



# Comment on objections 104

Adam Bandt MP

6 pages



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To the AEC Redistribution Committee

### **Comment on Objection 487 from Victorian Labor**

Never has there been a more transparently political attempt to alter an independent proposal of the AEC than Objection 487, from Victorian Labor.

Dripping with self-interest and tortured arguments, Labor's objection is little more than a brazen grab to fend off a perceived disadvantage in the proposed divisional boundaries of Wills.

The clearest evidence of this naked grasp for political gain is Labor's warped boundary for Melbourne, carving out suburbs like North Melbourne that have been in the electorate since 1922, with only the faintest whiff of supporting argument, as if even the authors themselves were embarrassed at the contortions required to sustain their fancies.

This distortion of Melbourne is a necessary consequence of Labor's attempts to keep certain suburbs within - and out of - Wills, which in turn also forces them to extend Maribyrnong's boundaries into suburbs never before proposed. Evidence of the pure partisanship of their objection is also gleaned from the fact that next to no time is spent in Labor's submission justifying their preferred boundaries of Maribyrnong, because they know it is unjustifiable. In Labor's submission, Maribyrnong would stretch from North Melbourne and the tram stop for the Queen Victoria Market to Sunbury Road and the Tullamarine Airport, a proposed boundary so transparently ridiculous, so unnecessary and divisive of so many communities of interest that it is given a desultory few paragraphs in the hope that it won't be noticed.

With more front than Myers, Labor is asking the AEC Redistribution Committee to rip up an independently prepared set of boundaries and do something done to no other capital city suburbs, all to deliver their party what it considers to be an electoral boost.

As the Federal Member for Melbourne and the Leader of the Australian Greens, I urge the AEC in the strongest possible terms not to grant the ALP its grotesquely gerrymandered self-serving request for Melbourne, Wills and Maribyrnong. The AEC should instead maintain its original, independent proposal in full, as a package, which no-one could suggest was at the behest of any particular party.

### **The AEC's proposal**

The AEC's proposal had the merit not just of abolishing a seat proposed by no political party, but also of making consequential adjustments that either maintained existing communities of interest or created new ones.

The AEC's role is, of course, to follow its legislative charter, which provides as far as possible a level playing field for candidates, where boundaries are set for non-political reasons and do



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not of themselves provide any benefit to any political party, but rather allow for the will of the electorate to be expressed.

In abolishing Higgins - an electorate where the Greens had previously finished in the two-candidate preferred count, and which the Greens had prior to the AEC's proposal publicly identified as a 'priority seat' to seek to win at the next election, the AEC delivered a setback to the Greens, but so too to the Liberal and Labor parties.

As to the electorate of Melbourne, currently the only Greens-held electorate in Victoria, the AEC's proposal did not on its face result in any great advantage to me as incumbent. In fact, the views of commentators tended to suggest it would result in a disadvantage. Further, in crossing the river for the first time, the AEC implicitly rejected my and the Greens' suggestion that this Federation electorate revert closer to its historic boundaries by reincorporating suburbs like Flemington and Kensington.

Notwithstanding this rebuff and potential disadvantage, noting that these political considerations are not matters driving the AEC's deliberations, the Greens and I supported the AEC's proposal as having struck a fair and independent balance. Not so the ALP, who have clearly been spooked by suggestions that the boundaries of Wills - a seat within which already sits a Greens State MP and where many people already vote for the Greens - may change in a way that disadvantages them.

Notably, to the extent that it is relevant (if at all) to the AEC, all published psephology suggests that even on the AEC's proposed boundaries, Wills remains on current voting patterns notionally an ALP seat. In other words, by its proposed boundary changes, the AEC has not 'removed' a seat from a sitting member or Party.

However, if there is any perceived disadvantage for Labor, it is simply a reflection of the incontestable fact that more people are voting for parties and candidates other than Labor and the Coalition. Almost a third of voters cast their ballot for a candidate not Labor or the Coalition at the 2022 Federal election, the highest number in close to 100 years. Instead of simply accepting the raw reality of modern voting patterns, Labor is attempting to push the AEC into making boundary changes that Labor thinks benefit it and it alone.

