

Kelowna Chamber

Submission to

**Electoral Boundaries Commission
Kelowna October 19, 2022**

Growing the people who power the Okanagan.

PRESENTATION TO THE COMMISSIONERS

Made to the Electoral Boundaries Commission

Kelowna, BC, October 19, 2022
Fairfield Inn & Suites by Marriott Kelowna

COMMENTS FROM KELOWNA CHAMBER

We appreciate the opportunity to provide you our thoughts on the Preliminary Report released earlier this month.

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 Caroline Miller, Senior Policy Analyst at the Chamber, today representing the Chamber on behalf of Board Chair Pamela Pearson and the rest of our elected Board.

We are pleased at the creation of a fourth riding in the greater Kelowna area, which we, and others, recommended in our submission to the Commission in April of this year. We appreciate that the Commission recognized the need for this fourth riding in its Preliminary Report.

We also are grateful that the Commission recognized representation in northern BC ridings was critical to maintain at its current numbers and did not recommend any decrease. This is critical for good representation in a province that is subject to the vagaries of urban-rural divide issues.

We do wish to repeat our recommendation from our first submission regarding moving Big White to a Kelowna riding – now that the Commission has rejected this proposal.

FAIR REPRESENTATION – Further Potential Boundary Realignment

The point we repeat 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.

We recognize that the population numbers in the Similkameen riding are likely needed to balance that riding's deviation which would likely exceed what is allowed under the act if moved to a Kelowna riding.

However, the difficulties encountered by businesses and residents in that riding regarding provincial tourism, federal visas, and other inter-related government programs are significant. An MLA who is geographically closer to the area would be better equipped to assist in issue resolution. As well, businesses and health care providers in Kelowna are far closer to residents and visitors to Big White than those further away in the Similkameen. The majority of owners of property at Big White live in the Central Okanagan, and expect and perhaps deserve, representation that is closer to home.

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.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES 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 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.

General principles that we believe the Commission should consider in undertaking its work include research on electoral boundaries. Such research may be outside the parameters and mandate of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. However, government-sponsored research is currently missing

from our processes around making these decisions, while issues of voter parity and representation, appropriate inter-community relationships associated with UNDRIP and rapidly-changing municipal growth profiles all put pressure on defending historic boundaries.

We encourage the Commission, while such research may lie outside its parameters at present, to advocate for research on examining electoral boundaries and the effects of doing – or not doing so - have on society.

The Urban Rural Divide

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/>