



Comment on objections 116

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Peter Khalil MP
Federal Member for Wills

Augmented Electoral Commission of Victoria
C/O: Redistribution Secretariat Australian Electoral Commission
Locked Bag 4007
Canberra, ACT 2600

12 July 2024

Dear Augmentation Commission,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the objections to the proposed redistribution of Victorian electorates. This comment will discuss those objections relating to the Divisions of Wills, Melbourne and Maribyrnong.

As the Federal Member for Wills, I submit this comment with a focus on a number of community objections that were submitted to the AEC on the proposed redistribution of the Wills electorate. Whatever the outcome of this process, I will proudly represent and serve the electorate of Wills in its entirety, and all the suburbs that are included in the final redistribution.

I note that many members of our community in Wills and community organisations in Wills have written to the Redistribution Committee to oppose the draft changes.

Many of the objections that have been submitted raise unique experiences of our community, but I write separately to summarise their objections as follows:

I agree with the objection of Victorian Labor (OB487) as well as the following submissions in respect of their arguments relating to Wills:

- OB10, OB32, OB93, OB96, OB97, OB113, OB121, OB122, OB126, OB128, OB129, OB147, OB159, OB161, OB162, OB170, OB173, OB208, OB228, OB229, OB285, OB303, OB306, OB307, OB308, OB309, OB318, OB343, OB349, OB350, OB356, OB364, OB375, OB383, OB386, OB394, OB404, OB405, OB409, OB413, OB415, OB422, OB431, OB436, OB441, OB446, OB447, OB450, OB467, OB470, OB472, OB480, OB483, OB489, OB491, OB494, OB500

Wills in its current form is estimated to have 120,791 in 2028 which is 1,994 under the AEC set quota. In response to this, the AEC draft proposal moves 30,746 people to and from Wills (including moving natural borders, splitting communities of interest and suburbs and splitting suburbs across multiple councils). In my view, this is a disproportionate response. I also believe, as many of the objections point out, this has a disproportionate impact on communities of interest in the north of the electorate – which are often communities that don't always feel adequately heard or considered. These communities are embodied in the suburbs of Glenroy, Hadfield, Fawkner, Oak Park, Pascoe Vale, Pascoe Vale South, and Coburg North.

Community of interest including economic, social and regional interests

Migrant and refugee communities

The Division of Wills is a symbol of the thriving multicultural Australia. This is no accident, but the fruits of the hard work of generations of migrants and refugees coming to Australia.

I have had many constituents express their objection to the draft proposal directly to me, and in their written objections to the AEC. These objections have come especially from those belonging to migrant and refugee communities and those who are traditionally underrepresented in the political process who have expressed that the proposed redistribution will negatively impact them. One example are the written objections from the Nepalese community groups who represent a growing part of the Wills community, particularly in Glenroy (see **OB 350, OB356, OB386**). These objections highlight the Nepalese community's concerns about splintering ethnic communities, who share a unique community of interest that should be preserved. The proposed redistribution splits this community in half, using Pascoe Vale Road as an arbitrary border, with organisations such as Gulmi Samaj, the Nepalese Association of Australia, and The Federation of Nepalese Community Associations of Australia having a strong presence in both sides of Glenroy and Oak Park.

There have also been significant objections from Muslim communities who share strong communities of interest across Fawkner, Hadfield, Pascoe Vale, Glenroy, Oak Park, Coburg North, Coburg and Pascoe Vale South that would be separated by the proposed changes along the Western boundary of Wills. This is reflected in many objections, including **OB129, OB228, OB229, OB285, OB307, OB308, OB309, OB343, OB446, OB483, and OB491**. Facilities and services that cater for the significant Muslim populations such as Coburg Islamic Centre, King Khalid Islamic College and Glenroy Private demonstrate a population spread from Glenroy to Fawkner, and Hadfield down to Coburg. Pascoe Vale Road does not separate these Muslim communities from different communities of interest in Maribyrnong, rather, the Moonee Ponds Creek is a recognisable border which largely does.

As objections (including **OB285, OB308, and OB480**) observe, specific refugee or migrant groups have different needs to other refugee or migrant groups. Refugee and migrant advocacy groups provide distinct and much-needed assistance to new migrants and growing communities. Refugees and migrants are not all one community of interest on the sole basis of their status as new migrants to Australia. As they come from different cultures, religious and national experiences, they represent different communities of interest who require their own cultural tailored services provided within the Wills electorate. The Iranian Women's Association [IWA] (**OB 285**) is such an example of a service unique to Wills in that it provides culturally tailored services, advice, and a group dynamic that is supportive of new Iranian migrants which are a growing community in Wills. In contrast with many of the new and emerging migrant communities in the electorate of Maribyrnong, the Wills based IWA; Kurdish community groups and the Islamic College of Sport share symbiotic relationships with suburbs proposed to be removed from Wills (see **OB 343, OB 409 and OB436**). I suggest that these groups are unique in their cultural significance and a community of interest that will be split by the proposed redistribution.

Local Government

Secondly, the proposed redistribution has the effect of adding two Local Government Areas (LGAs) to the Division of Wills. In addition, the suburbs removed by the draft changes also fall within the Merri-Bek LGA. Splitting and removing part of the suburbs Oak Park, Pascoe Vale South and Glenroy and Brunswick West and transferring them to Maribyrnong, does not wholly consider the fact that many of these suburbs' services are provided directly by Merri-Bek City Council which reinforces their connection to the electorate of Wills.

