (Murdoch) [8.01 pm]: Before private members' business, I spoke of the Opposition's total rejection of the proposal to change the electoral system to favour city voters at the expense of country voters. The history of Western Australia involves people trying to come to grips with a large State that has a small population and a huge land mass in a country that is city-based and in which most of the population lives in the eastern States. Those factors were reflected in the debate in this State prior to its joining the federation about what would happen to Western Australia if it did. They were also seen in the 1933 referendum when the State voted for secession. I am not proposing that now but it shows the strength and concerns of people throughout our history for the protection of Western Australia in a federal system and for the protection of large land masses that were under-represented in terms of population. It also shows concern for those who did the hard yards in our community - the mining industry, the developers of Kalgoorlie, the forestry industry, the pearling industry and the pioneers who went forward against the odds to create a future for this State. The pioneers led to the wealth of this State. Many people came to this State from the east during the gold rush and Western Australia has continued to attract people from around the world to develop the State we have today. It is entrenched in the psyche of Western Australians that we must look after our State and protect and nurture the growth of our regional, country and remote areas. In many ways, we have entrenched a bias toward supporting real equity in our system.

The Labor Party talks about equity in a philosophical sense; equity in terms of one vote, one value. No-one will argue against that philosophical approach. No-one can argue that one person's vote should not be equal to another's. That is universally accepted. Because of our uniqueness, remoteness, size and small population in a large land mass, we have traditionally chosen to give protection to the development of the State. We have chosen to give support as we have been largely city-centric. I assure members of the House that had there not been protection of rural areas since the foundation of this State and through the difficult times, we would not have many regional towns today.

Mr McGowan: One vote, one value has nothing to do with that.

Mr BOARD: Over the next two years we will all see that, unless the voice of the country is in this House, the Cabinet and the Caucus, country people will not get a look in. At the time of the budget, when people are fighting for equity and their part of the public purse -

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr McRae): I ask the member for Nedlands to address members in a proper manner.

Mr BOARD: We have heard the Minister for Health arguing for support for country regions. Where will support come from when it comes to the crunch? Where will it be if the Government takes eight members from country areas and puts them into the metropolitan area?

Dr Gallop: It will come from our passionate belief in equal opportunity.

Mr BOARD: No, it will not. I predict that when the Premier goes to the next state election this issue will be his Achilles heel. This will be an issue for country people and city people. It will be an issue in which the Premier will be seen to have deserted the people who built this State and who generate the wealth of this State. The Premier will be seen to have deserted people for political advantage. City people in Western Australia support country people and they want to see country regions grow; they want to see people supported. We will see that support diminished. This House will move to a city-centric point of view. Country representation will be taken away. If the Premier took his equity argument to the nth degree, would he stop health funding to country areas? Will the Minister for Education stop subsidising education in country areas because there are fewer people in the country? Will liquor licensing be changed? Will protection for some country hotels stop? We have subsidised country regions because they need support.

Mr Carpenter: What is your point?

Mr BOARD: We protect our country regions; we support them with extra funding. We give them extra money for roads, health and education. We look after country regions as best we can. Protection has come about because of the numbers and support country areas have had in party rooms, Caucus and Cabinet over a very long period.

Dr Gallop: It is not a rationale.

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Mr BOARD: Yes, it is. How many state ministers go to Canberra each week and argue for funds? We have just heard the Minister for Health say that Western Australia is a very large State and has unique issues and needs additional support. Country areas need support with telecommunications, transport and education. What rationale would rip out the protection and the support they have from their local members? What purpose would it serve to diminish that representation? In Canberra the State Government argues for Western Australians, as we did, but when it comes to the crunch, this Government will diminish country members' power in this place and their opportunity to argue on behalf of their constituents. It will diminish country people's representation and their access to members of the Parliament. Every country member will suffer. A country member cannot stand in front of his electors, having voted in favour of removing their representation and their voice and putting it in the city, and say that country voters will be better off. Their representatives will be in the city. Those members are in lulu land and if they support the legislation, they can count their days. The previous Government had an Achilles heel leading into the last state election, and I put on record today that this is the Government's Achilles heel. This will bite back at the Government at the next state election, every time an issue arises in country areas and every time there is a lack of resources, because it did not have enough gumption to support its country electorate. That is the situation and that is how it will be. It will be a sad day in Western Australia when this Bill gets through the lower House.

Several members interjected.

Mr BOARD: Mr Acting Speaker, there are too many interjections from the other side of the House.

Several members interjected.

Mr BOARD: I know the feeling. Members opposite are very sensitive about this issue, and there is a bit of heat coming from the compost heap at the moment. It is guilt. Members opposite are churning around because of their guilt. They will ask themselves how they will explain this situation. How do they create the smoke and mirrors and say to the guys in the country that they will rip out the country people's representation - those members that fight for their interest - but that they will be much better off? The Government should explain to them how they will be better off. I am telling the Government that this issue will come back and bite it.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr McRae): Order members! I have allowed some interaction between the speaker and other members on my right, particularly because the member for Murdoch has in some ways been inviting those interjections. However, when the debate occurs between people other than that group, it is totally incoherent. It makes no sense to me, it is certainly very difficult for Hansard and it does members no good at all.

Mr BOARD: How many times have I sat in this House over the past eight years and listened to members of the current Government talk about protection for the country regions? Questions were asked about how to stop the banks closing, how to stop government agencies closing, moving or amalgamating, and how to gain support for the police and police stations. The country members from both sides of Parliament, who represented those electorates, were passionate and got on their feet to try to protect country regions. Less than seven months later, those members of Parliament will strike a decisive blow in the history of Western Australia. They will go down in history as a group of individuals who took away something that had been established in the psyche of this State for a long period; that is, that this State will look after the generations of families on farms who have generated dollars and helped build this State. We want to support them and give them extra muscle. What is wrong with giving them that protection? I would be arguing this even if the Government held every bloody seat in the country. I would be arguing that the representation should remain that way because there is no reason to take it from them. It has gained support and maintained some stability in this State. If the Government rips it out, then 10 years from now, every time something closes in the country, this decision will come back to bite them. Every time a commercial interest or some other quasi-government body wants to move something from the country to the city, how will the Premier's front bench stand and argue in support of country areas after having taken away their representation and the very key to the support they get?

Dr Gallop: You are not serious, are you?

Mr BOARD: I am very serious.

Dr Gallop: What about in 1996?

Mr BOARD: The Premier cannot argue that because he will not and cannot be consistent. This is solely a political exercise. It is not an exercise in equity; it is an exercise in political gain.

In closing, I invite members opposite to in the future revisit *Hansard* of 22 August 2001, and remember that it was the day on which they started the demise of the Labor Government, and started losing the next state election.

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**MR WALDRON** (Wagin) [8.18 pm]: I strongly oppose this legislation. I will approach the debate a little differently, and I shall talk about commonsense and realities. I oppose this legislation because it will disfranchise country people and is an insult to them. Their voice in this Parliament will be greatly diminished, and that cannot be argued against. There will be diminished access to and service from local members - whoever they may be. I refer to local members, but in these proposed new electorates, the members will not be local. It is not fair or equitable, and we keep hearing about equality -

Mr Carpenter interjected.

Mr WALDRON: I am talking about equality and commonsense. We need a system of one vote, fair value. The current system delivers that. I have spent most of my life in country Western Australia. In the past seven or eight years I lived in the city with my family because I was managing country football. Although I lived in the city, I visited country WA as part of my job all the time. It is one of the reasons that I stood for Parliament, because during that time - I said this in my maiden speech - I became aware of the many inequities between the city and the country in so many different areas. Country people acknowledge that and they accept those differences. However, they do not want special and extra treatment; they just want fair treatment.

Dr Gallop: No, just the National Party does. Not the people, just the National Party.

Mr WALDRON: In my case, I say categorically that it is not the National Party.

Dr Gallop: You are standing up in this Parliament for blatant self-interest. Be honest.

Mr WALDRON: Those people who know me well would not agree with that statement.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr McRae): Order! The member for Wagin is neither inviting nor responding to interjections. He should continue without interjections.

Mr WALDRON: The inequities I refer to are many, including health, education, telecommunication services, entertainment and sport, which is something in which I was involved. We cannot even get decent reception of the cricket in country Western Australia. One of the reasons I stood to become a member of Parliament was to help address some of those inequities. If this legislation is successful, it will be one of the greatest inequities of all time. It will be a great loss for country people who miss out in so many ways. Country people will lose their voice in this place if this legislation is successful.

Earlier, the Leader of the National Party said that the disadvantaged people in our society would lose their representation. The Australian Bureau of Statistics informs us that eight of the State's areas with the lowest household incomes are the localities of Pingelly, Gingin, Boyup Brook, Albany, Nannup, Beverley and Merredin. This legislation will take away fair representation for some of the most disadvantaged people in this State.

Mr Carpenter: You are killing your own argument.

Mr WALDRON: Maybe the minister takes that view. However, I am sure that most people do not. Country people want a fair go and they want fair representation; that is not a lot to ask.

Mr Marlborough: On that criterion, how did you sneak into Parliament?

Mr WALDRON: I probably snuck in because of my record, and I will stand by that. The Government talks about what is fair and equal for people and I agree with that. I emphasised the need for fairness and equality in my maiden speech. If this legislation is fair for country people, I have a good head of hair! The National Party supports fair representation of all electorates by taking into account the concepts of fairness and community of interest. The present system fairly represents all people in Western Australia.

I talked about being in the city. I have many friends in the city and I have met many acquaintances in the city.

Several members interjected.

Mr WALDRON: Most people who know me would know that I have a lot of friends. I have made a point of asking people in metropolitan Perth about this issue. They tell me that they do not care much about it. They do not know much about it because it does not affect them. I can understand that. I have spoken to many intelligent people from all different walks of life.

Mr Barron-Sullivan: Do any of the metropolitan people say that they want more members of Parliament?

Several members interjected.

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The ACTING SPEAKER: Order!

Mr WALDRON: I have made a point of asking people about this issue because I want to find out their views. They tell me that they are not concerned about the issue. When I explain to them what it would mean to the people in country Western Australia, they have empathy for those country people. I am sure that most of those people would support me, although I grant that some people might agree with the Labor Party's principle. However, the majority of people that I have spoken to who come from different walks of life do not support this legislation. They are concerned for the country. The Government says that it is concerned for the country but I do not see the evidence.

In the first six or seven months since becoming a member, like other newly elected members to this House, I have tried to establish myself in my electorate and in this House. I have worked extremely hard for extremely long hours like other members, although some of them might have worked longer hours than I have. I have tried to do my job properly and inform myself so that -

Mr Whitely interjected.

