

Presentation to the

Prince Edward Island Electoral Boundaries Commission

by the

Acadian Communities Advisory Committee

**Hôtel Village sur l'Océan
Mont Carmel, Prince Edward Island
September 13, 2004**

Presentation made on site is official version

Members of the Commission, electoral district representatives, members of the Acadian and Francophone community, ladies and gentlemen:

On behalf of the Acadian Communities Advisory Committee (ACAC), I would like to share with you tonight, the impressions of the Committee regarding the interim report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. As several other Island organizations and citizens, we are interested in the revision of the provincial electoral map. We believe that it is in everyone's best interest to ensure that the electoral boundaries remain relevant.

The ACAC's mandate is to advise the provincial government on how its laws, policies, programs and services address the particular needs of the Acadian and Francophone community of Prince Edward Island. Coming from all Acadian communities, the members of our Committee believe that it is important to comment on the recommendations contained in the Commission's interim report.

We want to acknowledge the work carried out by the Commission because it has demonstrated the need to take into consideration the community of interest notion in its report by identifying the Acadian and Francophone community as one of the three communities of interest along with the urban community and the rural community.

However, the Commission's argument regarding the Acadian and Francophone community of the province does not go far enough. The fact is that Canada is a country with two official languages and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees the protection of the French language community on Prince Edward Island.

The Commission must understand that when we refer to the Acadian and Francophone community, we are talking about a linguistic community. This is how the community defines itself.

With the ACAC having a provincial mandate, we evaluated the recommendations of the Commission's interim report in terms of the Acadian and Francophone community as a whole.

According to the 2001 Census, the French mother tongue population of Prince Edward Island reached 5,890 people, representing 4.4% of the population - a slight increase since the 1996 Census. Dispersed throughout the province, the Acadian and Francophone population is mostly spread out into six main areas: West Prince, Évangéline, Summerside/Miscouche, Rustico, greater Charlottetown and Eastern Kings.

Firstly, for the West Prince area, the main Acadian and Francophone communities are Tignish, St-Louis, St-Édouard, St-Roch, St-Félix, Bloomfield and Duvar. There are 1,003 Francophones living in the West Prince area. The Commission proposes boundaries for the new ridings of Tignish and Bloomfield which seem acceptable since the communities mentioned are included. While it would be more advantageous to group these communities, we are aware of the fact that the size of the territory and population data would not allow such an option.

For the Summerside area, the Commission suggests establishing boundaries for three electoral

districts within the city limits instead of the two existing electoral districts. Given the increase in the population in the city of Summerside since the last revision of the electoral map in 1996, this proposal seems acceptable. Also, it is difficult to identify where exactly the Acadian and Francophone groups are found within the Summerside city limits even if they are numerous. However, if we consider that, traditionally they resided in the western part of the city and that the new school and community centre (Centre Belle-Alliance) is also found in that area, the new Greenwood electoral district would theoretically include them.

As for the Charlottetown area, the Commission proposes seven electoral districts within the city limits while the towns of Cornwall and Stratford would become individual districts. Given the concentration of Francophones in these two towns, these districts also seem acceptable. For information purposes, the Acadian and Francophone population in greater Charlottetown, including Cornwall, is 950.

In Eastern Kings, the Acadian and Francophone community is located mostly in the Souris area. Traditionally, there is also a group in the Montague area. The Commission proposes a new district for East Point, which includes Souris and the new Montague riding, which includes Montague, of course. This seems to be the best solution given that the Acadians and Francophones are dispersed throughout the Eastern Kings area.

You have certainly noticed that we had skipped Rustico and Evangeline. We will now elaborate on these two areas.

For the Rustico area, the Commission proposes the new boundaries for the Cavendish district. This new riding would now include 3,919 voters compared to 4,316 voters during the last provincial election in 2003 in the present riding of Park Corner-Oyster Bed. This significant reduction in the total number of voters for this district fosters the concentration of the Acadian and Francophone vote of this area. Totalling 268 people, the number of Acadians and Francophones is relatively low in the Rustico area, compared to West Prince or Summerside. The fact remains that this population is concentrated around Rustico and forms a population base whose right to effective representation must be taken into consideration.

Finally, with its 1,543 Francophones, it goes without saying that the Evangeline area comprises the largest group of Acadians and Francophones of the province and forms an enclave where the homogeneity of the Acadian and Francophone electorate gives the region a distinct status.

However, the Commission seems to disregard the fact that the Acadian and Francophone community is a linguistic community of interest. We must take into account the linguistic composition of the area and not only the origin of its residents.

It is therefore not only a question of avoiding the division of the territory of the present Evangeline-Miscouche district, the Commission must also ensure that the Acadian and Francophone vote is not diluted, which will happen with the Commission's proposal to broaden the present Evangeline-Miscouche district.

As the Commission mentioned in its report, it is not enough that the new riding called

Evangeline be composed of Acadians OR Francophones. We must respect the fact that the Acadian and Francophone community is a linguistic community of interest.

It is not enough either to say that the Act allows for a gap of $\pm 25\%$ and that the relevant factors like communities of interest can influence this gap, it must be put to practice. With a proposed variance of -1.08% for the new Evangeline riding, the Commission has significant flexibility.

Considering the linguistic composition of the actual Evangeline-Miscouche riding, considering the increase of $+9.03\%$ of voters in the present Evangeline-Miscouche district between 1994 and 2003* (one of the best growths among rural areas in the province), the Committee strongly advises the Commission to maintain the existing boundaries of the Evangeline-Miscouche district in order to prevent diluting the Acadian and Francophone vote, to anchor even more significantly the distinct status of this area and to maintain the right to effective representation of the Acadian and Francophone community.

In closing, we are aware that the revision of the electoral map is a very complex political and legal puzzle. In this context, we understand the significant work carried out by the Commission. However, we hope that the Commission will give particular attention to our recommendation regarding the actual Evangeline-Miscouche district.

Thank you.

*Source: Schedule C of the Prince Edward Island Electoral Boundaries Commission Interim Report.