

March 17, 2004

Mr. John McQuaid
Chair
Electoral Boundaries Commission
J. Angus MacLean Building
92 Great George St., P.O. Box 774
Charlottetown PE C1A 7L3

Dear Mr. McQuaid:

The Société Saint-Thomas-d'Aquin, official voice of the Acadian and Francophone community of Prince Edward Island, wishes to comment on the possible changes to the electoral boundaries of Prince Edward Island.

We hope that the enclosed document contains information that will help you write your report. Should you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Maria Bernard
President

encl.

March 19, 2004

**Comments Presented to the Electoral Boundaries Commission
of Prince Edward Island
by the
Société Saint-Thomas-d'Aquin**

The Société Saint-Thomas-d'Aquin (SSTA) is the voice of the Acadian and Francophone community of Prince Edward Island. Created in 1919, this Acadian society has a membership of some 1,200 Islanders. From its head office in Summerside, the SSTA oversees a wide range of issues in the political, socioeconomic and cultural sectors.

Mission

To work so that each Acadian and Francophone Islander can live and achieve their full potential both individually and collectively in French.

Objectives of the SSTA

- To regroup the Island Acadian and Francophone community;
- To represent its members in national, provincial and municipal government issues, especially in matters pertaining to minority rights;
- To develop programs and services that will enhance the development of the Acadian and Francophone community in all sectors;
- To encourage harmonious relations among all Acadian and Francophone Islanders as well as with Acadians and Francophones of other provinces and countries;
- To establish and administer a funding program to provide financial assistance to Acadian and Francophone students of Prince Edward Island.

Current Situation

The SSTA was given the mandate to ensure Francophone population development. Not only have Island Acadians and Francophones preserved their language and their identity, they have also built a strong society, which has been successful in many spheres of activity. The institutions built by Acadians and Francophones have helped them maintain their presence from one end of the Island to another.

One of the key challenges faced by the Acadian and Francophone population is the fact that this community is spread out from one end of the province to another. The Acadian regions are as follows: West Prince, Evangeline, Summerside-Miscouche, Rustico, Charlottetown and Souris.

Despite the ravages of assimilation (the percentage of Francophones dropped from 8.6% in 1951 to 4.8% in 1981 due to the loss of French schools during the last century), statistics from the last Census (2001) are encouraging and show that 5,890 Islanders, or 4.4% of the Island's total population, consider themselves to be Francophones. This represents a slight increase from the 1996 Census. It should be noted that more than seven Francophones out of 10 live in the western part of the Island, that is, in Prince County.¹

Representation of the Official Languages Minority

For several years, the Island's Acadian and Francophone community has been working to maintain its population and reintroduce the French language to families and regions who had lost it over the years. According to statistics from recent censuses, these efforts have been successful. That is why we believe it is essential to preserve the districts where the Acadian and Francophone community has a significant political impact.

As you are probably aware, the Supreme Court of Prince Edward Island has decided that a deviation can be justified on the basis of a linguistic minority claim to representation, and that the Acadian population represented by the Evangeline-Miscouche District is entitled to a special status.² We therefore do not think any change should be brought to District 24.

In the event of changes being brought to the electoral map, we ask that the regions where our community has a significant impact not be changed in any way that will put us at a disadvantage.

In Prince County, Francophones represent approximately 10% of the population, which gives them an important political impact. The delimitation of electoral boundaries in this county therefore becomes a very big issue for our community.

With reference to the Carter case, we wish to remind you that during the delimitation of electoral boundaries, we must ensure that the population has a right to effective representation. We must remember, however, that effective representation often cannot be achieved without taking into account countervailing factors. The case judge mentioned that minority representation may need to be taken into account to ensure legislative assemblies effectively represent the diversity of our social mosaic.³ We believe the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island has an obligation to do so.

¹ Analyse de la situation actuelle des Acadiens, Acadiennes et francophones de l'Î.-P.-É., Institut de leadership, Moncton, N.-B., 2003.

² Prince Edward Island Commissioner of Electoral Reform. 2003 Prince Edward Island Electoral Reform Commission Report, December 2003, p. 76.

³ Ibid., p.53.

Conclusion

Although novices in this complex matter, we wanted to emphasize that it is essential for the Acadian and Francophone community to preserve what it has acquired over the years, so that it can pursue its development. The fundamental importance of linguistic duality has allowed for the development of the province as we know it today. Whether it is in terms of culture, tourism or economy, the Acadians and Francophones have shaped the province, and their contribution has been significant. The SSTA thus wants to ensure that their voices continue to be heard within the Legislative Assembly.

We wish to thank the Electoral Boundaries Commission of Prince Edward Island for letting us present our comments.