Mr WALDRON: I will refer to distances in a minute. I have tried to be properly informed for when I speak in this place. However, I have become frustrated because there are times when I want to do my job properly but I cannot do it because of the distances and the time involved spent travelling.

Dr Gallop: Why do those people who live in Brownlie Towers mean less?

Mr WALDRON: I am not saying that.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order! I have said it once before: the interaction between the speaker and another interjector is fine; I will not concern myself with that. However, cross battles occur from the left and the right of the Chamber that do this debate no good at all. I would like to hear the member for Wagin.

Mr WALDRON: I have been frustrated because of the distance and the time spent travelling around my electorate. I realise that members in Perth have similar problems. However, country members waste time because of the distances we must travel. I talked about commonsense and reality, and that is a reality. My country electorate is only medium size. It covers 23 121 square kilometres and it has 13 local government authorities. It takes me about two and a half hours to get from one side of the electorate to the other.

Dr Gallop: How long does it take the member for Kalgoorlie to get round his electorate?

Mr WALDRON: I do not know; I do not get up there all that often. The member for Roe has about 500 kilometres to travel. Members will travel more than that according to the plans of the new electorates that I have seen.

Mr Marlborough: I do not think politicians should travel; I am opposed to it!

Mr WALDRON: That is a little silly. People in the proposed electorates will be greatly disadvantaged, and there is no doubt that members will find it impossible to do the job properly. It has been mentioned that technology, including the use of mobile phones and the Internet, helps members. The Leader of the National Party said previously that a lot of the time mobile phones do not work and members must wait until they get to a major town before they can use them. That is a fact of life in the country. Sometimes the Internet does not work and other times it is so slow it is impractical to use it. While technology continues to evolve, it will have its advantages.

I said at the beginning of my speech that I would talk about reality, and I will continue to do so. I am sure that people in the city and the country like personal contact. Technology has meant that banks have become more impersonal. These days when people phone different organisations, they do not speak to anyone because organisations use recorded messages. As technology improves and grows, people will need more human contact.

A couple of weeks ago, it was said that country members perhaps need to work harder. That is a fair comment, and I am always prepared to work harder; I think I have proved that. People who have worked with me over the years know my work ethic. I am not complaining about work ethics; I am discussing the realities of doing the job to represent the people. I am sure that the government members in this House who represent country seats know what I am talking about. They understand it because they live in the country. The electorates of some country members are not as large as other members' electorates. Soon their constituents will realise that their members are not supporting them or meeting their needs. When they realise the full implications, as some already have, that will cause trouble for the Government down the track. One vote, one value bases electoral boundaries on population figures and makes no allowances for the distances members must travel.

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Another point is the lack of regional cities in Western Australia, and I stress again the representation rights of country people. We are always saying that some allowances should be made. The member for Murdoch made that quite clear when he spoke about the different allowances that are already made in many areas. Allowances are made throughout our society. There are taxation allowances; that is, there are different thresholds. There are different social security levels and different qualification levels. We want to make it fair and equitable, as the Labor Party says, so we make those allowances. I agree with that. There are allowances for people who leave home to study. There are travelling allowances. There are even handicaps in golf, to make allowances for some of us. Those allowances are fair enough. That is all we are talking about here. If government members really want the equality that they are talking about in this legislation, they should read the letter to the *Countryman* newspaper last week, which hit the nail on the head. It states -

With the Labor "parties" claiming this change is to provide equal rights, one could ask will there then be equal rights as follows:

- Fuel will be equally priced across the State.
- All voters, regardless of race or colour, will receive equal assistance in all situations.
- All schools will receive equal funding.
- All hospitals will receive equal funding.
- All nursing homes will receive equal funding.
- All towns will have a police station.

That is not possible. I do not think country people expect that. They know there will be differences. They are realistic people. What they are saying, and what I have been saying all along, is that they just want their right to fair representation. There is no doubt in my mind that they will not have that. This new legislation means that there will be 42 city seats and 15 country seats from Kununurra to Esperance. I cannot understand how anyone could think that is fair and reasonable. In my first few months in this House it has been made clear to me that country people's representation in this Parliament will be reduced. They will have far less opportunity to put pressure on Governments of any persuasion to deal with country interests. I have seen how it works in this place. After this legislation is passed, the voice of the country areas will be diminished even further.

The recent drought highlighted that; it is the classic example. Until the seriousness of the situation and the implications involved in the drought were raised in this House by the National Party as a matter of public interest, city members and the public were not aware of the disastrous proportions of the drought and its implications. They knew there was a drought; I acknowledge that. However, they did not realise how serious it was. Their awareness was raised by the action of members in this House. What happened? The Minister for Agriculture and the Premier visited the area. That is terrific!

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr McRae): Order! The Leader of the National Party asked why. He was not in the Chamber when I rose on three previous occasions and said that I am quite prepared to allow interjections and discussion between the speaker and others to whom he responds; I have no difficulty with that whatsoever. However, a continuous cross-debate has been going on behind the speaker. In not involving the speaker, it has added nothing to the debate. I am not prepared to accept it.

Mr WALDRON: The awareness that was raised in this House led to visits to the area, a recognition of the seriousness of the situation and some action being taken by the Premier, the Minister for Agriculture, other parliamentary members, the Prime Minister and the federal Minister for Agriculture. I am sure that in the future, when situations like that arise, the same level of awareness will not be raised because we simply will not have the voice.

Mr Marlborough: What a load of nonsense!

Mr WALDRON: I do not think it is nonsense at all. The people representing country areas have a special knowledge of the country and the situations in those areas, such as the drought, as do members in the city have a special knowledge of the metropolitan area. I do not claim to know everything about the city, although I have spent some time here. Because of my lack of experience of living in the city for a number of years, there are certain things that I do not know about. It was interesting to hear the Minister for Education talk about his visit to the north eastern wheatbelt schools etc. I thought that was terrific. He acknowledged those people and the great work they are doing. He realises that because he has been to the area and understands the situation. It was great to hear him speak in that way. People who represent country electorates are fully aware of those issues all the time, and that is the point I want to make.

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The majority of people across the State do not support the proposed electoral reforms. Very few people I have spoken to support it. We spoke about referendums earlier and the reasons the Government will not consider a referendum. City people do not see a great need for this change; only the Government sees the need for the change. The reasons the Government sees the need for the change have been highlighted tonight. Country people feel angry, shunned and let down.

Mr D'Orazio interjected.

Mr WALDRON: I do not think we have let them down at all. We are right here doing what they expect us to do. This action will further divide the city and the country. We do not want that to happen. We should be trying to get together, not driving in a wedge. I have heard members say that we need more help from the federal Government; I agree with that. We want to help the Government of Western Australia get more for this State. It is important that we unite and not become divided, so we can get more for this State. I hope that the member for Merredin - I could not think of a better person - becomes one of those people who can help us get a better deal from the federal Government. Country people are greatly disadvantaged in many ways. This legislation will deny fair and equitable representation to country people, and I stress the word "people" because the Government keeps talking about people; I agree with it on that issue. Country people do not want an extra advantage; they just want a fair go. In representing Western Australian country people and my electorate, I strongly oppose this legislation.

**MR EDWARDS** (Greenough) [8.37 pm]: I also strongly oppose this legislation. When I last spoke on this issue, I prefaced my remarks by telling the House that I represent country people. I reiterate that position today. I intend to focus my comments on representation - I repeat the word "representation" - in rural and regional electorates. We must remember that Western Australia is unique in its geographic size compared with any other State in Australia. It is one-third of the Australian landmass. Because of the areas and distances involved, representation takes on a whole different meaning for people living in rural and regional Western Australia. I will use my electorate of Greenough as an example. It covers an area of approximately 32 000 square kilometres. It is one of the smaller country electorates north of Perth. However, to properly represent my constituents, I can spend a week or fortnight travelling around my electorate. There are seven local government authorities within the electorate, and they all represent people from businesses and backgrounds as diverse as farmers, fishermen, miners, machinery and animal food manufacturers, as well as many other larger and smaller enterprises. They are people who have chosen to live and work in a rural environment. Through those businesses and lifestyles they contribute a sizeable amount to the State's economy. I make that comment only to support the influence and input that those people have on the State and their community. These people expect a level of service and delivery of all aspects of lifestyle, community benefits, shopping, allied facilities and government services. They want to be able to access a post office, a doctor, medical facilities, a bank, a chemist and social and community services. They expect, in part, services equal to those available to their city counterparts.

They also expect access to their local government representatives and to be represented by them fairly and equitably. They see it as their right to be able to talk to their local government representative face to face and for their representative to be a member of their community. Their representative is not someone who is far removed geographically from the issues of their community. They expect the same from those of us who represent country electorates in State Parliament. That same application of geography should apply. Community of interest, demographic trends and economic factors should be of consideration.

I am aware that by using my local area of interest as an example - namely, the Greenough and Geraldton electorates - I could be accused of pandering to my own position on this issue. However, I am prepared to accept that criticism in support of my argument.

I am here to represent the people who elected me. They did not elect me to change the electoral system. The Minister for Electoral Affairs was quoted as saying that people in country areas want better services, not more politicians, as has been said before in here. I remind the minister that under his reforms country people will lose probably eight politicians, not gain them. I wonder if city people would sooner have better services than more politicians. I bet London to a brick they would. However, under the minister's plan those country seats will go to the city. Country people are satisfied with their representation and they see no reason for change. I suggest that city people too are happy with their representation and see no reason for change. If country people want better services - I will not argue with that - it is even more important that they have good and accessible representation.

I suggest that the minister ask the member for Geraldton how often he can leave his office to service the greater Geraldton-Greenough area. From all accounts, I think he has some difficulty doing that. My electorate officer says that people constantly complain that the member for Geraldton is too busy to see them. That is no reflection

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whatsoever on the member for Geraldton. I know he has a heavy workload. However, if he is that busy he will not be able to address issues in a larger seat or whenever the rural balance of Greenough goes.

Country people like to see their state representatives in their communities face to face. Local authorities, farming organisations, country schools and local community groups call on their elected members to support or help them with issues that cannot be resolved by telephone or through another form of communication - that is, as someone has already said, if they have a phone or some other form of communication. Some people geographically at the top end of my electorate are lucky if they can receive e-mail. They certainly do not have the technology available to enable them to use a mobile phone. Technology is not all it is cracked up to be for making representation.

