There has never been a gerrymander or an attempt to engineer a gerrymander, in the history of Commonwealth elections. This has been stated from time to time by politicians from all sides, and I believe anyone who makes such a charge really has his tongue in his cheek or does not know the real meaning of the word. The Oxford Dictionary gives the meaning as to 'manipulate so as to give undue influence to some class etc.'—but perhaps the origin of the word itself is more interesting in the context of a discussion on electorates. Experts say that it came from the name of the governor of an American state called Gerry who signed into law the boundaries of a district which were manipulated for political gain. The shape of the district was like a salamander... so, the word 'gerrymander' was born.

Both Houses of the Federal Parliament during the week have debated the proposals introduced by the Government for redistribution of the present 122 electorates in the states.

The current proposals provide for an increase in the number of Victorian electorates by one to 34, decreasing New South Wales electorates by one to 45, and increasing South Australia's seats by one to 12. They leave the numbers of seats in Western Australia, Queensland and Tasmania intact, so that there is an overall increase to 123 in the number of seats in the states.

How did this come about? It is the function of the Commonwealth electoral office to determine the number of members of the House of Representatives for the States after each population census is taken. These are now taken every five years. A re-distribution of electorates is made because of the increase or decrease of a State's population and of population movements within a state. A formula determines the number of representatives each state is to have in the new House. First, the total population of the States is divided by 120 (twice the number of Senators). This produces a quota which is then divided into the population of a state and the result is the number of members for that state. To find the number of electors in each division, the number of members is divided into the total number of electors in the
stute”. By this means Victoria is entitled to 34 Federal members and the number of voters for each electorate is to be around 51,675.

There have been charges that the present proposals flew in the face of equal representation for the people because of the provision in the Electoral Act allowing the number of electors in a division to be up to one-fifth higher or lower than the quota. It was the provision for a lower number in country electorates that drew fire from some sections of the Opposition in the House debate. But this argument places no value on two points — one, that the provision has been in the Electoral Act since Federation, and two, fails to take account of great size of many country electorates and the tremendous hardships this imposes in adequately representing it. The very size is a disadvantage to the member and the residents of these electorates, so that arguments of “one vote, one value” have a rather theoretical ring when one takes account of this. Take Kalgoorlie, for instance, an electorate 1500 miles long, 1000 miles wide and covering nearly 900,000 square miles. Or Kennedy, in Queensland, occupying 283,600 square miles out of Queensland’s total area of 670,500 square miles.

Redistributions of Federal electorates have taken place in 1903, 1906, 1912, 1922, 1937, 1948 and 1955. There has not been one since 1955, as the proposals brought forward in 1961 — which were determined on the old formula and would have been a loss of one seat each in three states — were ultimately dropped. In the period since 1955 population movements and increase have caused enormous disparities in the populations of electorates. For instance, in Victoria the electorate of Bruce has 130,000 compared with Melbourne where numbers have shrunk to 30,000. In New South Wales the seat of Mitchell has grown to nearly 110,000 — while West Sydney’s electors number only 29,000. This unequal representation will be overcome by the current proposals put forward by the Commissioners in each of the states and accepted by the Government.

Great heat tends to be generated by a re-distribution. This
is understandable because in any re-distribution there are always members who are unhappy with proposed alterations of their electorate boundaries. They either lose supporters, or perhaps gain unwanted electors from a hostile area - or suffer the blow of having their electorate eliminated altogether. In the resultant emotional atmosphere, tempers become frayed and charges and allegations can be hurled without any basis of fact. In the current situation the Opposition perhaps believes there are prospects for political gain in the tactics they have adopted. But it is interesting to hear the Opposition Leader, Mr Whitlam, in the House stating that the Parliament has had to wait seven years for a re-distribution and that, and I quote from Hansard, 'clearly the present proposals are acceptable to the extent that they are immeasurably more equal than the existing distribution.' He added, 'If the choice is between this proposed distribution and the present boundaries, there can be no doubt that the proposals are to be preferred.' He also stated that his criticisms of the proposals before the House did not contain the allegation of a gerrymander.

