

Redistribution of ACT Electoral Boundaries.

Submission by Gungahlin Community Council

Why Gungahlin Needs Its Own Electorate.

Gungahlin, as part of the largest electorate (Molonglo), currently shares its electoral representation with a significant number of older north and central Canberra suburbs, many parts of which are now undergoing change and re-development. As established developed areas they have access to or are close to a full range of entertainment, employment, recreation and service amenities and facilities. Gungahlin does not! Many of the older suburbs in the largest electorate are experiencing redevelopment issues. Gungahlin has not reached that stage yet, with a small number of earlier suburbs attaining the 22 year mark and over one third of the total number in the region still under development.

Gungahlin remains one of the prime growth areas in the ACT.

- It has a broad and growing range of residents from different ethnic backgrounds.
- It has significant numbers of pre-school, youth and younger children – there are 18 separate school entities in the district.
- It has a large number of young families as well as a growing proportion of older people.
- At least five suburbs are still under development, another two are at or nearing commencement stage.
- There is little employment in the Town Centre, with only one small government office block now under construction.
- There are no cinemas or entertainment facilities for youth in the district as yet (with plans for a cinema complex apparently in limbo).
- Critical roads are earmarked for duplication to handle the expected growth of the local population (but project funding has not been provided).

Gungahlin Town Centre development has for many years seemed to progress slowly. GCC and the Gungahlin community generally see commencement of project work and eventual project completion after typical periods of waiting extending to 5-10 years. This does not seem to be the case for developments in the airport precinct, Tuggeranong, Civic and Belconnen which take much shorter timeframes to go through a similar process. A stronger local political focus should strengthen commitments to complete projects in a faster timeframe. Non-resident elected representatives do not experience these 'growing pains' or local problems/issues like local residents do.

- The Leisure Centre took at least 5 years and several iterations before a satisfactory solution was reached. A cinema complex has been on the wish list for even longer, without any firm indications of design, commencement or progress.

GCC has identified local employment opportunities as a key requirement to stimulate additional commercial development in the Town Centre. The building of an office block to house about 650 ACT public servants will improve matters but at least one more office block of a similar or larger size is essential to foster broader commercial development. However the relative lack of daytime clientele in local commercial precincts currently hinders consideration of additional commercial developments by the private sector and an outdated master plan for the Town Centre does little to remedy the situation.

Currently focus is placed on the need to 'export' Gungahlin residents outside the district to service the bulk of their employment, entertainment, shopping and lifestyle needs. A recent survey of Gungahlin residents revealed that over 85% used private vehicles to travel to work outside the area.

The recent government stimulus plans will result in an earlier start to the development of more residential sites resulting in a significantly increased population base without the full range of services and facilities needed by a satellite region (that should ideally be largely self-sustaining). Gungahlin should not be classed as a dormitory region. The lack of local elected representation is necessary to raise the profile of the need to provide more amenities and services in the region.

GCC believes that:

- Electoral boundaries need to be reconfigured to reflect current needs of Gungahlin residents and the continuing rapid growth. (The current Electorate footprint, being a combination of Gungahlin with areas of the Inner South and Weston Creek, is not considered to reflect the interests of Gungahlin residents.)
- The option for an expanded Legislative Assembly comprising five electorates provides an opportunity to create one electorate which includes the whole Gungahlin region - encompassing a discrete critical mass of population with a common set of needs and interests.

The GCC prefers a model whereby Gungahlin residents are specifically represented by their own set of additional MLAs. GCC notes that not one 'true local' candidate was elected in the 2012 round. Residents can therefore feel somewhat disenfranchised with that result!

Electorate modelling software indicates that five electorates of five MLAs each (with quotas of approximately 11,000 electors) can be easily achieved. These electorates can align closely to established communities of interest: Belconnen, Inner North and Central Canberra, Gungahlin, Weston/Woden, and Tuggeranong. An added advantage is that each likely new electorate would be geographically defined, thus giving elected members far better opportunity to closely engage with the community they represent.

GCC seeks a solution that aligns communities of interest as closely as possible, while recognising the impact of growth in the region over the next 8 years. This allows for a

temporary, largely local solution ('borrowing' nearby suburbs from Belconnen) until Gungahlin growth reaches levels sufficient to reach the desired quota.

GCC supports criterion regarding electoral boundaries being weighted in favour of community interests, including economic, social and regional interests, means of communication and travel, and physical features and area-specific needs.