Representation of country people has different implications. Often in country areas today development is in progress for fairly fundamental facilities that we take for granted in semi-rural or metropolitan areas. A shire in my electorate managed to raise funding for a water pipeline approximately 170 kilometres long to service approximately 71 members of its farming community. As I said earlier, a fundamental service in metropolitan and regional Western Australia is scheme water on tap, which we take for granted. Apart from the shire, the Department of Conservation and Land Management and the Water Corporation were involved. The shire had a problem with the siting of the proposed line, which was proposed to run along a road that runs through a CALM reserve. However, the shire was responsible for the maintenance and the upkeep of the road and it was finding it difficult to reach agreement with both agencies on a better siting of the line; namely, on the road reserve. Somewhat frustrated with efforts to reach agreement with the two relevant agencies, a shire representative phoned my office. As their elected member I said I would see what I could do to help. I was able to bring all the parties together on site and the issue was resolved in a day. My point is that that meeting was not just around the corner, down the street, a block away or a half-hour drive away; I spent three hours driving to the meeting and a couple of hours on site resolving it. That took five hours out of my day, which I was happy to give. However, I had to spend three hours in the car driving to the site meeting. That is only one example.

I was at a salinity seminar yesterday where people asked me about one vote, one value. They are fairly angry that they will be disfranchised and that their representation will be taken away from them. They are happy with the situation and see no reason for change. We are elected to represent our constituents. City or regional town members of Parliament can do much representation from behind a desk, but rural country representatives need to go out and see the people in their community. That involves time and distance.

It is a pity that the party machine on the other side of the House has changed the mind of the member for Eyre. I am sure that at the bottom of his heart he can relate to my comments. Before the election, he was a strong supporter of the current situation. I bundle the members for Geraldton, Bunbury, Collie, Albany, the Kimberley and Mandurah together in quasi-country seats and wonder at their silence on this issue. I say quasi-country seats because they live in regional centres. They are not truly rural representatives in country areas; they operate from regional centres.

I believe the change the Minister for Electoral Affairs wants to ram through this place on this issue is nothing more than a cynical grab for ongoing power for his party. I think the members of the front bench are quite uncomfortable with this reform, as their body language has indicated. It is making them squirm. This is no more, no less than politically driven.

Neither I nor my electors to whom I have spoken have any concerns about the present system. We see no reason to change it. We are talking about equitable and fair representation. I stress representation. The people should be making the choice on this issue through a referendum. It is a major change of this Legislative Assembly's structure and representation, which warrants the people making a choice. The issue begs the question, why the Government will not give the people an opportunity to make their own decision on this reform. What sort of representation of their electors are these so-called country representatives on the other side giving their electors? As has been said before, they are not truly representing those people. The people did not vote them in to change the electoral system.

I do not think the minister gives a damn about them because they are expendable. The eight seats in the country will go to the city and they will be lined up as Australian Labor Party seats. That may be a cynical point of view, but that is the way I see the issue.

**MRS EDWARDES** (Kingsley) [8.49 pm]: I oppose the Bill before the House, which seeks to deal with the principle of one vote, one value. The Bill really seeks to reduce the political power of those people who live outside the metropolitan area in Western Australia. The Bill seeks to reduce their level of representation by eight members of Parliament, cutting representation by 35 per cent. Historically, people living in country regions in Western Australia have been the backbone of our economy and community. They have done the hard yards.

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Many still live in isolated conditions and suffer the disadvantages of doing so. Yet, we need those farmers, station owners and roadhouse owners, so that the Minister for Education has somewhere to stop for a drink or bite to eat when he travels around from school to school. He was happy to go to country areas to see what was going on, but when will he go back?

Country people like having a local member and they like to see their local member. Members opposite said that this issue is about government services, not representation, and that people can get on the phone or can send an e-mail to their local member. Hey, this Government really responds! A person cannot get a meeting with a government member, nor can he get a response by telephone. It takes months to get answers to letters, so what hope will country people have when they will have to rely on the Government of the day responding, not face to face, but by telephone or e-mail on matters that concern country regions. Country members will have even greater areas to cover. The tyranny of distance, which Western Australia has always suffered in relation to Canberra, will be even greater for those members of Parliament who will have greater distances to cover. People do not want to talk to members only on the end of a phone or to send a letter or e-mail. They like to see their members of Parliament. All members probably have Friday electorate days, during which they meet the constituents who have not had a chance to see them because the member has been in Parliament during the week. They come in for a cup of coffee and a chat about their problems, which members of Parliament try to resolve. Members of Parliament have the best job in the world; they attempt to help people. However, this will become harder for country members. How will country members attend school graduations, award nights, the odd P&C meeting, citizenship ceremonies and the like when they are given larger electorates? How many shire and council areas will they represent? This is all about centralised power in Perth.

Everyone knows what Western Australians think about centralised power in Canberra; they do not like it. People in Canberra believe that the border stops on the east coast and that the other side is just us. If Western Australia wants a commitment to change a policy, what do the politicians in Canberra do? They count the members of Parliament and the number of seats they hold and say, "Hey, we know where the votes are. They are on the east coast; not the west coast". What will happen here? The Government will say, "We know where the votes are". They will count the members of Parliament in the metropolitan area and will forget about country members, because the votes are not in the country. That is what this issue is all about. It will take representation and a political voice from country people and will give it to those living in the metropolitan area. This will be at the expense of country people.

The Government has said that this issue is not about representation, but is about government services. The Government is already closing services. The Labor Party has only been in government since February. It is not increasing government services in country and regional areas.

Mr Murray: I didn't think there were any left to close.

Mrs EDWARDES: Is the member for Collie going to speak on this issue?

Mr Murray: Yes.

Mrs EDWARDES: Excellent. The Opposition wants to hear from country members of the Labor Party. The Department of Indigenous Affairs and the Department of Environmental Protection have closed their offices in Kalgoorlie. That is a disgrace. The DEP is needed in that growing region. Government services are already being cut. The Government has said that this issue is not about representation, and that it will continue to provide government services in country areas. The Opposition does not believe it, and neither do people in the country. They are already disadvantaged. If the Government was really concerned about ensuring that this is what the people want and will support, it would hold a referendum. Why will the Government not take it back to the people? Because they will not be happy about this decision to increase the area and number of people country members will have to represent. However, it will take work off me. Great, the number of constituents in my electorate will go down! In reality, that never happens. Any member of Parliament who has been in the job for some time knows that even after a redistribution, people do not look at the boundaries if they have been coming to a member for years. They will continue to come to the same member for years. The Government is essentially increasing the workload of country members of Parliament and reducing the workload of metropolitan members of Parliament. Why is the Government doing that? It wants to increase its own political power at the expense of country people. If country members on the government side were serious in their belief that country people support this change, they would support a referendum. What did we hear earlier in this debate? We heard that the Government has a mandate for this change. The Minister for Education spoke of a sweeping victory and the former Government being crushed. We lost the election, but those guys did not win it.

Several members interjected.

Mr McGinty: Here comes Billy Snedden!



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Mrs EDWARDES: The Labor Party increased its primary vote by 1.4 per cent. It has the lowest primary vote of any Government and won only two seats in its own right. It did not win the election on the basis of its policies.

Mr McGinty: I wonder why we are sitting over here then?

Mrs EDWARDES: Labor Party members are sitting on that side because of One Nation and Greens (WA) preferences. They are the reason the Labor Party is over there, and its members know it. However, they have said, "We won the election on 10 February, so we have a mandate and can go ahead with these changes to the electoral system". I do not believe that is the case. There is a lot of debate about when parties actually have a mandate. Does it apply to the whole of the policy platform that a party took to the election or does it apply only to more important items? How should it be determined? Is it based on voting strength or the number of seats won, and, if it is based on the number of seats, in which Chamber are those? Is it in one or both Chambers? A lot of the talk about having a mandate has been pure rhetoric. It is a political doctrine that political parties have used from time to time when going into an election to say, "Give us a mandate and we will do this". A lot has been written about mandates. I will read from research paper 19 of 1998-99 titled "Mandate: Australia's Current Debate in Context", which states -

The idea of mandate derives from the view that elections are about more than periodically casting a vote for particular individuals. The idea embraces candidates and/or parties telling the voters what they stand for in terms of philosophies, principles, plans and programs; what they stand against; and what they propose to do should their campaign be successful. An early expression of the mandate idea was the view that, circumstances permitting, -

Mr Marlborough interjected.

Mrs EDWARDES: The member for Peel has always been a bully. He will never change.

... major new policies or programs should be submitted to the people before being enacted. The mandate idea applied both to legislation and to policy which might be implemented on the basis of executive power.

I will quote from further on in the document -

Practical problems aside, the mandate has been roundly criticised on general grounds as a means for avoiding, circumventing, short circuiting or nullifying parliamentary process in the making of legislation.

Does that sound familiar - not wanting to go back out to the people when making such major changes to the electoral Act?

In this view, the mandate is portrayed as a bludgeon in the hands of a majority party for imposing its views on others; behind this lies a fear that the view of the majority party is only that of a majority within it, and therefore a minority within the whole.

Gough Whitlam has been recognised as one the Prime Ministers most strongly promoting the idea of a mandate. The research paper states -

... when recommending that the Governor-General exercise the prerogative of mercy and release several youths who had refused national service, Whitlam wrote:

It may be assumed that this was endorsed by the electors, and that Your Excellency's Government has a mandate to take these steps.

Whitlam then went on, in August 1975, when delivering the Chifley Memorial Lecture -

I interpret the mandate as being both general and specific - a general mandate to govern for the term for which we were elected and a specific mandate to implement the undertakings we made, within that term ... I cannot accept the conservative definition of a mere mandate to govern, a permit to preside over the administration of government and, hopefully, to administer the existing system in a sufficiently acceptable way, to give reasonable prospects of re-election.

What were the views of commentators about Whitlam's views on a mandate? One of the opposition backbenchers at the time said -

... when in the course of an election campaign a political leader makes what he is pleased to call a policy speech and a number of other speeches and issues supplementary statements and so on there may be 199 different matters that he has mentioned. To claim that he has a mandate for every one of these is of course on the face of it obviously absurd.

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Two political scientists, Gordon Reid and Clem Lloyd, wrote in 1974 -

The theory of mandate applied by Mr Whitlam was often naïve and obscure. Inherent in it were very real dangers of inflexibility in the composition of policy, and confrontation with the Senate on the wrong political issues. Undoubtedly, the Whitlam mandate also gave expression to a strong strain of idealism . . .

This is what we are facing today in the Bill before the House - so-called principle.

. . . and a remarkable fidelity to the performance of electoral promises.

