

Kelowna Chamber

Submission

**Meeting with the Electoral
Boundaries Commission
Kelowna April 6, 2022**

Growing the people who power the Okanagan.

PRESENTATION TO THE COMMISSIONERS
Made to the Electoral Boundaries Commission
Kelowna, BC, April 6, 2022 - Kelowna Yacht Club

COMMENTS FROM CHAMBER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DAN ROGERS

“We appreciate the opportunity to provide you our thoughts and be part of the periodic process of looking at the electoral boundary issues.

The Kelowna Chamber is the largest chamber of commerce outside the lower mainland/island – we are in our 115th year, have one thousand members, and represent member businesses, not for profits and other community organizations from Peachland to Lake Country. My name is Dan Rogers, Executive Director at the Chamber, today representing the Chamber on behalf of Board Chair Pamela Pearson and the rest of our elected Board.

We appreciate the difficult task you have in finding balance in achieving fair and equitable representation in the Legislature in such a diverse province with ridings that vary significantly in geographic size, population density, climate, and economic conditions – from rural ridings that cover a geographic area the size of many countries to ridings in a highly densified metropolitan area that, for the most part, is concentrated in one very small part of the province.

We believe that most British Columbians value our democratic institutions and principles and the work you do is critical to ensuring continued faith in those institutions.

Those elected to represent us in the Legislature set the public policy agenda and an agenda that must cover all the critical issues that impact the economy in *all regions* of the province.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES, FAIR REPRESENTATION AND THE URBAN RURAL DIVIDE

If our democratic institutions are to continue to have the respect from the citizens engaged in the democratic process, then, fundamentally, everyone needs to feel that their vote counts, that their representative in the Legislature has the opportunity to speak and be heard, and that their issues, whether rural or urban, are taken seriously. In this way representation by distribution is as important as is representation by population.

Our comments are two-fold:

1. Those that note the general principles that we believe the Commission should consider in undertaking its work.
2. And, some specific observations around our growing region and the need for additional representation in the Legislature and potential boundary realignment.

Potential Boundary Realignment – Primary Point

We believe, being in one of the fastest growing regions, not just in the province but in the country, that an additional riding must be added in the Kelowna Central Metropolitan Area/CMA. The current three ridings are already near the largest, population-wise, in the province and with accelerated growth we are seeing that the time for an additional seat in the Kelowna CMA is now.

As we are a business organization, we will leave it to you to determine, and others to suggest, what the redefined boundaries for such a new riding would look like, but we believe that the significant increases in development, business, and population growth in Kelowna's urban core lend themselves well to a new city centre riding.

We would observe that the creation of a new downtown centre riding would bring together those who have shared issues while allowing for the readjustment of the Kelowna West riding, so that it more naturally reflects the geography on the west side of Okanagan Lake and the growing population of West Kelowna and surrounding unincorporated areas.

Similarly, an adjustment of the Kelowna Lake Country riding to capture the growing population and business centres in the northern part of the central Okanagan Regional district would also make sense.

Potential Boundary Realignment – Secondary Point

The second specific point we would make on the boundaries in our area is that we believe Big White should be within one of the Kelowna ridings instead of its current position within Boundary Similkameen. Adding Big White to one of the Kelowna ridings would much better align this development with the local economy which primarily benefits and contributes to its operation. An MLA would then have common issues and shared interests with residents within their constituency and reflect the key economic drivers that impact their quality of life and business success.

The Urban Rural Divide

On the subject of general principles: we, as a business organization, believe that the Commission should consider the much talked-about urban rural divide. It is real and tangibly reflected in the Legislature by a shifting of representation to more MLAs who hail from the province's metropolitan regions. This shift is understandable given the need to respect population growth. However, the unintended consequence is that the frequency of policy discussions related to issues important to citizens in highly urbanized areas draws attention and time away from critical policy issues related to our resource-based economy. And that very economy creates prosperity for all British Columbians whether they are aware of it or not, regardless of their address.

We believe that the biggest challenge the province and other similar jurisdictions for that matter, continue to face is, "how do you ensure fair representation for those who live outside the most urbanized areas of the province?" In the absence of a provincial electoral system where there is both representation by population and representation by distribution, we believe that past efforts to allow large ridings a greater variance (*i.e.*, less than suggested population size of ridings) makes sense. This is especially true, given the importance of resource extraction: forestry, oil and gas, and mining to both the livelihoods of those who live in the province's rural regions and to our provincial economy.

Such an approach ensures that the will of the majority doesn't override the needs of the few, particularly when considering that many Indigenous communities are situated within large regional rural ridings.

Summary

We know that having strong MLA representation in a community, aids that community's businesses. Access to an MLA equals access to our voices being heard in the Legislature.

On behalf of the Kelowna Chamber of Commerce, thank you for your consideration of these points.”

Submitted to:

<https://bcebc.ca/your-voice/submission/>