




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

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ELECTORAL (REDISTRIBUTION COMMISSION) AND ANOTHER ACT AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr SEENEY** (Callide—LNP) (10.47 pm): I rise in this debate to lend my support to the bill that has been introduced by the member for Mansfield and I congratulate him on the bill that he has brought before the House. I also congratulate a range of speakers on this side of the House who have made impressive contributions to a debate tonight, particularly the Leader of the Opposition; the member for Hinchinbrook; the member for Mount Isa, who of course made a very impassioned speech; the member for Warrego and a whole range of other members. I do not mean to upset anybody by exclusion. But a whole range of members on this side of the House have made very creditable speeches from different perspectives, the different perspectives that are offered from each of their electorates.

In stark contrast, the speeches that have been offered by government members have all had a single theme. They have all been motivated by the bitterness of the past. They have all repeated ad infinitum the Labor creed or the Labor myth that has become their creed, that somehow or other the bill that has been introduced by the member for Mansfield is going to recreate a situation that they found repugnant back in the late 1980s. Leaving aside whatever existed in 1980, there is no way that anybody with an ounce of intellectual nous could suggest that the bill that has been introduced by the member for Mansfield can recreate that situation.

What really riles the Labor members in this debate tonight—the single issue that has been the central part of every one of the contributions that has been made—is their philosophical objection to the concept of weightage. The concept of weightage, as the member for Hinchinbrook quite correctly pointed out, was a product of the EARC process. It was agreed to in a bipartisan way by Wayne Goss and Russell Cooper and it was put in place in 1991. That concept of weightage remains the same in the bill that the member for Mansfield has introduced. He is proposing a slight variation to the quantum of the weightage but no variation at all to the principle or the philosophy of the weightage. Yet the members over there tonight have repeated over and over again, one after the other, some sort of a nonsense that varying the quantum of the weightage is somehow going to recreate a situation that existed before there was any weightage at all in the electoral system. As the member for Hinchinbrook quite correctly said, these people over there wear the cloak of Fitzgerald to their advantage. They parade around in the cloak of Fitzgerald and all of the things that he recommended all the time as though it were Holy Writ—except when it does not suit them.

The EARC recommendations were part of the Fitzgerald outcomes. The seven-year review that the member for Hinchinbrook spoke about was part of the EARC outcomes. Yet the government members seek to ignore all of that tonight. They seek to ignore all of that for a cheap political slogan, for some cheap political points about not having more politicians. Can I say to you, Madam Deputy Speaker Grace, that from my perspective this bill should not be about the number of politicians; it should be about the number of constituents. This bill should be about the constituents who we all represent. In considering how we are going to vote on this bill, we should all ask ourselves these questions. How

many constituents can we realistically represent? What is the maximum number that any one of us can represent, irrespective of where we live? Is it 30,000? Is it 35,000? Is it 40,000? Is it 45,000? Is it 50,000? Is it 60,000? Is it 70,000? Of course sooner or later there has to be a limit.

Unless we have the courage to address the real issues that are involved in electoral redistributions, then the number of constituents that we all represent is going to continue to grow. The task of representing that number will be different, depending on where the particular electorates are. EARC recognised that and they introduced the principle of weightage in recognition of the fact that the task would be different. Even with the current quantum of weightage that is included in the electoral system in Queensland and that has been there since 1991, the task of representing our constituents varies enormously depending on our electorate. It does not fully compensate for the difference in the work that is required or the processes that are required to properly represent those constituents.

But the fact remains—and this issue has not been addressed by a single speaker on the other side of the House—that sooner or later the number of politicians in this House has to increase, not because we want more politicians but because the people who we represent deserve to be represented by more politicians. The people who we represent deserve to be able to have access to their local member and to be properly represented in this place. The arguments that have been put forward about technology and resources are complete and utter nonsense. I challenge any member in this place to go out into their electorate or any electorate in Queensland and ask someone, ‘Would you be happy to get an email from your local MP? Do you want an email or do you want to see them?’ Of course there is only one answer to that question. The people we represent want to see us, they want to get to know us, they want to talk to us—and they deserve that.

With the government tonight retreating to some sort of Labor historical nonsense, it is almost like a chant for some of the members opposite. It is almost like a mindless religious chant that they do not understand; they are not trying to look at the issues that are involved in the bill that has been introduced by the member for Mansfield. In doing so, they are denying the people they represent the proper representation that they deserve in this House.

In the short time I have left, I want to make some comments about my electorate, as different members have done, because I think it is important that the House understands the different challenges. Mine is not one of the big five; it is not one of the geographically large electorates, but it is a very diverse electorate. I have 25 towns in my electorate, 64 schools and 18 local shows that I attend every year. It is a challenge that is different to the challenge that is faced by the member for Warrego, the member for Gregory and the member for Mount Isa. It is different to the challenge that is faced by the member for Surfers Paradise or the member for Mermaid Beach, but it is a challenge nonetheless. That challenge will continue to get greater and greater and greater as the size of the electorate increases and as the number of constituents increases for whoever represents that great belt of Queensland between the outback and the coast.

This bill deserves a better consideration than what the Labor Party government have given it in this place tonight. This bill should not be an opportunity for Labor Party members to regurgitate Labor Party bile. This bill should be an opportunity for some level heads to think about the future of Queensland, some level heads to think about the future of this parliament and some level heads to think about the welfare of the people we all represent wherever they live. Those people deserve proper representation in this place. Until all of us have the political courage to address the issues that are contained in the bill, the prospect those people face is less and less access to their local member and less and less representation in the Queensland parliament.