I now come to a current political leader, the federal Leader of the Opposition, Mr Beazley. When speaking about the character of the Howard federal Government's mandate on the goods and services tax, and about the parliamentary process, he said -

John Howard has won this election. There's no question about that. But he's won it with the lowest vote to win an election that any of us can actually recollect . . . He has a right to govern well. And a government has a right to introduce anything that they like . . . He is entitled to put forward any piece of legislation that he wants. And he can claim for that legislation the merits of the arguments associated with that legislation. He can claim no more for it than that.

That is exactly what I am saying. The Government can claim no more than that. In fact, the Government is going even further, because this is a different type of legislation, which changes the electoral system, and the way people vote in Western Australia. The Government should hold a referendum to allow the people to decide. The Government is saying electoral reform has always been part of its policy, but was it the issue on which the election was fought? I do not think so.

Mark James, a member of a democratic reform organisation, writes -

A mandate can not even be claimed for policies which are fully articulated before an election, as other issues may have been decisive, and focused debate is difficult during the campaign period . . .

Second, there must be an accurate method of determining the views of the electorate. Opinion poll surveys are expensive, not comprehensive, and can be manipulated through the choice of question wording.

I suggest that the answer to that is a referendum. James continues -

Finally, there must be safeguards against naive or dangerous proposals being rushed through the parliament and becoming law.

Another commentator writes -

A fourth perspective argues that when most people vote they have little understanding of detailed party policy and any claim to a mandate is therefore flawed.

All those in this House know that. I will return to what constitutes a mandate. Is a mandate based upon the number of seats in the Legislative Assembly? I do not think so, because the Government, in the election, only won two seats in its own right. Is it based upon the majority of seats in both Houses? The Government does not have that. Is it based on the percentage of votes? The Government obtained the lowest percentage primary vote of any Government, so it does not have that. I have gone through the views of other people much more informed than I, since they have done the research. Is a mandate a whole platform, or just the main subject of the election? Let us reflect on the issues of the last election. Was the election fought on the issue of electoral reform, and the promise of eight fewer members of Parliament in the country? I do not remember getting a pamphlet in my letterbox. In some of those country areas, the Liberal Party raised the issue, because the Labor Party had no intention of doing so.

Mr Dean interjected.

Mrs EDWARDES: The pamphlet shown by the member for Bunbury did not come into my letterbox.

On the other hand, were the issues in the election a combination of other things? Health was a major issue in the election, and still is, considering the debate on the subject in this House earlier tonight. I showed one of the pamphlets that did come through my letterbox, dealing with an unhealthy health system. It is a lot less healthy today. One of the pamphlets that went out to every single electorate was about the health system. The finance brokers scandal was a big issue. The Minister for Electoral Affairs ran with the finance brokers issue day in, day out, every week. He ran the issue for months. I never heard him talking about one vote, one value, promising to make that a major principle of the election campaign. Law and order was always going to be a major issue. I do

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not think that anyone here would believe that the election was fought on electoral reform. The Government cannot claim a mandate for this.

This Bill will be totally unfair to the people of Western Australia, particularly country people. If the Government were really serious about the issue, particularly those country members who would suffer no backlash, it would take it back and test it. I bet that government members have not even done surveys on the issue in their electorates, asking whether their constituents want less representation. Some of the debate that went on before the election involved a lot of misinformation. What people have been asking for is a better health system, more police, and all the other core issues. Electoral reform is not, and never has been, part of the call from the people of Western Australia.

**MR COWAN** (Merredin) [9.10 pm]: I read the second reading speech of the Minister for Electoral Affairs with interest. He took some licence to delve into the history of this State's electoral laws and the High Court's historical judgment in the case he took to that court and lost; therefore, it is appropriate that I mention a couple of issues associated with the process of electoral reform in the State of Western Australia. I was pleased that he referred to the process in which some members of the Labor Party engaged in the early 1970s. Those members had a strong bent for electoral reform which focused on one vote, one value. Their main motivation was the establishment of sectioned seats in Western Australia, in which the boundaries of Legislative Assembly seats were determined by the Parliament. That created a distinct degree of malapportionment that, in my view, lent substance to the argument that electoral reform was needed in Western Australia. I subscribed to that view: the processes needed to be changed. I believed it necessary for this State to have a bicameral Parliament comprising a Legislative Assembly with a single-member constituency, from which the Government is drawn, and a Legislative Council with a different electoral system. Prior to 1989, the Legislative Council had a number of electoral provinces with a multimember constituency. Each member was elected alternately, as is the case in the Senate. That is known to most people. In 1989, landmark legislation removed sectioned seats from Western Australia and established two quotas - one for the metropolitan area, which was clearly defined as following the metropolitan region scheme boundaries, and another for the remainder of the State. The quotas are determined by dividing the number of metropolitan electors by 34 and the number of country electors by 23. That effectively produced a quota of roughly two to one. We moved on from a degree of malapportionment - if people want to use that word - or vote weighting of 15 votes to one, which occurred when some of the more populous seats in the metropolitan area were compared with the seat of Murchison-Eyre, which had the lowest population. That was a significant change. The other significant change was to abolish the provinces in the Legislative Council and establish three regions with 17 members for regional Western Australia and three regions with 17 members for the metropolitan area. The intention was to mirror the direction taken by the federal Parliament, which has a single-member constituency in the House of Representatives and a multimember constituency in the Senate, for which the States elect a number of people. At the time of these changes, the States sent 10 representatives to the Senate. They now send 12. No-one ever mentions the malapportionment in the Australian Senate.

The introduction of the 1989 legislation resulted in some diminution of people's anger about the electoral processes in this State. However, the Minister for Electoral Affairs has now come onto the scene. He has as much zeal for electoral reform as did Arthur Tonkin, one of his predecessors. As a consequence, we now have legislation before us that proposes a number of things, not least of which is to divide the State into 57 electoral districts with one quota. That, in the words of the minister, is the principle of one vote, one value. I wonder how many people have looked closely at this legislation and reached the same conclusion as I. The Electoral Distribution Repeal Bill includes the proposal to repeal the Electoral Distribution Act, including the seven criteria to which the electoral distribution commissioners must refer when determining electoral boundaries. Those criteria are community of interest, means of communications and distance from the capital, physical features, existing boundaries of regions and districts, existing local government boundaries, the trend of demographic changes and, when the State is divided for the first time, the boundaries of the electoral provinces and electorates in which the State was divided prior to the division. I assume that the seventh criterion applied only prior to 1989, when the first distribution took place. The commissioners are effectively required to take six criteria into account. It is common knowledge that those criteria are shunted to one side and that the commissioners tend to accept section 7(f), the trend of demographic change, as the overriding criterion.

On the recommendation of the Australian Statistician and the State Electoral Commissioner, who are electoral distribution commissioners, and with the use of Australian Bureau of Statistics data, the number of electors who will be enrolled in an area four years hence is projected; in other words, the commissioners project the number of people who will be enrolled in an area at the midpoint of a distribution, which must last for two terms. That method contains a number of flaws, not the least of which is that all the other criteria for distribution are pushed to one side. Community of interest or distance from the capital city and remoteness are not considered. There is no reflection on the previous boundaries. The commissioners simply calculate the projected population based on

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postcode numbers. The most noticeable feature of the quota is the plus or minus 15 per cent tolerance. However, demographic shifts mean the ABS projections of the growth and spread of population four years after the distribution are not necessarily accurate. In fact, those calculations have proven to be inaccurate over time. Members can get their researchers to investigate it if they do not believe me. Seats with high population growth enjoyed the value of a quota less 15 per cent of the norm.

The seats that had a slow population growth or a static population were loaded up.

Let us look at the current legislation. The Government is not delivering one vote, one value. Based on the projections, and using the same Australian Bureau of Statistics data, the Government will establish a single quota for Western Australia. It is something we can debate, and I acknowledge it is the next step in any electoral reform, should it be something that electors are looking for. I debate whether electors are really looking for electoral reform. By adopting a single quota, repealing the Electoral Distribution Act and using the provisions of the new legislation - if we assume that the average quota will be 22 000 electors - all the seats that are more remote and isolated and have a greater number of communities within the electoral district will be loaded up by another 2 200 electors.

I am not crying poor but I have 19 shires and 38 schools in my electorate. When they have a function they do not want me to send a representative, make a mobile telephone call, send a fax or send an e-mail. They want to see the member. That is the case for everybody who has difficulty representing an electorate. At the beginning of my parliamentary career I was asked by the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal to log the number of hours I worked in the performance of my duties. My electorate was nowhere as large then as it is now. I still managed to drive an average of 25 hours a week. I defy members of this House to tell me that they do the same. That is beside the point; I knew that when I stood for the seat.

The seats that are now known as Wagin, Merredin, Pilbara and Ningaloo will all have quotas of about 24 000 electors. The only variation will be through the introduction of the notional figure. We will get a notional figure in about five seats - if we are lucky. Four of them will be in the mining and pastoral regions - maybe only three, as it is dependent on how the commissioners distribute the provincial capital of Kalgoorlie. One or two seats will be in the agricultural area. One will be centred around Esperance and the current electorate of Roe, and the other will be centred around Merredin and part of Moore. The 100 000 square kilometres notional rule that the minister seeks to introduce will not have a big effect. All the seats in rural Western Australia will enjoy a quota of 24 000 electors, with the exception of perhaps three or four seats. Most of the seats in the metropolitan area will have greater population growth. The only seats that will not have to go through this particular process will be the seats based around Cottesloe and Nedlands, which are along the west coast. Guess what will happen? We will not see one vote, one value. The metropolitan area will have seats with a quota of about 20 000 electors. The quota will be just under 22 000 electors and there will be seats with a bit of growth or, at least, more rapid growth than others. In those seats, there will be downward loading. Metropolitan seats will have quotas of about 20 000 electors and more remote areas of the State will have quotas of about 24 000. The only places in the metropolitan area in which there is likely to be a quota that exceeds the average will be the seats held by the Liberal Party. It will be to the delight of the Labor Party that it will be able to lock up Liberal voters in those enlarged seats because they have low population growth. At the same time the Labor Party will be able to unlock the Labor voters who can create more seats that are marginal or safer for the Labor Party.

The end result of all that has been predicted, I believe, in *The West Australian*.

Mr Carpenter: It is unusual for you to quote *The West Australian* as an authority.

