



Comment on objections 111

Dr Monique Ryan MP

7 Pages



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The Redistribution Committee for Victoria
Australian Electoral Commission
Locked Bag 4007
Canberra ACT 2601

BY EMAIL: FedRedistribution-VIC@aec.gov.au

Dear Redistribution Committee,

Proposed redistribution of federal electoral divisions in Victoria May 2024 (“the proposed redistribution”)

As the Independent Federal Member for the Division of Kooyong (“Kooyong”), I welcome the opportunity to comment on objections to the proposed redistribution.

I note that the final determination of the electoral divisions and boundary names will be made by the Augmented Electoral Commission on 17 October 2024.

Prior Comments and Current Position

In my previous correspondence to the Redistribution Committee dated 24 November 2023 and 8 December 2023, my suggestion was that the borders of Kooyong should remain unchanged or undergo only very minor changes. I reassert the view that I have previously expressed: the borders of Kooyong do not need to change to meet the redistribution requirements.

However, I acknowledge that with the proposed abolition of the division of Higgins, boundary changes as part of the greater redistribution must now impact Kooyong. I have reviewed the proposed redistribution and the suggested boundary changes for Kooyong, and I believe that the Redistribution Committee has given full and careful consideration to

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the communities of interest impacted by the proposed changes. Therefore, I support the proposed redistribution as currently drafted.

The redistribution process is such that there will always be some who are displeased with resulting boundary changes. Compromises will always have to be made, and difficult decisions reached. However, we should take pride in the fact that our country is one in which we can have full confidence in the independence of the Redistribution Committee, and the Australian Electoral Commission more broadly.

Summary of Comments on Objections

I reject the suggestion in Objection 398 from the Liberal Party of Australia – Victorian Division (“the Liberal Party”), which would see the north-eastern area of Kooyong between Burke and Belmore Roads redistributed to the division of Menzies. That area should properly remain within Kooyong.

I also reject the suggestion in Objection 398 (from the Liberal Party) and Objection 481 from the Australian Greens Victoria (“the Greens”) to transfer the area south of Malvern Road and west of Orrong Road from Kooyong to Macnamara.

Detailed Comments on Objections

The following points comprise my response to some of the specific objections to proposed boundaries raised by the Liberal Party (Objection 398), insofar as they impact Kooyong. I have chosen not to address all of its suggestions.

Suggestion 1: Liberal Party suggestion to transfer North Balwyn to Menzies

The Liberal Party has suggested that the area contained in the north-east corner of the proposed division of Kooyong, being the area contained within the current northernmost border and Burke Road and Belmore Road (as highlighted in Map 1 in Objection 398), should be redistributed to the proposed division of Menzies. I strongly reject this suggestion. This change would split the significant, strong Chinese community of interest in Balwyn and North Balwyn, which comprises more than 30% of the population at the SA1 level – as was clearly demonstrated by Map 1 in the Liberal Party’s submission.

In addition, the Chinese community of the eastern suburbs has a strong shared community of interest that runs along the east-west axis, from Kooyong to Chisholm, not the north-south axis from Kooyong to Menzies. The Chinese residents of Kooyong travel predominantly eastwards to Box Hill Central (in Chisholm), this being the cultural, social and retail shopping centre for the Mandarin-speaking community. Importantly, for Chinese residents with developing English-language proficiencies, Box Hill Central provides a broad range of shops and services where Mandarin and Cantonese are spoken.

The suggestion to shift North Balwyn from Kooyong to Menzies would also divide the longstanding Italian and Greek communities of interest in North Balwyn and Kew East. These communities represent more than 12% and 8-12%, respectively, of the population by SA1.

Moreover, this change would result in a material decrease in the number of projected electors for Kooyong, necessitating further changes to proposed boundaries.

I note that the Liberal Party did not raise the prospect of this very significant change in its earlier submission.

Suggestion 2: Liberal Party suggestion to transfer Prahran from Kooyong to Macnamara

I reject the suggestion in Objection 398 (from the Liberal Party) to transfer the area south of Malvern Road and west of Orrong Road from Kooyong to Macnamara. This suggestion was also made in Objection 481 from the Greens, although not by the Leader of the Australian Greens, the Member for Melbourne, in his submission (Objection 384).

My objection is based on the following considerations:

1. Means of travel and physical features
2. Communities of interest

1. Means of travel and physical features

As proposed by the Redistribution Committee, Dandenong Road/Princes Highway East will become the new southern boundary of Kooyong. This is a sensible proposal as Dandenong Road/Princes Highway East is a major arterial road, running east to west, which effectively delineates communities on either side on the basis of travel and communities of interest.

Along the proposed Kooyong southern boundary line, Dandenong Road/Princes Highway East is an eight to ten lane road with heavy traffic. It is entirely separated by physical dividers and has a dedicated tram line. It is – geographically and physically -- a much more natural electorate border than Malvern Road. This is why Dandenong Road exists currently as the natural boundary between the Local Government Areas of Stonnington and Glen Eira.