Gungahlin, as a rapidly growing 'newish' area, is currently split between two electorates with a range of community interests represented by both older and new communities at critical points in their respective development.

The 'older' areas of Gungahlin suffered for many years from lack of essential amenities, including lack of adequate telecommunications (broadband), adequate road access, commercial facilities and employment opportunities. The rapidly expanding newer areas of Gungahlin are also experiencing the ramifications of 'catch-up' planning and provision of facilities and amenities commensurate with the needs of the growing population. Most of Gungahlin is faced with 'growth pains' – some residential, some amenities/services related and most transport related.

It is difficult to find broad or multiple synergies between the needs of the Gungahlin, Inner North, Central Canberra and South Canberra constituents of the Molonglo electorate.

GCC notes that the growth in Gungahlin has been accompanied by increasing reliance on connections between Gungahlin and Belconnen as many Gungahlin residents have had to make use of schools, medical facilities, employment opportunities, shopping and commercial areas in the adjacent district of Belconnen. Naturally Gungahlin would prefer to have its own complete suite of services and amenities commensurate with the current and growing population.

The Opportunity for a New Electorate Model

Most Gungahlin residents support the move from a very broad electorate to a more localised area electorate (combining Gungahlin and proximate suburbs of Belconnen in the one electorate) as it would create a region with vastly more synergies with many Gungahlin and Belconnen residents. The prospect of maintaining an electorate including residents of Central Canberra, South Canberra and Weston Creek has little or no relevance as residents of these three areas have needs and interests far removed from many of those affecting Gungahlin residents.

At present the Gungahlin district by itself is not large enough to create a 5-Member electorate in its own right, thus 'making it necessary' to include other adjacent areas (preferably parts of Belconnen) to make up the numbers to bring the electorate to within +/- 5% of the quota at the time of next election.

The preferred approach of GCC is to include the suburbs of Giralang, Kaleen McKellar and Evatt as the other Belconnen suburbs which could be combined with the Gungahlin to constitute a new 5-Member electorate.

The Turner Residents Association stated “that the suburbs of Turner, O’Connor and Lyneham should NOT be part of a larger Ginninderra electorate as Turner, O’Connor and Lyneham have much stronger links with central Canberra than with the newer suburbs to the north and should remain within the electorate of Molonglo.”

The GCC is concerned about the ‘requirement’ to comply too rigidly with variance limits to electorate quotas. As at 31 March 2011 the electorate of Molonglo was 2.7% over quota and Ginninderra was 0.6% below quota.

The Gungahlin area continues to grow at a significant rate. The suburbs of Bonner, Casey, Crace, Forde, Franklin, Gungahlin and Harrison had projected growth rates of enrolled persons in excess of 10% up to October 2012. In Belconnen the suburbs of Belconnen Town Centre, Bruce, Dunlop and Macgregor had growth projections over 10%. Only Braddon, City and Phillip in the Molonglo electorate had growth rates (from a reasonable base) over 10%.

Residents of Gungahlin feel that they have, and continue to, suffered from ‘catch-up’ remedial action in relation to many services facilities, services and amenities that they require. More growth is inevitable in Gungahlin as the new suburbs of Moncrieff, Throsby, Jacka, Taylor and Kenny are developed and populated.

There is a need to apply pro-active policies in addressing the needs of residents in growing areas in the ACT. Gungahlin suburbs will continue to grow well after the close-off date for electorate numbers and a significant surplus situation could well occur within a short time afterwards, again placing the residents of that electorate at a representational disadvantage (under current terminology). Net growth in Gungahlin and Belconnen should significantly surpass that in Central and South Canberra so there is a need to anticipate this process in the planning for future electoral distributions in order to avoid significant disruption to residents in ‘fringe’ areas.

Gungahlin residents, in particular, would prefer to see evidence of forward planning in relation to many of the issues they currently face. An electorate model that recognises the ramifications of rapid growth and an appropriate level of representation (both in terms of numbers of politicians and regional focus) should meet with a high degree of satisfaction.

GCC submits that there is merit in adopting a unified approach to resolving the electorate issues facing the key growth areas in the ACT.

However GCC’s prime interest is in gaining specific and appropriate representation for the Gungahlin community and that translates into a discrete electorate (maybe named Gungaderra, Mulanggari or Gungahlin) eventually being established. Furthermore the GCC wants the establishment of local electorate offices or a shared office for the Gungahlin electorate so that residents could develop a closer relationship with their respective elected members of the Legislative Assembly.

Electoral Boundaries

GCC has a preference for the boundaries for the five electorates being based primarily on geographic boundaries.