Mr COWAN: I am not saying it is an authority. It has forecast that whichever party wins government in the future in Western Australia will not have to win a single regional seat. This so-called one vote, one value, brought about through the repeal of the Electoral Distribution Act, effectively means that a quota of about 24 000 electors - rather than 22 000 electors - will exist in remote and regional areas. The majority of metropolitan seats will have quotas of about 20 000 electors. Please do not talk to me about one vote, one value because the Government is not introducing one vote, one value. It is introducing a system that will load up the electorates of those areas of Western Australia that will guarantee two things: that the Labor Party will unlock some of the Labor votes in key Labor seats, and that it will win victory without going outside the metropolitan area. It will cast aside forever all people who live in remote and rural Western Australia because it will have loaded them up - in all but three or four seats - by at least 2 000 electors above the quota and at least 4 000 above the metropolitan area. Can anybody say that is fair? Of course it is not fair. It does not deliver one vote, one value.

Mr Carpenter: How many electors are there in your seat?

Mr COWAN: Just under 13 000.

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Mr Carpenter: I have 25 000. Is that fair?

Mr COWAN: That is a valid interjection. We do a lot of things in this State that we regard as fair. We give people who hold a pension card the opportunity to travel on public transport at half price. It is not equal but it is fair. It is fair that we should do that. There is a difference between equality and fairness, and I am talking about fairness because the member asked me whether it was fair. It may be unequal, but it is fair. The Government is not delivering one vote, one value. It is changing the system to load up the areas that have traditionally not supported the Labor Party. The Government will unlock a lot of key Labor votes in the metropolitan area where there is a strong Labor majority. By contrast, where there is a strong conservative vote in the metropolitan area, it will be locked up tight.

I do not see that as having any relationship to equality.

Mr Hyde: It is much better than it is now. Perth is the smallest metropolitan seat; Cottesloe and Nedlands are above the quota. The logical place for a new seat will be in Subiaco or Wembley, both of which were conservative seats.

Mr COWAN: The member for Perth has made it very clear that they are above quota; and they will be. They will be even more above quota with the way this is going.

Mr Carpenter: No, they won't.

Mr COWAN: They will be. I urge the member for Willagee to read his Government's legislation. There is no room to manoeuvre. The only option for flexibility is that which has been put in by the minister and that is the notional value that will be given to a seat that has an area in excess of 100 000 square kilometers. I urge the member for Willagee to read the legislation.

I refer now to the Legislative Council. It is interesting that very few changes are being put into effect in the Legislative Council. There is a simple reason for that and it is called blackmail, or bribery. That is precisely what the Minister for Electoral Affairs is doing to the Greens. The minister knows that he has to have the Greens sitting on the right-hand side of the President's chair to get this legislation through the Parliament. I was not privy to the discussions that the minister had with the Greens, but my guess is that he told the Greens that if they supported the Government's legislation, particularly those provisions that relate to the Legislative Assembly, the Greens would be allowed to introduce some amendments to the way in which the Legislative Council is structured, and the Government would give them full consideration. However, I guess the minister said that the Government would not even consider those amendments unless the Greens were prepared to give it the critical elements of its version of one vote, one value, which effectively is vote-weighting for the majority of seats in the metropolitan area and loading up those seats in remote and rural Western Australia.

Mr McGinty: I wanted to get one vote, one value in its purest form in both Houses. The Greens, and some of our country members, were the ones who put pressure on the Government in respect of the mining and pastoral seats greater than 100 000 square kilometres. It was not my doing, and I did not particularly like that; it offended me. We were unable to reach agreement on the Legislative Council. The Greens were not prepared to support my model, which was one vote, one value, and I was not prepared to support their model, which would create two new seats in the Legislative Council. Therefore, we are at an impasse. The Greens are happy with what we are doing in the Legislative Assembly, but they believe our measures do not go far enough because they say they do not deal with the Legislative Council.

Mr COWAN: The minister has confirmed the offer. He has asked them to accept the provisions in this legislation which give the minister what he wants, which is not one vote, one value. There will still be a discrepancy in excess of 4 000 voters between seats. It will not be one vote, one value. I acknowledge that it will be closer to the Government's definition of "equality".

Mr Carpenter: That is what you supported.

Mr COWAN: That is not what I supported. I have just enough time to deal with that interjection. The member might recall, and I know that it was selectively quoted at the time that it was stated and has been ever since, that when I was the Leader of the National Party, I said that I could acknowledge that there could be a single quota for the Legislative Assembly. I said it would be necessary to have a much higher variable of 20 per cent. Accompanying the plus or minus 20 per cent - I urge the member not to forget this, because everyone has chosen to - was the requirement that the provision relating to demographic trend that the commissioners had to take into account had to be abolished to exactly load up those seats that did not need to be considered for remoteness and isolation, and those that were remote and isolated could be loaded down. Therefore, we would have exactly the reverse of what will happen under this legislation. If we had one quota with plus or minus 20 per cent, and we could take 20 per cent from the remote and isolated areas, we would effectively have a situation in which

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country quotas would be around 18 000 and metropolitan quotas would be around 24 000 to 25 000. That was what I said. If it really wanted to go down this path, that is what the Government should pursue. However, it has not done that.

I refer again to the Legislative Council, and I say to the Minister for Electoral Affairs that I do not think that anybody has been fooled. Effectively, the Minister for Electoral Affairs has presented his legislation to the Greens as his position for one vote, one value and he has told them that they can seek to make amendments and the Government will support those amendments, even though it does not like them, to get this so-called one vote, one value - which is a sham - for the Legislative Assembly. Mr Acting Speaker, you should mark my words; that is exactly what will happen. Notwithstanding all of its protestations about being of high principle on this issue of one vote, one value, the Labor Party will compromise itself and agree to anything the Greens offer on the understanding that the Greens will return that favour by supporting what the Government has put forward. It is not one vote, one value; it is an absolute bastardisation of the system we have in Western Australia. The Government knows exactly what this system will do, and I know why it is doing it. I think that the electors of this State understand that also.

If the Government believes that it has a mandate to implement this, then it must prove it to the people of Western Australia. It must prove to the electors its belief that it has a valid mandate by having the courage to go to a referendum. Only by having a referendum will it prove that the majority of Western Australians believe in this principle. The protest vote against the former Government did not go to the Labor Party! The Labor Party received 1.4 per cent additional votes! The vote against the Government was a protest vote. However, through the preferential system, the Labor Party received enough votes to form government. I am not protesting about that. We have copped it sweet; we have to. I have been around for long enough to have copped it sweeter than most members. However, the fact is that there was a strong protest vote against the previous Government. People went into a polling booth, not to vote for a government; they went into a polling booth to vote against something. I think some electors are terribly sorry that they did that. I will give members an example. The Labor Party has been in government for six months. The rural areas of Western Australia have had the worst season in my memory, and the Minister for Agriculture has not introduced one new policy to support those people who are suffering adverse seasonal conditions - not one new policy. The minister has extended the policies that the previous Government introduced and that cost \$25 million. He has done nothing else, and neither has anyone else in government. The Government has been so taken up with structure and process that it has done nothing. I heard the minister bragging about what the Government had done previously. The retail price cap on fuel never worked in country areas, and it was never applied even in the last few years of the previous Labor Government. The minister probably does not want to hear that because it does not suit his rhetoric, and it does not suit all the nonsense that he talks.

I am strongly opposed to this legislation. It is not one vote, one value; it will create a situation in which the Labor Party can never lose.

**MR OMODEI** (Warren-Blackwood) [9.39 pm]: I will take up where the member for Merredin left off. When members first come into this place, they learn how to count. They also realise that members are only as good as their last and best argument in the party room. After being a member for a dozen years, I know that no matter how good my speech is, in the end the numbers are not on this side of the House; therefore, the Labor Party will have its way with us. We are witnessing one of the most deceitful acts that I have seen in my 12 years as a member of Parliament.

The truth is that we have never had one vote, one value, and we never will. Yesterday, when I thought that the Labor Party would accept a system of one vote, one value, I understood that the quotas would be about 22 000 or 24 000 in the city and about 18 000 in the country. People who were in favour of one vote, one value with that type of weighting factor could have accepted that proposal. However, the Labor Party has gone to the other extreme. It wants to load up electorates that have a static population and downgrade those electorates that are growing. That is not a one vote, one value system. Surely members opposite must realise that.

Tonight it has been said that 12 members represent each of the States in the federal Senate. That it is done deliberately to give a voice to those States with smaller populations than the other States. We on this side of the House want to do the same in the House in which the Government is formed.

Mr D'Orazio: What about the upper House?

Mr OMODEI: I was just getting to that. The House of Lords is exactly the same as the other place. What is the difference? What is so special about the Legislative Council or the federal Senate? They represent people in this country. They do not represent States or regions. If that were the case, we would represent only districts.

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In the end, we represent people and we must represent them fairly. This is a rare opportunity for some backbenchers in the Labor Party who represent country seats to stand up for their constituents and not be bound by the regimen of the Labor Party, in which backbenchers must vote with the party or be told to get on their bike. The member for Collie has been elected for four years and he will not get another term. Why does he not stand up and say, "I am here for the people of Collie, not for the people who live in downtown Fremantle."

Mr Murray: I will not do that because I believe in the principle.

Mr OMODEI: Is the member for Collie a man of principle? This Bill is about deceit. Deceit is written all over this legislation. If members opposite want to talk about a mandate, I remind them that the Government cannot pass water without the Greens (WA) or somebody else helping it in the other place. Does the Government think that the Greens have a mandate to introduce one vote, one value into this State?

Mr Hyde: Are you saying that the National Party did not have a mandate?

Mr OMODEI: I am saying that without the Greens in the upper House, the Government cannot pass any legislation, and members opposite know that. Extreme vote weighting in the upper House will occur because the Government needs the Greens to support its legislation in the upper House. If it is all right for the federal Senate representation to be formed in a way that helps the States with fewer populations to have a voice in the federal Senate, why can it not be done here?

Western Australia is unique in that it has an electorate that is as large as 2 500 square kilometres. Ministers may fly out of Perth in an aeroplane to their electorates and fly back to Perth again. One member mentioned that he had just been to Warburton, which takes about five hours travel. The former ministers on this side of the House have been in that position. I spend an average of about 50 days a year driving in the car, usually at all hours of the night.

When other members of the Government leave Parliament at six o'clock and go home to their electorates or to their homes, they arrive within half an hour. I have to drive for three and a half hours, or four hours on a wet night. The next morning I may have to drive in my car for another three or four hours. My electorate does not have a regional airport or a dedicated air service. As the member for Merredin said, I went into this job with my eyes open, and I knew that that was part of the job, and I do it with great relish. However, I put it to the Government that if some of its members had to drive down the South West Highway -

Mr Hyde: I drive down to Denmark every second week.

Mr OMODEI: I can imagine how many times the member would go there. Members opposite might have a different view -

Mr Carpenter: I have the photos to prove it.