As noted by Dick Gross, a former Mayor of Port Phillip, in the 2021 redistribution submissions (COB3), “The communities on the southern side of Dandenong Rd in the Cities of Glen Eira and Port Phillip are genuinely quite distinct from those on its northern side in Stonnington, when assessed on communities of interest, means of communication, and travel.” Many comments on the 2021 redistribution – which examined the boundary between Macnamara and Higgins – echoed the observation that Dandenong Road is the most significant natural boundary in this area.

In summary, this significant road infrastructure presents a natural geographic and demographic boundary that militates against the Liberal Party and Greens suggestions that Macnamara’s northern boundary be extended northward across Dandenong Road/Princes Highway East.

Williams Road, a north/south road with two lanes in each direction, is also a sensible western boundary for the new boundaries of Kooyong, as proposed by the Redistribution Committee. Williams Road as a natural western boundary for Kooyong was also noted on page 6 of the Greens Objection 481, which stated: 'Williams road (sic) is a fairly reasonable barrier between the community in Toorak and that of South Yarra.' The same point was made by the Member for Melbourne, Adam Bandt MP (Objection 384). I concur with these statements, and I agree with the Redistribution Committee's proposal that Williams Road should become the western boundary of Kooyong between Alexandra Avenue and Dandenong Road/Princes Highway East.

2. Communities of Interest

The Liberal Party proposal to transfer the area south of Malvern Road and west of Orrong Road from Kooyong to Macnamara is based in part on an argument about a Jewish community of interest. However, compared to the surrounding suburbs of Malvern and Toorak, the SA1s in that southwestern corner of the proposed Kooyong boundaries have a relatively low Jewish population, so the Liberal Party argument does not hold. (See Map 1 below.)



Map 1. Kooyong – Population Density of People of Jewish religion

Black: Boundary proposed by the Redistribution Committee

Red: Area proposed by the Liberal Party and the Greens to move to Macnamara

Moreover, Kooyong has a significant Jewish community and is home to numerous Jewish schools and synagogues. In its current boundaries, Kooyong is home to Bialik College (K-12) and three synagogues: the Ark Centre, the Kew Hebrew Congregation and the Leo Baeck Centre.

With the boundaries proposed by the Redistribution Committee, Kooyong will also become home to King David School (K-12), and two additional synagogues: Kedem and Chabad Malvern (which also includes an early learning centre). This brings the total of Jewish schools and synagogues to two and five, respectively, demonstrating a strong community of interest in Kooyong.

I note also that the Liberal Party and Greens proposals would divide the King David School campus into two different federal electorates, with part of the senior school being located in Macnamara (west side of Orrong Road) and part of the senior school and the junior school located in Kooyong (east side of Orrong Road).

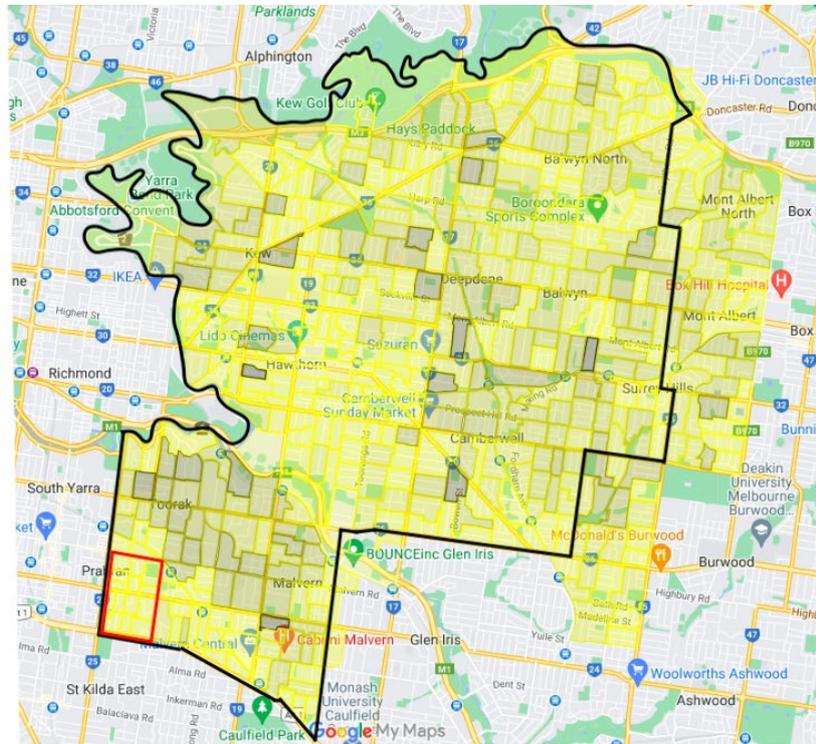
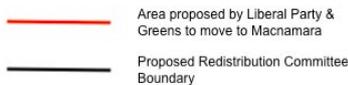
Finally, I note that the Liberal Party's current proposal contradicts its own submission from 2021 (OB34), in which it noted that: "the Jewish community across Melbourne has substantial links to the current Division of Higgins... A significant number of members of the Jewish community attend schools that are spread across schools (sic) in the Divisions of Goldstein, Kooyong and Higgins – not just within the current Division of Macnamara".

