

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
By email: em@aph.gov.au

13 July 2020

To the Committee Secretary,

Submission regarding the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Ensuring Fair Representation of the Northern Territory) Bill 2020

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the opportunity to write in support of the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Ensuring Fair Representation of the Northern Territory) Bill 2020.

Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation. In the Northern Territory, we work with some of the most disadvantaged people and communities, through partnerships with local Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and communities and the delivery of youth justice programs in the Top End and Central Australia. This includes work in the metropolitan areas of Darwin and Palmerston, the urban centre of Alice Springs, the regional centres of Katherine and Tennant Creek, and the remote communities of Santa Teresa, Atitjere and Engawala in Central Australia, and Wadeye in the Top End.

Our work in the Territory reinforces every day the size, diversity and unique demographics of this jurisdiction. It is extremely difficult to imagine how the Territory would be appropriately or fairly represented by a single MP.

The young people and communities we work with are extremely diverse in terms of culture and language, reflecting the fact that almost one third of the population is Aboriginal, and with more than 100 Aboriginal languages spoken, it is one of the most linguistically diverse areas in the world. Moreover, the size of the Territory – Australia’s third largest jurisdiction, six times the size of Victoria and almost double the size of New South Wales, with 40 per cent of population living in remote and very remote areas (and 80 per cent of Aboriginal people living in remote and very remote areas), means that covering these distances to appropriately serve and represent communities would be extremely challenging, if not impossible, for a single MP.

The needs and interests of communities within the Division of Solomon – largely the metropolitan areas of Darwin and Palmerston, with Aboriginal people making up 8.5 per cent of the population – are vastly different to those of communities within the Division of Lingiari – a division covering 1.3 million square kilometres, all remote and very remote communities in the Territory and home to the largest Aboriginal population in Australia (40 per cent).

If the Territory became a single seat, it would be the most underrepresented jurisdiction in Australia – with just one MP representing nearly 250,000 Territorians.

In the context of the recent national renewed commitment to the Closing the Gap and pursuit of voice, treaty and truth, it must also be emphasised that this would mean that the jurisdiction home to the greatest number of First Nations people is the most underrepresented jurisdiction in Australia. Reducing Federal electoral representation in the Territory would directly reduce the electoral power of Indigenous Australians, particularly those living in remote and very remote parts of our country.

Lastly, we note that by 2021, the Northern Territory Department of Treasury and Finance's projected population statistics predict the Territory's population will reach 251,727 – meaning it will meet the threshold of eligibility for two seats. This bill will guarantee that fair representation for the Territory is not at the mercy of population fluctuations and census statistics.

The Territory needs fair representation. Jesuit Social Services strongly supports the proposal to amend the Commonwealth Electoral Act to guarantee that the Northern Territory will continue to be represented by two upper house Members of Parliament.

Please contact John Adams, General Manager Northern Territory at john.adams@jss.org.au or on (08) 8952 4616 for any questions relating to this submission.

Yours sincerely,



Sally Parnell
Acting CEO, Jesuit Social Services