Mr OMODEI: The member for Willagee has the photos to prove it. The issue of local government has not been mentioned in this debate so far. What does the Government intend to do with local governments? Questions have been asked in the other place of the Minister for Local Government about whether he intends to introduce the one vote, one value system into councils in Western Australia, and he has said that that is his intention. I wonder whether local governments in Western Australia know that.

What does it mean for local councils? With reference to the advisory board considering ward boundaries, the Local Government Act refers to criteria that are almost identical to those in the Electoral Amendment Bill. The member for Merredin mentioned community of interest, means of communication and distance from the capital, physical features, existing boundaries of regions and districts, existing local government boundaries and trend of demographic changes. The Local Government Act states that when a council reviews its ward boundaries every eight years it must take into consideration, where applicable, community of interest, physical and topographical features, demographic trends, economic factors and the ratio of councillors to electors in the various wards.

What happens to those councils that have no wards? They have a true one vote, one value system, particularly if there is no change in the demographics. The only way to get a true one vote, one value system is to quarantine every single district and not allow the population to change. What happens to a local government when it is compared with the local government next door? Western Australia has 1 500 councillors. Some 1.2 million people who are registered on the electoral roll are also on the residential roll, not including the owners and occupiers. Let us use the example that 1.2 million people are on the electoral roll. The ratio would be one councillor for every 800 people. The City of Melville has 90 000 people. How many people are in the council that the member for Ballajura formerly represented?

Mr D'Orazio: Some 58 000.

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Mr OMODEI: What is 58 000 divided by 800? The metropolitan area will have a surfeit of councillors because that is what a nonsense this argument is. If the Government is to have its way with the people of Western Australia from the point of view of the Legislative Assembly, it will some day do the same to local government. The truth is that one vote, one value does not exist in the State Government, the upper House, the federal Senate or local government. What will happen to the 112 country local governments throughout Western Australia?

Mr D'Orazio: What was the first thing you did as minister when you forced us to have one vote, one value? Do you remember that?

Mr OMODEI: Did we force you?

Mr D'Orazio: It was the first thing that you did as a minister.

Mr OMODEI: One vote, one value does not exist, and the member for Ballajura knows that, particularly when comparing one council with the council next door.

Let us consider my situation, and the projections for my new electorate.

Mr Hyde interjected.

Mr OMODEI: If the member for Perth would keep quiet, he might learn something. He is a bit of a loud mouth.

Let us take my electorate as an example. Currently, the district of Warren-Blackwood takes in all of the shire of Augusta-Margaret River, right up to Cowaramup; all of the shire of Nannup; all of the shire of Bridgetown-Greenbushes; and all of the shire of Manjimup, except for Walpole. The new boundaries will extend to all of the shires of Denmark, Plantagenet and Cranbrook and part of the shire of Donnybrook. The funny thing is that the boundaries take in part of the shire of Donnybrook, but leave out the town site. The boundary in Margaret River has been changed to leave out the town. I do not have a major problem with leaving out those towns, but what does it do to the local governments? No longer will their local members represent all the people in the shires, and the same will be the case in Donnybrook. That will change.

Mr Hyde interjected.

Mr OMODEI: The member for Perth knows better than that! The Electoral Commissioner, particularly under a Labor Government, does exactly what the Government tells him to do. If those matters are taken into account, I will have an extra four local governments. I currently have four, so I will end up with eight. The number of my schools will rise from 26 to about 35 or 36. I do not have as many as the member for Merredin or some members from the wheatbelt of Western Australia. We should consider that country members have to drive for probably four or five hours in a modern car when travelling from one side of their electorates to the other. Members who hold metropolitan seats will be able to stroll around their electorates on a Sunday afternoon. They will live in one local government region and they may have a couple of schools. In the 25 years I have been involved in public life, in representing local government, and now in State Parliament as a district member of Parliament, I know that the people do not want to see a bureaucrat, a fax or an e-mail; they want to see the local member. At the end of the year, one of the greatest pressures and the most pleasurable times for a member of Parliament is to visit all the schools in his or her electorate, to see the people at the presentation nights and to meet the proud parents of those children. Normally, those presentation nights are held over two or three weeks at the end of the year. During my political career, my wife has gone in one direction and I have gone in the other. Sometimes we do not see each other for more than a week. We get home in the middle of the night and we were off again the next day. It is almost impossible. I stagger those schools, so that the ones I miss one year I will visit the following year.

Mr Hyde: As minister you still managed to get to every council in the State.

Mr Omodei: It took me eight years, and some of those people had not seen a minister for 25 years. We tried hard to get to those people. If I sent my electorate secretary, to whom my constituents talk on the telephone, to Margaret River or Cowaramup, or to Nyindamurra Family School, they would not know who she was. They take great pride in showing off their schools to their local member. In metropolitan Perth, under the Labor Party's regime, members can saunter down there on their blooming pushbikes.

The people in country Western Australia should be treated fairly. That means that the criteria need to take into account distance, the workload and the disability suffered in the large areas of the State. I put the challenge to those members from country areas on the other side: this is their one opportunity to stand up and make a name for themselves and say that they will represent their districts. They have been elected to Parliament; they cannot be kicked out. They can stay here and say that they stood up for the people in their areas. I assure members that I will stand up for my people. If the boundaries change and I am still the member, I will have to live with that and I will do my very best. However, that does not make it fair. If the Government is talking about one vote,



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one value, it should listen to what the member for Merredin had to say. It should go for a 20 per cent loading and let the country seats have a population of 18 000 or less and load up the other side. There is no way that we will get one vote, one value. It is just not fair to do it in the way the Minister for Electoral Affairs suggests; that is, to load up seats that have static populations and to bring down the level in the metropolitan area. He knows very well that there will be a huge growth in the populations in Wanneroo, Rockingham, Mandurah and Busselton. If the Government sets all the population numbers at a level of 21 000, within six weeks there will be a distortion because of population changes.

Mr McGinty: When I met with National Party members, they raised that very point with me: how would we feel about a provision that pitched those country seats that had a static population at or below quota rather than above? I said that I was quite happy to hear some response on the issue, and if they wanted to enter into a dialogue, we would see what we could do. The offer was there, but, unfortunately, nothing came back. I am quite sympathetic to that point of view.

Mr OMODEI: The point of the matter is that the minister has gone to the other extreme. He will further penalise country people. If I had my way, we would go back to the system of provinces in which members of Parliament represented people, rather than were elected on a ticket while sitting on the beach. The system of government is breaking down because of the electoral laws in this State. The only people who really represent people at a grassroots level are those in this place. It is not fair that country members of Parliament and country people should be penalised just on the whim of the Labor Party which is trying to entrench itself in government for the long term. I can tell members what will happen: once members opposite have picked up their pensions and have gone -

Mr Hyde: New members do not get one.

Mr McGinty: You have a pension, but most of our people do not.

Mr OMODEI: The member for Willagee will get two - one from the ABC and one from State Parliament. Somewhere down the track members will pick up their money. The pendulum will swing the other way, and then the Labor Party will complain about the situation.

I reiterate: the Labor Party cannot pass any legislation without the Greens (WA). The Greens do not have a mandate. With 37 per cent of the vote, I do not believe the Labor Party has a mandate. This issue is important to the people in country Western Australia. The 98 per cent of the people who generate in excess of 80 per cent of the wealth of this country, who get out there, live with the elements and live long distances from their families, but at their own will, are the heart and soul of this country. What the Labor Party is doing is tearing the heart and soul -

Mr Hyde: Our people do not matter.

Mr OMODEI: Why do we not ask them what they think?

Mr Hyde: We did on 10 February, and they said democracy.

Mr OMODEI: No, we did not. If the Labor Party had any courage at all, it would give this information to every constituent in Western Australia and hold a referendum. Then we would see what the people of Western Australia think about its one vote, one value idea. The Labor Party needs to take stock of itself. I am sure it will not. Maybe a Greens member in the upper House will read some of these speeches, take these matters into account and have some conscience about the future of Western Australia as a State. My prediction is that the Labor Party will be able to win the election in the city without winning a country seat. In the end, that will lead to the demise of this State Parliament in Western Australia.

**MR AINSWORTH (Roe) [10.00 pm]:** We have heard much from government members tonight about numerical fairness. It is an argument based purely on numbers of people and numerically equal electorates. I have never heard a city person complain about being disfranchised or unfairly treated by vote weighting in favour of country Western Australia. What are those people missing out on in the way of services, consideration and provision of all that modern life requires? How are they suffering due to this terrible inequality we keep hearing about from the Government? I suggest they have missed out on absolutely nothing.

On the other side of the coin, even with vote weighting - whether it has been in the term of a coalition Government or in the term of an Australian Labor Party Government - country areas have had to continue to fight to ensure they get something approaching a fair share of the State's resources so that they have the basic services that most people take for granted. Some Labor members - one that comes to mind is the member for Kimberley - would clearly acknowledge that some of the areas they represent have had to fight both persuasions of government for years to get their fair share of resources for basic health and education services. That will not

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improve with one vote, one value; it will get worse. The larger electorates in the city have suffered no detriment because of the present vote-weighting system. I find very hard to accept complaints from metropolitan and regional members that it is difficult to represent the large numbers of people in their electorates. They may represent more people, but they do not have widespread and diverse populations as I do in my electorate.

Mr Hyde: Do you have 37 different language groups?

Mr AINSWORTH: Do you speak 37 languages to converse with them or do they speak English? I suspect they speak English.

Mr Hyde: No.

Mr AINSWORTH: My electorate is an extreme example because it is a very large and remote electorate in the southern half of the State. I am prepared to concede that it is not as big as some of the north west electorates, nor is it as far from Perth as they are. However, its structure is such that the major town, which contains 50 per cent of the population, is at the extreme eastern end of the electorate. The town of Esperance is 720 kilometres by road from Perth. The western end of my electorate is 400 kilometres closer to Perth than that and is accessible only by road. I usually fly from Esperance to Perth to attend parliamentary sittings. For more than half that distance I fly over my electorate in the knowledge that my electorate lies beneath me in the aeroplane, I can have no communication or access to anyone there.

I cannot argue that my electorate's population is larger than that of city electorates. However, it comprises 30 schools and seven shires. Those people expect to have personal access to their elected member on a reasonably regular basis. They know that, unlike city electorates, in most cases they cannot ride a pushbike, catch a bus or a taxi, walk to their electorate office or drive their car to see either their member or the electorate officer. People in the town of Esperance can do so if I am in Esperance and not in Perth or somewhere else in my electorate. They have direct physical access to the electorate office. Everybody else is remote from the electorate office and their member. I am remote from them until I drive out to see them.