In summary, the Liberal Party proposal for shifting the Prahran SA1s from Kooyong to Macnamara on the basis of a Jewish community of interest is contradicted by the evidence in two respects. Firstly, the section of Prahran that they propose to move into Macnamara on the grounds of a Jewish community of interest has a lower density of Jewish people than the immediately surrounding areas of Malvern, Armadale and Toorak within the proposed new boundaries of Kooyong. Secondly, Kooyong has a significant Jewish community and seven major Jewish schools and synagogues.

The Liberal Party proposal also argues for the shifting of Prahran out of Kooyong on the grounds that: "It is very dissimilar to the suburban, leafy Kooyong electorate."

This argument is based on outdated stereotypes. On the contrary, the section of Prahran which the Liberal Party proposes to shift to Macnamara is typical of Kooyong in multiple respects. **Map 2 below** shows that the median age of the Prahran SA1s is quite typical of SA1s in the northern and western parts of Kooyong in its current boundaries. In fact, the outlier areas are the suburbs of Toorak and Kooyong – not the Prahran SA1s.

Median age by SA1



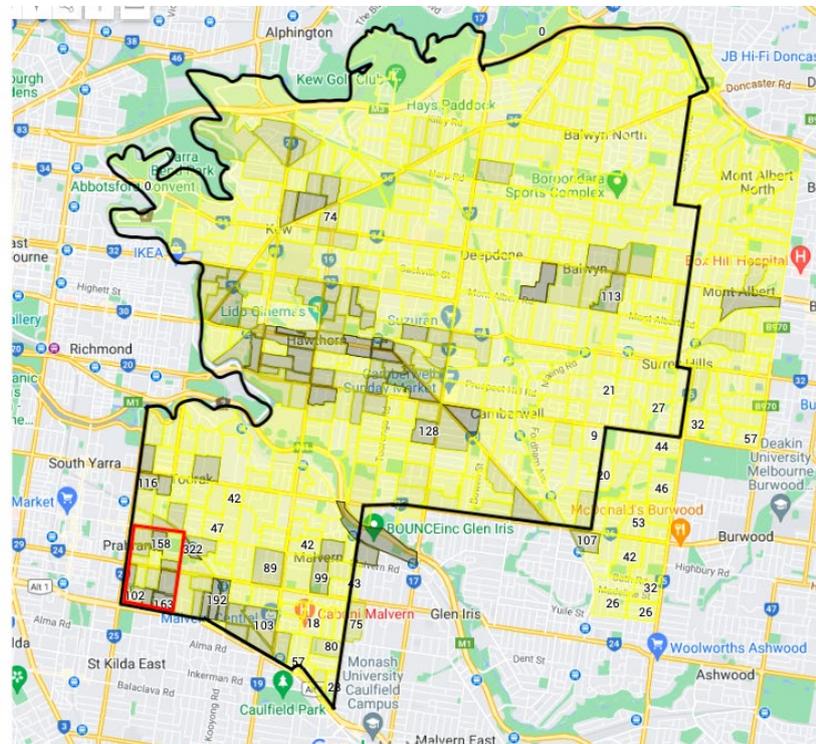
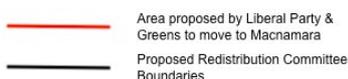
Map 2. Kooyong – Median Age by SA1

Black: Boundary proposed by the Redistribution Committee

Red: Area proposed by the Liberal Party and the Greens to move to Macnamara

Map 3 below shows that the relatively high number of renters in the Prahran SA1s is typical of the SA1s in the neighbouring suburb of Malvern, and in large sections of Hawthorn, Kew, Camberwell and Balwyn, which are all within Kooyong.

Number of Renters by SA1



Map 3. Number of Renters by SA1

Black: Boundary proposed by the Redistribution Committee

Red: Area proposed by the Liberal Party and the Greens to move to Macnamara

In summary, the Liberal Party proposal for shifting the Prahran SA1s from Kooyong to Macnamara on the basis of Prahran being dissimilar to Kooyong is not supported by the evidence.

Other Objections

I have chosen not to comment in detail on the remaining objections that reference the word "Kooyong". In the main these objections serve simply to reject the proposed abolition of the division of Higgins. Most do not comment on the impact that the proposed changes to Kooyong's boundaries will have on communities of interest, nor suggest alternative changes to Kooyong's boundaries in the event that the decision to abolish Higgins were to be reversed.

Were the Redistribution Committee to be persuaded by these objections, and choose not to abolish the division of Higgins, I would direct the Committee to my original submission, and reiterate my view that retaining Kooyong's current boundaries would be the most fair and reasonable outcome in the circumstances.

Conclusion

Whilst I maintain that a redistribution could occur such that the borders of Kooyong remain unchanged or undergo only very minor changes, I do accept that difficult decisions must be made. Given that it has been determined by the Redistribution Committee that the Division of Higgins is to be abolished, in order to facilitate an orderly and logical redistribution meeting the guidelines of the AEC, I accept that the current proposal is reasonable.

With all best wishes,



Dr Monique Ryan, MP
Member for Kooyong