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Title:

Statement: Electoral reform

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STATEMENT

from the Premier

September 30, 1975

Date.....

Embargo.....

State Administration Centre,
Victoria Square, Adelaide,
South Australia 5001
228 4811

ELECTORAL REFORM.

The Premier, Mr. Dunstan, today introduced two Bills into the House of Assembly to give effect to the Government's pledge of electoral reform in South Australia.

Mr. Dunstan said the two pieces of legislation (Constitution Act Amendment bills Nos. 4 and 5), will ensure that the principles of electoral justice are written into the Constitution and that the processes of redistribution are taken out of the reach of political abuse.

"The Bills provide for electorates in the House of Assembly to be redistributed on the basis of one-vote, one value, that is each seat will have - as nearly as practicable - equal numbers of voters. A 10% tolerance will be allowed above or below the quota," said Mr. Dunstan.

"The Constitution will be altered to provide that all future redistribution will be entrenched in the Constitution".

An entrenched provision cannot be altered unless both Houses of Parliament agree AND people approve the change at a referendum.

"A permanent, completely independent Electoral Districts Boundaries Commission will be established and will have the sole responsibility for redistributing Lower House electorates. The three Commissioners will be a senior judge, the Electoral Commissioner and the Surveyor-General and any redistribution they determine in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution will take effect without any intervention by Parliament".

"In other words, electoral redistribution will not be subject to political manipulation by a Government which might chance to have a majority in both Houses at any one time and which sought to alter the provisions in its own favour, as happened under Liberal Governments previously in South Australia.

"There are safeguards to ensure that there can be no interference by administrative means with the independence and continued work of the Electoral Boundaries Commission.

"It is not intended to change the number of seats in the House of Assembly from 47, and in consequence the next redistribution will be for the same number of seats as present.

"The second Bill will change the Constitution to ensure that simultaneous elections are held for the Upper House and the Lower House. Half the members of the Legislative Council will go to the people at each general election for the House of Assembly.

"There will not be a minimum six year period for members of the Upper House and they will not get extension of time to eight or nine years as has happened in the past simply because House of Assembly elections fell within the six year period.

"Under existing provisions of the Constitution, some members of the Legislative Council have gone for nine years without facing the electors, simply because of accidents of timing".

Mr. Dunstan said once the legislation passed both Houses, the Boundaries Commissioners would start work immediately and he expected the redistribution would take six months to complete and would take effect at the next general elections for the House of Assembly.

Premier said the reforms would prevent the gerrymandering and unfair weighting of electorates which previous Liberal Governments had used to keep themselves in office.

"The basis of future redistributions will be the democratic rights of all South Australians to have an equal say in the running of their State.

"The Boundaries Commission will be an independent, permanent body which will draw up the boundaries without political interference and using criteria laid down in the Constitution.

"The reforms ensure true and permanent democracy in this State".



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