The service delivery of Councils fundamentally connects them as a community of interest – where possible, it assists residents in advocacy and receiving services when LGA and Federal Division boundaries are consistent, as is currently the case along the Western boundary of Wills and Merri-Bek. This argument can be seen in **OB93, OB96, OB97, OB113, OB118, OB121, OB126, OB128, OB159, OB162, OB208, OB303, OB318, OB349, OB364, OB394, OB405, OB409, OB422, OB467** and **OB489**. The benefits of this were that services were uniformly delivered and accessible to the entirety of Wills. Having service delivery uniform across the electorate provides consistency and is representative of a strong community of interest.

Furthermore, the suburb which is alternatively proposed to be added to Wills, Gowanbrae – in line with the necessity for sustainable growth of the electorate – falls within the Merri-Bek City Council and is reliant upon the services which they provide, a view echoed by **OB447**. This is consistent with the argument that Wills should not have a further two LGAs added to it in favour of removing suburbs which rely on services from the Merri-Bek City Council and the culturally appropriate services they provide.

Means of communication and travel

The public transportation services provided by the 19 Tram, the 530 and 531 buses and the Upfield train line connect Brunswick in the south of the electorate all the way through Sydney Road and Coburg, Fawkner and Hadfield. These means of transport are one of the many physical and community features which undermine arguments in some objections which suggest that the proposed boundaries are suitable due to tenuous connections between the whole of the current division of Wills. In addition, the Committee implies, based on removing Brunswick West and Pascoe Vale South from the electorate that travel from these suburbs into the Division of Maribyrnong is simpler than within Wills. No credible evidence provides support to this rationale. Traffic flows, the orientation of roads and the accessibility to transport undermine Redistribution Committee's proposal to move the localities of Brunswick West and Pascoe Vale South into the Division of Maribyrnong. Electors in Brunswick West and Pascoe Vale South are far more likely to travel in the direction of Coburg, Brunswick and Pascoe Vale in Wills – as opposed to Essendon or Strathmore in Maribyrnong – further highlighting the obvious connection that those suburbs have with the localities which constitute the division of Wills. **Objections OB349, OB364, OB383** and **OB467** highlight the means of communications that exist between residents in suburbs like Coburg, Brunswick West, Pascoe Vale South, Glenroy and Oak Park.

Community members from Coburg and Pascoe Vale, particularly from Iranian and Middle Eastern backgrounds, utilise Pascoe Vale Road as a means of travel to connect them to the suburbs of Oak Park, Glenroy and Hadfield because of the culturally sensitive amenities in those suburbs. **Objections OB491, OB494** and **OB500** note the Iranian community of interest that has developed due to the shopping facilities which provide halal food and other services which are attuned to the needs of that community. Moreover, these objections, in addition to others including **OB129, OB228, OB229, OB307, OB409, OB472, OB480** and **OB483** highlight that because of the community of interest that has developed around the Middle Eastern community, many Iranian people travel from around the electorate including from Coburg and Pascoe Vale to Hadfield, Oak Park and Glenroy to seek services such as General Practitioners because they provide healthcare services in Farsi. This connection is facilitated and augmented due to regular travel and utilisation of these roads. Ultimately, this leads to the conclusion that Pascoe Vale Road does not smoothly or seamlessly divide these communities in the manner which it is intended, rather it is a uniting element of the community which links services and amenities, and thus is not a suitable border.

The physical features and area

Similarly, Sydney Road and Pascoe Vale Road are both important routes for transportation within Wills which are unifying features connecting the same community. **Objections OB113, OB121, OB170, OB318, OB409, OB422** and **OB467** are based on the connection via services and transportation that bind the electorate together. Creating a physical border for the electorate of Pascoe Vale Road by removing Pascoe Vale South should be reconsidered as Pascoe Vale Road is a road regularly travelled on by constituents in Coburg and

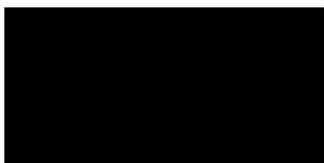
acts as an important conduit for people travelling north in the division of Wills. Pascoe Vale Road is not a major road that is difficult to cross and separates distinct communities – the areas of Oak Park and Glenroy on either side of Pascoe Vale Road are one continuous community with shared facilities and amenities on either side of this road. Put simply, Pascoe Vale Road is as important as Sydney Road for travelling north of the electorate.

Conclusion

While I acknowledge the compulsion for the Division of Wills to grow in accordance with the Electoral Act, the proposed redistribution fails to consider communities of interest, clearly recognisable boundaries and physical features, important local government area boundaries and the means of communication and travel within the Division of Wills. The objections which I have highlighted in my comment underscore the impact of the proposed redistribution. Victorian Labor’s proposed boundaries for the Division of Wills, Melbourne and Maribyrnong achieves the numeral outcome sought by the Redistribution Committee without as significant an impost on the community which I represent. As such, I support that proposal – once which is more closely aligned with the interests, wants and concerns as expressed by the community of Wills.

I would welcome an opportunity to appear at a public hearing of the Commission to discuss my comments further, should such a hearing be held. Please feel free to contact me by email at Peter.Khalil.MP@aph.gov.au or by phone at (03) 9350 5777.

Yours sincerely,



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