Rather than accept the decision of the independent umpire, the ALP has unashamedly sought to twist the adjacent electorate of Melbourne (and Maribyrnong) into a shape without justification, all to try to persuade the AEC to protect what the ALP perceives to be its electoral interest in Wills.

For the AEC to back down on its original proposal and accept the ALP's proposed boundaries for Wills, Melbourne and Maribyrnong would be to rip apart long held communities of interest and set an extraordinary precedent.



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### Other capital city electorates

The electorate of Perth - even with the AEC's proposed redistributions - includes the suburbs of Perth, North Perth, West Perth and East Perth. Adelaide includes Adelaide and North Adelaide. Melbourne includes Melbourne as well as North, East and West Melbourne. (Clark, though not named after Hobart, includes Hobart, as well as North, West and South Hobart.) Where capital city electorates do not include their namesake suburbs with such 'compass point' designations, it is only because the relevant suburb is across a river: Brisbane (South Brisbane and East Brisbane are across the river in Griffith), Perth (South Perth is across the river in Swan) and Sydney (North Sydney across the river is currently the namesake of its own electorate and proposed to be incorporated into Warringah).

The reasons for this are easy enough to understand: capital city suburbs are intricately linked with their land-contiguous North-, West-, East- and South- offshoots, with residential, commercial and community growth having developed there for over a century. These suburbs are traditionally much smaller than others on city outskirts, facilitating a much tighter integration of building styles, markets, educational institutions, community facilities, commerce and transport networks. It is the very definition of 'community of interest'. Evidence of this for Melbourne is set out further below.

Labor is asking the AEC to create the only (and as far as I am aware, first ever) capital city federation division that would excise a 'compass point' suburb with which it shares a land boundary. Labor offers almost no justification for this move, because there is none - it is all driven by their perceived political self-interest.

### North Melbourne

Like East Melbourne, North Melbourne shares a land boundary with the suburb of Melbourne and has been part of the Division of Melbourne for over 100 years.

#### The connection between North and West Melbourne

It is galling that the ALPs proposal to remove North Melbourne from the Division of Melbourne will create an artificial split between the deeply connected suburbs of North and West Melbourne.

For locals, North and West Melbourne operate as one holistic community. The suburbs share community newspapers - North & West Melbourne News Community Newspaper and North West City News. They share a community centre - the North & West Melbourne Neighbourhood Centre and a community association - the North and West Melbourne Association. They share a primary school zone, with both suburbs being zoned to North Melbourne Primary School.

While the boundaries between North and West Melbourne are porous, they together share the border of Moonee Ponds Creek to the North-West. To apply this key boundary to one



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suburb but not the other makes little logical sense.

To split North and West Melbourne into different Federal Divisions is a preposterous suggestion that demonstrates, at best, a lack of understanding of these communities and, at worst, a blatant attempt to manipulate boundaries for party political benefit.

### North Melbourne as an inner-city electorate suburb

North Melbourne, as a suburb immediately adjacent to the Central Business District of Melbourne, is clearly an inner-city suburb which shares more with the communities of the Division of Melbourne than with the outer-suburb suburbs of Maribyrnong, such as Keilor.

Demographically, North Melbourne is a suburb of renters, with 47.52% of the population renting. While Melbourne is a Division of renters (63% of total occupied dwellings are rented), Maribyrnong is not (only 32.7% of total occupied dwellings are rented). North Melbourne, where almost half the community rents, should remain within the Division of Melbourne.

The ALP's argument that there is a difference in physical features between North Melbourne and neighbouring Carlton and West Melbourne is plainly false, demonstrating a lack of understanding of the neighbourhood. The dwelling structures of North Melbourne clearly demonstrate that it is a suburb which belongs within the Division of Melbourne. North Melbourne has a high-density of housing, and trends towards multi-residential development. Separated 'houses' as defined by the ABS, account for only 3.65% of the dwelling types in North Melbourne, similar to the dwelling structures of other suburbs within the Division of Melbourne - Carlton 1.1%, West Melbourne 1.06%, and Fitzroy 2.76%.