In supporting their claim that large electorates are difficult to service, members have quoted various statistics. I am saying the numerical factor is one issue. If everything were equal, I would agree that each electorate should be numerically equal. However, everything is not equal. We are talking about fairness. Fairness will not be achieved in terms of access to services that people expect to have in their area by making country electorates numerical equals with city electorates or close to it.

A couple of previous speakers on this side spoke about how many hours they spend in motor cars and the number of kilometres they drive. I will refer to some statistics in my electorate, not to complain but to put on the record what I faced as a newly elected member 12 years ago. The Labor Government introduced a wonderful new scheme for which I applaud it. It provided electorate vehicles to members, for which we took a salary cut to pay for the private component. For the rest of the time we had at our disposal a fully serviced vehicle on a 40 000 kilometre lease. It was a great scheme that initially - I do not know about the present scheme - saved members and taxpayers money. On average, I was getting a new car about every six months because I was doing my 40 000 kilometres in six months or less. In fact, for the first six years I was averaging 90 000 kilometres a year. If I travelled to the western end of my electorate, I drove to Perth on the Monday night and stayed on to attend Parliament that week. Many other times the electorate vehicle was left in Esperance and I would fly to Perth, as I often do now. I accumulated many miles of travel not only in my car but also by flying to Perth to attend Parliament.

Based on driving an average of 100 kilometres an hour over 90 000 kilometres a year, I spend 900 hours of travel a year in the car. If I divide that 900 hours by a 10-hour day behind the wheel - after the 10 hours I may have a shire meeting or a P&C meeting to attend - I was spending 90 days in my motor car for 10 hours a day, which is seven days a week for three months. That is dead time in the electorate. Until recently, I had no mobile phone coverage. The minute I left Esperance I could not communicate with anyone unless I stopped in the nearest town and used a coin phone. Even then I would be lucky to find people at home. While I was in the car I could not contact my constituents. I spend a quarter of a year in unproductive time travelling from A to B, mostly in the electorate. That is necessary to enable me to see people and do the things that city constituents expect to be able to do with precious little effort, as do their members.

I was interested to hear interjections from the member for Roleystone earlier. I recall his predecessor, the Liberal member for Roleystone, one Thursday afternoon at the end of the year when the school concerts and functions were scheduled, looking at his watch and saying that if he got out of here early and had a quick shower he could attend three school functions that night. Even in his outer-metropolitan electorate, three schools were close enough to each other to enable him to make an appearance at each school.

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I tried that once in my electorate. Two schools, about 70 kilometres apart, had invited me to their functions. One was scheduled to start before the other, which I thought I could leave promptly, drive fast and arrive at the other school for the second half of its function. The first function dragged on a little so I drove between the two schools at a speed I do not want Hansard to record because it was way above the speed limit. I will never do that again because it put too much pressure on me. I put my life at risk driving very fast to keep faith with the second school, which I was committed to attend at a certain time.

My electorate is not unique; there are many similar electorates. In most cases I can manage to attend one school function a day, unless I am invited to a day-time school function, of which one or two are held each year. Sometimes two or three functions are held on the same night and so some must miss out. In the past, on checking my chart to ensure the same school is not missed out consistently, I have found that the schools that held their functions on the same night were up to 550 kilometres apart. Schools in the towns of Condingup, which is about 60 or 70 kilometres east of Esperance, and Kulin, about 500 kilometres away, might want me to attend a function on the same night. I am not complaining about any of this. However, members must consider some of the practicalities of servicing an electorate, such as providing constituents with fair and reasonable access to a local member. Members should not look just at the so-called mathematical fairness on which the one vote, one value philosophy seems to be based.

I will not go into the issue of political advantage or disadvantage that anyone might suffer with the introduction of this policy. That has been covered by other members. The only thing I will say from a party political point of view is that some people, particularly those on the Labor Party side, have said that members like me are only concerned about our own situation or that our party will somehow miss out if the proposed electoral redistribution creates bigger country electorates. Of course, if there are fewer seats, fewer people will be able to win those seats. If one party misses out in the whole scheme of things, that party will have diminished country representation in this place. That is not the issue that concerns me personally. I have been a member of Parliament for twelve and a half years and there is another three and a half years before the next election. If this is all brought into play and an electorate like mine is made significantly larger or is swallowed up by a neighbouring electorate, the member must make a personal decision on whether to stand for the new electorate or to retire. By the next election, I will have served as a member of Parliament for 16 years. My future time in this place will be neither here nor there. If I were re-elected for another four years, that would probably be the extent of my career as a member of Parliament. I have not yet made that decision.

My concern is not about me and it is definitely not just about the National Party. Regardless of who wins the new seat or other country seats up the road a bit that might be held by a political party different from mine, right now my concern is that those electorates and the people within them will be disadvantaged far more than they are now. Compared with most city electorates, country people have far less access to their political representative, despite vote weighting and factors that were put in place to try to compensate for some of those disadvantages.

Other members have spoken about the fallacy of modern communications. Yes, they are wonderful things, but they are not the answer to everything. Most people recognise after playing with them for a little while that they are great while they work, but an absolute pain and waste of time when they do not. They are not available to everybody. In any case, people still want personal contact. That is not readily available in country areas at the moment, and it will be less readily available with these larger electorates. My primary concern is not for the political party or for me personally, but for the people of rural and regional Western Australia, whether they live in Kununurra or Esperance, or are represented by the ALP, the Liberal Party, Greens (WA) or One Nation. I do not care. The fact is that their representation will be diminished and they will have less access to their member. Collectively, their voice in the Parliament will be just a whisper compared with people in the city. Despite the best will in the world, city members will find that numbers have a big influence on decisions about how resources are to be shared between competing interests in various parts of the State and electorates. In this case, numbers will be grossly weighted in favour of the city. With the best will in the world, that cannot be totally negated, despite the rhetoric from the Government. Country representatives have always had to fight just that little bit harder to get a fair share of resources. You, Mr Speaker, as a country member, know that the things you and I have lobbied our respective Governments and ministers for over the years are the sorts of things most city members would never dream of having to deal with. We have had to lobby for basic services, such as a water pipeline to provide drinking water for people in towns. Members should forget the sheep and cattle that people keep throwing up as the reason for wanting different representation. I am talking about the human beings. Basic services include a decent water supply, or any water supply, and equitable access to electricity. In the country, people do not pay the standard connection fee that city people pay. Some country people have been getting quotes from Western Power of \$10 000 to \$25 000, just to connect to the system. Then, if they want to start a small business that uses more than 300 000 units of electricity, they must pay 34c a unit for the privilege, in the

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area where I live. Those are the things that city people and city members would never have to face. City members' constituents expect - and rightly so - that the local road system will be in good condition, and if it is not, it will be fixed very quickly. They expect the public transport system to work in their best interests, and I have no argument with that. I applaud the previous Labor Government for building the northern suburbs rail line, which was a very good initiative. That is a subsidised service for the people who use it. I have no problem with that, but most people outside of the metropolitan area contribute in some way to the cost of running the service and receive no benefit from it. They have no access to a similar public transport system, subsidised or unsubsidised, when they need to visit their doctor or their local member of Parliament. The differences between country and city in those very basic areas make it essential that the country voice is heard strongly in this Parliament. It must be heard not just from one or two very loud voiced people, but from sufficient numbers to carry home the message strongly to whichever Government is in power at the time, to ensure a reasonable chance of achieving equality. We all talk about equality as a fine principle in this place, but in practice it does not always occur as easily as one would expect, given that level of agreement. All country members must fight just that much harder to get basic services and facilities for our constituents.

The list of issues that a country member like me deals with daily is quite extensive. I have stressed sufficiently the size of my electorate, which is 500 kilometres long by about 150 kilometres deep. When I get to the extreme western end of it, I am still about 350 kilometres from Perth, which is another four hours drive if I am not speeding. The diverse range of industries and issues that arise in that area, apart from the simple things like basic services that I just talked about, is quite exciting for me, because they are the things that make my job so interesting. The fishing industry at Bremer Bay, which is part of my electorate, has been through some bad times. It was based mainly on the pilchard fishery, and two or three years back a disease went through them and the pilchards died in the millions. The industry there was shut down for a time. Now a new abalone farming industry is starting up to replace it. Three farms have either started or are about to start. At the other extreme, major new mines are being established in the Ravensthorpe area, and they will operate for more than 20 years. Just one of three new mines in that area will provide 1 200 new jobs in the start-up phase, and 250 to 300 permanent jobs. Two of the mines are already in operation, and the third and largest will commence operation within the next 12 months. There is major marine activity at Esperance, where a major research project has just been funded. A marine institute is being established there. Mineral finds have been made at that end of the electorate as well. This is not to mention all of the agricultural activities in the area, as well as fantastic opportunities for tourism. All of these things have issues surrounding them that need intervention or lobbying by the local member of Parliament.

Those issues are on top of the day-to-day constituency issues or bread and butter issues, if I may put it in those terms, that all members in this place understand so well. It is fallacious to say that this issue is about equal numbers of people. So many other factors make for fairness, which is the primary concern of representation in this place. The issue includes equality of access to everything, from basic services to people's local member of Parliament, which must also be taken into account when looking at the break-up of electorates in Western Australia.

The previous system that was supposed to be used by the electoral commissioners talked about community of interest, demographic change and other issues. As the member for Merredin said, they were mostly put to one side. They were put in place initially because of the very matters I have outlined. In my electorate at the moment there is very little community of interest between the east and west ends. Most of the population centres are at one end or the other; there are not that many in the middle. The people at the western end of my electorate do not regard themselves as being attached to or having any affinity with Esperance. It is not their service centre for business, where they ship out their primary products, go for banking or send their kids to boarding school. Depending on whether people are in the north west or south west corner of my electorate, people have an affinity with Albany and its surrounding service centres, Perth or, on a more localised regional centre basis, places such as Katanning. One of the maps I saw showed what would possibly happen to the electorate of Roe if it was added to. It showed that the electorate would be extended further west by possibly 70 or 80 kilometres, and would take in about five or six extra shires, some of which would have more community of interest and affinity with places like Bunbury than with Albany or Perth.