We prefer to avoid splitting districts but note the approach taken to the “one vote, one value” provisions in the Electoral Act, which stipulate that enrolments in each electorate must be within +/-5% of the average at the time of the next election.

GCC acknowledges that if the ACT was divided into 5 equal sized electorates it would be inevitable that at least the districts of Belconnen and Tuggeranong would have to be split with a number of voters being transferred to adjoining electorates in 2016. This is because these districts each contain more than 1/5 of the ACT’s enrolled population.

GCC clearly wants Gungahlin to be incorporated, as far as possible, into one entity. However Gungahlin has a connection with Belconnen and both districts will grow with the development of Lawson and West Belconnen (Belconnen) as well as the earlier documented suburbs of Gungahlin (Moncrieff, Throsby, Jacka, Taylor and Kenny).

Number of electors in each District

With the prime aim of electoral boundaries conforming as close as possible to geographical boundaries, plus keeping the number of voters in each electorate within quota as a secondary aim, the Gungahlin Community Council supports in principle the establishment of the following five electorates:

1. **Tuggeranong.** *Would have to be split, achieved best by moving Kambah, to provide one electorate of 5 MLAs.*
2. **Woden/Weston Creek Molonglo** – *Woden plus Weston Creek and adding Kambah, which adjoins Weston Creek and Woden, for one electorate of 5 MLAs.*
3. **Belconnen.** *Would have to be split, best achieved by moving voters in the eastern/northern suburbs of Belconnen, adjacent to Gungahlin, into the Gungahlin electorate. This can be achieved by moving Kaleen, Giralang McKellar and Evatt into Gungahlin electorate. All of these suburbs adjoin Gungahlin, so geographically it is as close to “best fit” as can be. This would reduce the remainder of Belconnen to be within quota for one electorate of 5 MLAs.*
4. **Gungahlin.** *Needs another 15500 electors, preferably from Belconnen, to move to Gungahlin. Gungahlin would then be within quota for one electorate of 5 MLAs.*
5. **Inner North and Inner South.** *No change needed to be within quota for one electorate of 5 MLAs.*

Population Data: Gungahlin statistics from the 2011 Census. Population 47,304.

The combined population of the ACT's northern SA3s increased by 6,100 people in the year to 2013, while the southern SA3s grew by 230. The SA3 with the largest growth in the ACT was Gungahlin, increasing by 4,300 people. Outer suburban areas in the smaller capital cities also had some of the strongest growth in their states or territories. In the ACT, the northern fringe suburbs of Bonner (up by 1,200 people), Casey (830) and Harrison (700) had the largest growth.

Franklin and Harrison are experienced significant growth along the Flemington Road corridor with development action now in progress on most sites between Wells Station Drive and the outer limits of the Town Centre. Most of these developments are medium density so population increases will be far higher than stand-alone residential developments.

Significant development is also taking place in Crace, Casey and Ngunnawal with large numbers of stand-alone and multi-tenanted premises being constructed. Additional residential development is now under way in Moncrieff with infrastructure projects for further expansion being brought forward under the ACT Government's economic stimulus measures and the expectations of having to relocate 'Mr Fluffy' housing owners/tenants.

It is therefore most likely that the Gungahlin district will achieve voter numbers in excess of 40,000 by the time of the next election in 2016. This has to be taken into consideration when defining a possible new 5-member electorate to comprise all of Gungahlin plus some nearby suburbs that may 'need to be borrowed' for the next election.

The number of voters in the ACT would reach 279,845 by 2016 thus providing a quota per elected member (based on 25 members) of 11,193. This translates into a voting population per 5-member electorate of 56,000 to align with the mid-point of the quota requirements.

These numbers, factoring in the expected growth rates in the Gungahlin district, would require about 15,500 voters to be 'imported' from nearby areas – far fewer than the number predicted on the basis of 2012 figures. The quota required for Gungahlin could be met by transferring voters from Giralang, Kaleen, Evatt and McKellar. These 4 suburbs are north of a defined 'barrier' – Ginninderra Drive - and closest in proximity to Gungahlin.

GCC offers for consideration names for each of these electorates:

- **Tuggeranong** – retain Brindabella
- **Woden/Weston/Molonglo** – retain Molonglo
- **Belconnen** – retain Ginninderra
- **Gungahlin** – call it Gungaderra (creek, homestead), or Mulanggari.
- **Inner North/Inner South** – name Inner Canberra, or Ngambri

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