In contrast, 51.37% of the dwellings in Maribyrnong are houses. The inverse also holds true: flats or apartments in buildings of any number of storeys make up just 23.98% of dwellings within the Division of Maribyrnong. In contrast, flats or apartments equate to 68.28% of dwellings in North Melbourne, 80.92% in West Melbourne, and 83.49% in neighbouring Carlton.

Despite the attempts by the ALP to obscure the fact, North Melbourne is a suburb of flats and renters, a clear community of interest that should be protected by keeping the suburb within the Division of Melbourne.

### Educational Institutions

As has been previously mentioned, North and West Melbourne share primary school zoning to North Melbourne Primary School.

North Melbourne is strongly connected to surrounding suburbs within the Division of Melbourne due to high school zoning. North Melbourne, alongside West Melbourne, Carlton, the CBD and Parkville, are the suburbs included in the zoning for University High School, located in Parkville. To have North Melbourne as the one school within the zone not included



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within the Division of Melbourne again demonstrates the weakness in the arguments put forward by the ALP.

In addition, North Melbourne is also home to a significant number of individuals currently enrolled in tertiary education (19.5%), unsurprising given that the Division of Melbourne is home to both the University of Melbourne, ACU and RMIT, as well as the city campuses of many other institutions. In contrast, 8.07% of individuals living within Maribyrnong are reported to be enrolled in any form of tertiary education.

### Biomedical Research Hub and the future of the Arden Precinct

The suburbs of Parkville and North Melbourne are already home to significant elements of Melbourne's hospital precinct and biomedical research institutions.

The Victorian State Labor government has earmarked the Arden Precinct, located within the proposed area of North Melbourne to be moved into Maribyrnong, as an 'urban renewal project', expected to 'accommodate approximately 34,000 jobs and be home to 20,000 residents by 2051.'

The Arden Precinct is expected to be home to significant new builds of medium and high-density housing and be 'highly complementary to the nearby Parkville Precinct incorporating the Melbourne Biomedical Precinct with over 45 partner hospitals, research centres, education institutions and biomedical organisations'. The Arden and Parkville Precincts will share a soon to be opened Melbourne Metro train station (Arden).

To split this significant precinct, and the hospitals and facilities within it across two Federal Divisions is ill-advised. Under Labor's proposed boundaries, key institutions including CSL, Orygen, The National Ageing Research Institute and the Australian Genome Research Facility Ltd would be pushed into the Division of Maribyrnong. Meanwhile, Royal Melbourne Hospital, Peter MacCallum Hospital, Melbourne University and many others would remain within the Division of Melbourne.

The suburbs of North Melbourne and Parkville are already home to a hub of bio-medical research institutions, in the coming decades this will already become more significant. The plans for this precinct, especially the new build of housing, will ensure that North Melbourne continues to remain a suburb with incredibly strong characteristics of the inner-city.

Overlooking the huge undertaking that is the Arden Development and all that it is set to include, splitting this precinct in half and moving the suburb of North Melbourne into Maribyrnong is an ill-thought through proposal that fails to consider the future of our city.



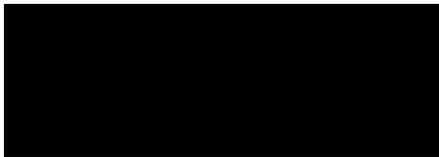
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### Conclusion

In a redistribution that involves the abolition of a seat, political parties and sitting members will no doubt have strong interests. So far, the AEC has commendably rejected all of them, coming up with a proposed set of boundaries that can be considered truly independent. The ALP is now making a desperate last minute plea for the AEC to change course to suit the ALP's perceived political needs. As a consequence, they distort the boundaries of Melbourne (and Maribyrnong) in ways that defy logic and divide clear communities of interest. That is not how boundaries should be drawn. For the AEC to change course now and agree to Labor's blatantly self-interested request would be a grave error.



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