Speaking later in the debate the Prime Minister, Mr Gorton referred to arguments by Mr Whitlam in support of the contention that country electorates should not have a smaller number of voters than city seats. The Prime Minister spoke of a submission by Mr Whitlam to the re-distribution commissioners in New South Wales, asking that 4,000 voters should be taken out of the electorate of Prospect and added to Reid, making Reid the largest electorate in New South Wales. Under the original proposals, the difference between Darling and Grayndler to which Mr Whitlam had referred, was 40.16%. But under the proposals made by the Leader of the Opposition, the difference between Darling and Reid would have been 43.6%, said the Prime Minister, neatly demolishing the case put forward by Mr Whitlam.

At this point it be helpful to discuss the way in which the commissioners go about altering electorate boundaries.
of the commissioners themselves is an interesting point. Three are appointed for each State by the Governor-General. One of the Commissioners is to be the Chief Electoral Officer or an officer having similar qualifications, one is to be the Surveyor-General for the State or an officer with similar qualifications. The third is to be selected by the government usually from a panel of names put forward by the Chief Electoral Officer.

When the commissioners sit down to determine where the new boundaries should be they take into account a series of factors laid down by law. They must consider community of interest with a division, including economic, social and regional interests. They must consider means of communication and travel with the division, with special reference to disabilities arising out of remoteness or distance. They must look at the trend of population changes within the state, the density or sparsity of a division's population, its area, the physical features, as well as existing boundaries of divisions and subdivisions. And before a distribution is made anyone may lodge suggestions with the commissioners, and after the commissioners have finished their tasks, their proposals are exhibited publicly for 30 days to allow objections or suggestions to be lodged.

Victorian Premier, Sir Henry Bolte, and his government won deserved praise from farmers' organisations for the decision to abolish land tax imposed on farmlands. This is a decision of great importance to rural producers, as it will have the effect of decreasing pressure on production costs. It is most welcome news also to those farmers emerging from the effects of crippling drought. The Commonwealth, it might be recalled, abolished its land taxes in 1951. It is interesting to note that the last annual Commonwealth collections of this tax totalled about $13 million. Land taxes imposed by the States over all categories of land in the financial year 1966/67 totalled more than $72 million.

There was good news also for primary producers in New South Wales in the Budget brought down during the week by Premier Askin.
The Government is to eliminate land tax on land used for primary production over the next three years, because of the problems facing producers through rising costs and the longer-term effects of the drought.

Recently the Commissioner of Trade Practices, Mr R.M. Bannerman produced his first annual report, which was tabled in Parliament. Part of the report was a reminder of the functions of the Commissioner - to keep a register of trade agreements, to contain examinable agreements; to consider whether agreements and practices are examinable under the Act and are contrary to the public interest; to institute proceedings in the Trade Practices Tribunal; to consult beforehand with parties to agreements or practices with a view to rendering proceedings unnecessary. The Act, the main part of which became law in December, 1965, is entitled 'an act to preserve competition in Australian trade and commerce to the extent required by the public interest.' By June 30 this year parties to agreements had lodged a total of 10,841 registrations with the Register of Trade Agreements. The largest number - 4622 - came from Melbourne, there were 3,659 from Sydney, 825 from Brisbane and lesser numbers from the other capitals. Mr Bannerman reported that industry had widely accepted the view that lodging agreements for registration was the prudent course in cases of doubt and that registration did not affect the public interest question. Examinability, he said, was ultimately a matter for the Tribunal itself and not a matter for the Commissioner to determine at the point of registration.

The registration figures, he said, did not provide a direct measure of the degree or effectiveness of restriction on competition. Distribution agreements between a manufacturer or wholesaler and his outlets would not usually be registrable in the U.K. whereas in Australia over half of the Register consists of such agreements. The usual basis of the lodgement was that the manufacturer or wholesaler sometimes competed with his own outlets so that the distribution agreement became an agreement between competitors. Mr Bannerman reported that examination of agreements in the Office commenced as soon as documents began to be lodged for registration. Ten major cases were being studied at present -...
cases concerned with the manufacture and marketing of both producer and consumer goods and include commodities commonly purchased by public authorities. The studies cover nearly 100 horizontal agreements and four times as many related distribution agreements, he said.