Community of interest sounds great. One must be practical about the size of electorates and how small we make them numerically in order to ensure that community of interest is truly met. In an example such as the electorate of Roe as it is at present, and particularly with the proposition to add several more shires to the western end, community of interest means absolutely nothing. There is a need to restrict that exponential growth of electorates under the one vote, one value principle. If we take the example of what could happen in an electorate like Roe, we could have one member of Parliament representing a number of dispersed groups of people. Three geographically dispersed groups of people could approach the local member. One could say that it wants one

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thing for its area and another that it wants another thing for its area, and so on. Those requests may be in direct competition. It is very difficult to represent people who are telling a member three different things for three different reasons. It is a fine line, because members try to represent the wishes of the people. One group in an electorate may say that it wants a road from here to there, and another group may say that it does not want the road there because it will take tourists away from them. Those problems will only get worse the bigger electorates get. It is extremely difficult to truly represent all the people in an electorate in that situation. In some of the larger city electorates, at a local level there are probably some differences of opinion about such issues, but these views can be quite extreme. An issue can be as large as whether the Government should be allowing a port authority to spend millions of dollars on upgrading its facilities, because the ports of Albany and Esperance may both be competing for the same grain coming from the middle of my electorate.

A decision to upgrade a port at one end of the electorate would result in an increase of costs for people who still need to use the other port. They suffer because the throughput of the port is shifted to the other end of the electorate, but the fixed costs are still in place and must be shared among fewer tonnes of produce. Those are the competing points of view that seriously impact on some people's lives and businesses. Members must juggle those competing interests over a large area. My electorate is 500 kilometres in length, which is manageable, but I suspect it will become less so as it increases in size under the one vote, one value system proposed by the Minister for Electoral Affairs. The proposed system will only exacerbate the problems faced by electorates in which the population growth is less than that of the metropolitan area and which would be weighted above the quota.

I reiterate that my opposition to this Bill is not based on personal benefit, nor is it because I want to defend the position of my party. That is not my primary objective. I believe it is imperative that country people, whether they are major wealth producers, pensioners or the unemployed, have fair and reasonable access to not only their local member but also the services that other people in this State take for granted. Until those services are provided equally across the State, vote weighting in this Parliament is necessary to ensure that the legitimate desires and aspirations of those people are met. At the moment, only some requirements are met, despite the big effort of country members, no matter what their political backgrounds, in arguing the cases of their constituents. That will be much harder to do, and there will be far less equality in the provision of services, if the electoral system is changed.

**MR SWEETMAN** (Ningaloo) [10.26 pm]: I begin by referring to a quotation. It was made not by an ancient historian or philosopher, but by Piers Ackerman on Sunday morning - I am not sure of the television program. He said that politicians are disconnected from the real things that affect average people. That is profound. It goes to the heart of what we are talking about with electoral reform. Although electoral reform is a philosophical absolute of the Labor Party - we have heard the word principle mentioned tonight - it is, in reality, disfranchisement. That might sound strange, because when I initially looked at the proposed boundaries and electorate sizes, I thought I must have curried some favour with the Labor Party, as I will represent just 12 475 people. However, when I looked closely, I discovered that I must cover 56 per cent of Western Australia to service their needs. I would not have a problem with the member for Wanneroo's electorate. In fact, I would enjoy a seat with 36 000 or 38 000 constituents. I think I could connect with the real issues affecting those people on a day-to-day basis far better than I could with the issues affecting the people in that larger region.

The Premier said that we are arguing from the point of self-interest. I declare that I will not seek endorsement for the new seat of Gascoyne, which will replace my electorate of Ningaloo. Instead, I will either try to win one of the seven or eight new metropolitan seats or retire from Parliament and get a life. I do not want to be misunderstood in the way I start my -

Mr Kucera: Are you going backpacking when you retire?

Mr SWEETMAN: I will catch up with a lot of the doctors. I will try to encourage them to come back and fulfil their obligations to the State and the people who are ill in Western Australia. I do not want some of my remarks to be misunderstood. The Labor Party claimed to have a mandate to introduce electoral reform with one vote, one value. If I isolate my comments to the Mining and Pastoral Region, there is a prima facie case from the figures for the Legislative Council, and one could say that there is some justification for having a look at rejigging the boundaries in my electorate.. The Mining and Pastoral Region received barely 26 per cent of the vote, and I think Labor's vote was just in excess of 40 per cent. Even though the vote varied from electorate to electorate, the Legislative Council vote in the seat of Pilbara was very low at 19 per cent, it was 30 per cent in Ningaloo, 20 per cent in the Kimberley, 34 per cent in Kalgoorlie, 29 per cent in Burrup and 25 per cent in Eyre. One might say that that is justification for the people of Western Australia endorsing the concept of one vote, one value.

Mr Mike Board; Acting Speaker; Mr Terry Waldron; Mr Jeremy Edwards; Mrs Cheryl Edwardes; Mr Hendy Cowan; Mr Paul Omodei; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Ross Ainsworth; Mr Rod Sweetman; Speaker

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I want to refer to something the Minister for Electoral Affairs said about not going to a referendum over this issue. He said 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 the broader issues involved in our processes. I am not certain what he was getting at, but I think he was saying that people cannot make decisions when there are a whole lot of decisions on the radar. We went to the polls in those circumstances; even prior to the campaign starting there were many issues right across the State. Promises were made in my area that have not been fulfilled and I believe some of them will never be fulfilled; there were issues about the goods and services tax, and about high fuel prices. This Government promised to bridge the gap. It has not even started, regardless of what it thinks it has done.

Mr Bradshaw: The gap has got wider.

Mr SWEETMAN: It has got worse. When people went to the ballot boxes they were making decisions on a lot of issues, other than electoral reform. If we want to test whether or not people in Western Australia - country and city - are supportive of one vote, one value, we need to go to a referendum. The Government simply cannot say that it has a mandate because it won the state election. People elected this Government on a range of issues, on some perceived mistakes that we had made and on some priorities of ours that were in question.

My electorate and most of country Western Australia have done exceptionally well. I can backtrack to my time in local government in 1984 when the Labor Party had been in office a little over 12 months. I can recall negotiating with various ministers of the day trying to win some favours on pet projects for Carnarvon and the region in general. I was grateful for any small favour that the Government did for our local communities and our region. Regrettably, people today do not seem to be as grateful when Governments do things for them, and the way Oppositions campaign has something to do with that. The Government will spend \$1 million and the Opposition will say, "Well, they were mean-fisted; we would have spent \$1.5 million." That is the spin put on various issues. It is not statesmanlike, it is not becoming of politicians, to go out and distort, to knock and to create an illusion that people are badly off. I said to the people in my electorate and to others in country Western Australia that we should not overplay our hand. Everywhere I went, I heard people say that they had never had it worse. A lot of people were adjusting to problems caused by poor commodity prices and change that we had to have, regardless of which party was in government. People were irritable. The then Opposition was able to play on that irritability. It is sad. Already, there are a lot of people who regret the way they voted. That is certain. As the implications of one vote, one value become more obvious to the State, the city will not be grateful for having extra politicians bestowed on them. That is irrespective of whatever high principle the Labor Party thinks is being honoured by creating extra representation in the city.

I try to educate and inform my electorate, to take them along and have them take me into their trust. Those are the things that I got into this job to do. We should nurture, lead, inspire and confront on the occasions when we need to. We must be truthful on all occasions. It is good that members can be pulled up in Parliament and made to retract statements and comments like "liar" and "hypocrite". There is accountability; it is a good thing. That accountability does not appear to extend to some members of Parliament when they leave this House. Some people are hoodwinked by barefaced lies. It perverts people's sense of values. There is a lot of regret in many areas of country Western Australia as the full implications of the February election result are manifested. I do not know what all the implications of one vote, one value will be in electoral terms for this Government. The Government will have other issues that will alienate and irritate the electorate as much as this issue. It is early in the Government's life. It will be interesting to see whether people maintain their rage.

Mr Marlborough: I have been listening carefully to the member for the past six minutes. Having listened to the member I can see why he came within one vote of beating the member for Cottesloe for the leadership of the Liberal Party.

Mr SWEETMAN: That is about as good as the member's contributions get. Some of the biggest black marks against this Parliament have originated with the member. The member is always stirring the pot.

Mr Marlborough: You have only got one vote to go and you will get the numbers.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Ningaloo does not want the interjections of the member for Peel. I request the member to desist.

Mr SWEETMAN: Notwithstanding some of the distortions and illusions created in country Western Australia that the previous Government was mean-fisted, devious and depriving country people of their inheritance, let me tell the House of how some members of the then Opposition performed when people were at their lowest point.

Mr Marlborough interjected.

The SPEAKER: I call the member for Peel to order for the first time.

**Extract from *Hansard***

[ASSEMBLY - Wednesday, 22 August 2001]

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Mr Mike Board; Acting Speaker; Mr Terry Waldron; Mr Jeremy Edwards; Mrs Cheryl Edwardes; Mr Hendy Cowan; Mr Paul Omodei; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Ross Ainsworth; Mr Rod Sweetman; Speaker

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Mr SWEETMAN: Well done, Mr Speaker. In my first four years as a member, my electorate suffered three natural disasters. There were floods in the Ashburton area, cyclone Vance and flooding in Carnarvon associated with cyclone Steve. If there had been one more disaster I would not have voted for myself. I would have got the point. It is interesting to see the difference because, as a local member of Parliament, one cannot look to the left or the right when there are people that need one's help and who are in extreme difficulty. I believe the former coalition Government can hold its head high for the way it helped people out of their problems, whether it be the Ashburton floods, cyclone Vance or the Carnarvon floods.

I found it interesting that whenever the then opposition members of Parliament came into an area in which I was trying to help people cope with their problems, they were never helpful. All they ever did was tell people that the Government was mean and should do more, and they just preyed on people's trauma. I have written a couple of letters to members opposite recently, because I am still trying to deal with some of the aftermath of the difficult situations that they created, in which people were mentally traumatised. Quite apart from the difficulty that people were facing in having to recover their business or clean up their house, or whatever, so that they could get on with their life, Labor members of Parliament were saying, "What the Government has done is disgraceful. If we were in power, we would do this and we would do that."

We have had a serious incident in Carnarvon in which someone has clung to promises that were made by Labor members of Parliament when in opposition - promises that they could not honour then and had no intention of honouring if and when they ever came to power. The Department of Agriculture is now having to grapple with that, and it is trying to honour requests that ministers are making in trying to cope with the extreme traumatising that has been caused by members of the then Opposition. Those members went into that area and, instead of being responsible members of Parliament and lending a hand, they got in there and picked the scab off the sore. That is not appropriate.

I got into this job to help people. I want to appeal to the best in people so that we may be able to take them to the next level in life and encourage and nurture the innate goodness in everyone. It seems to me that we will never be any good as an Opposition if we campaign in the same way that members opposite campaigned when they were in opposition, because there was no level to which they would not stoop. We will not do that. It is unconscionable, and members opposite will have to live with that.

Debate adjourned, on motion by Mr Kobelke (Leader of the House).

*House adjourned at 10.42 pm*

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