

Expert Reference Group on the Size of the Assembly
C/- Elections ACT
CIVIC SQUARE ACT 2608

Email: SizeOfAssemblyInquiry@act.gov.au

Dear Expert Reference Group

**ISCCC Submission to the Review into the Size of the ACT Legislative
Assembly**

The Inner South Community Council (ISCCC) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Review. An appropriately sized and apportioned Assembly is an important requirement for good governance in the ACT.

The ISCCC supports an increase in the size of the ACT Legislative Assembly. We believe that there is overwhelming evidence that the current number of 17 members is wholly inadequate for the effective running of the Territory. It is not our intention to revisit those arguments, which are well documented in the Discussion Paper and in other submissions provided to the Review.

From the perspective of the ISCCC and, we expect, other community councils, a key objective is the expansion of the Assembly and an electorate structure that allows effective parliamentary representation of the various local communities in Canberra.

Community of interest

The area served by the ISCCC lies wholly within the 7 member electorate of Molonglo. This very unwieldy electorate currently extends from Gungahlin to Weston Creek and the northern suburbs of Woden, and incorporates the inner north and inner south, and other areas to the north and east of Canberra including Oaks Estate.

It is simply beyond the capacity of even the most diligent and astute MLA to understand and effectively prosecute the huge variety of local issues and concerns that inevitably arise in an electorate of this size and complexity. Despite the best endeavours of our local representatives, most issues of concern to the ISCCC and the residents of inner south Canberra are simply not being tackled on our behalf by our MLAs.

The key policy issues of concern to the ISCCC include quality planning and development, safeguarding our heritage, protecting urban open space, transport, heritage, environmental, economic and social resilience and sustainability, and provision of high quality transport networks and community infrastructure. Our objectives are in many cases neither relevant to nor consistent with those of community councils representing other parts of Canberra, especially the new developing outer suburbs. Policy solutions appropriate to the latter may not suit the needs of the inner south, which is faced with issues such as ageing infrastructure, preservation of the heritage of older and historically significant suburbs and streetscapes, and inappropriate urban redevelopment.

An expanded Assembly would provide the opportunity for small electorates both in terms of number of population and size that would allow the interests of the various Canberra communities to be better understood and prosecuted by our elected representatives. From our perspective an Assembly of 25 members rather than 21, if they are the most realistic options, is preferred by the ISCCC. This would enable 5 electorates of 5 members. While the population of the inner south is likely insufficient to afford it an electorate in which it is the major focus, the electorate would be small enough to ensure that it includes adjacent suburbs, which share similar, if not identical, interests and aspirations. In this regard, an electorate focusing on the inner south and inner north would be our preferred option.

Insufficient Backbench Representation

Four of the 7 Molonglo MLAs are currently Ministers in the ACT Government and due to their workloads and the principle of Cabinet solidarity they are for most purposes unable to engage effectively and flexibly with the community on local issues. At the present time there are no backbench MLAs from the two government parties in the Molonglo electorate which means that, in dealing with government MLAs, we are dealing in relation to many issues with the decision-making Ministers who simply do not have the capacity to seek fresh approaches. This is no reflection on the desire of Ministers to carry forward the concerns of their constituents but, as members of the Government, they are effectively constrained from playing the advocacy role that might be adopted by backbench MLAs, free from the responsibilities and collective responsibilities of Cabinet members.

MLA engagement

As indicated at the start of this submission, the ISCCC accepts as given the proposition that there should be an increase in the size of the Assembly. The current system is failing us in that MLAs currently do not have the time or capacity to engage with the community effectively. This is not a reflection on the ability or work ethic of our members. Rather, it is one outcome of the city-state structure of the ACT which means we have no system of local council arrangements universally enjoyed elsewhere in Australia. The significant Assembly state-type responsibilities of education, health, justice, and so on consume the lion's share of the Assembly's time and local issues inevitably get short shrift. An expanded Assembly would ameliorate while not totally addressing this shortcoming.

Should you have any questions about our submission please do not hesitate to contact me on info@isccc.org.au or 6260 7343.

Yours sincerely

Gary Kent
Chair
Inner South Canberra Community Council

3 March 2013