



Comment on objections 119

Charles Richardson

8 pages

FEDERAL REDISTRIBUTION 2023-24: VICTORIA

COMMENTS on the OBJECTIONS RECEIVED to the PROPOSAL of the VICTORIAN REDISTRIBUTION COMMITTEE

From CHARLES RICHARDSON

I again congratulate the Redistribution Committee on the degree of public engagement with the redistribution process. Although a large proportion of the 508 objections received are obviously due to co-ordinated campaigns (especially but not exclusively regarding the proposed abolition of *Higgins*), it still leaves a great number of serious and thoughtful contributions that I am sure the Commission will take into account. With such a volume of material it is not possible to comment on everything, but I have tried to pick up on the most significant points, starting with the objections that I had made and then going on to review some objections made in other areas, proceeding around the state in the same generally clockwise order. I hope my thoughts are of some use to the Commission in its deliberations.

1. BELLBRAE (CORANGAMITE / WANNON)

Darren McSweeney (#288), Phillip Drake (#416) and Anonymous25 (#504) support my proposal to keep Bellbrae in *Corangamite*. It seems to me this should be an uncontroversial point. The Liberal Party (#398) would go further and leave all of the existing *Corangamite/Wannon* boundary in place except for transferring Inverleigh to *Ballarat*; this is not unreasonable as far as it goes, but the flow-on effects are troublesome. *Wannon* would need to gain Stawell, and it's then very difficult to find sufficient compensation for *Mallee*.

2. DRUMMOND-FRANKLINFORD AREA (BALLARAT / BENDIGO / MALLEE)

A number of objections concur in criticising this proposed change, including Benjamin Close (#22), Leon Shinkai (#108), Jeff Waddell (#235) and Anonymous25. Mr Drake and Anonymous25 would fix it not by the marginal change I suggest but by taking Woodend from *McEwen*; I like the idea in principle, but (as they realise) it would require more extensive change elsewhere to *McEwen*, and the Commission may not be willing to embark on this. The Greens (#481) propose taking Rochester from *Nicholls*, which is a plausible alternative.

3. LITTLE RIVER (CORIO / GELLIBRAND / HAWKE / LALOR)

Several objectors agree with me on retaining the Little River as a boundary, including James Longford (#10), Mr Close, Mr Waddell, Mr McSweeney, Mr Drake, Will Douglas (#499) and Anonymous25. Mark Mulcair (#174) does not dispute departing from the Little River in principle, but agrees that the proposed boundary is unsatisfactory.

Some of them evidently think that *Corio* requires compensation if the Committee's proposal is reversed, but there is no warrant for this; it is well within the permitted tolerance even without Little River. Objection #85 suggests an unworkable degree of compensation from *Corangamite* and also objects to the transfer of the Bannockburn area to *Corio* from *Corangamite* and (to a small extent) *Ballarat*. But Bannockburn has little in common and no good transport links with either *Corangamite* or *Wannon*; *Corio* is the obvious place for it, especially since the numbers work so well.

4. BROOKLYN and SPOTSWOOD (FRASER / GELLIBRAND)

There seems general agreement that the Committee's proposal to put Spotswood into *Fraser* is an error that should be reversed (see for example PJ (#26), Nimalan Sivakumar (#86), Mr McSweeney and the ALP (#487)). Dr Mulcair also objects to it but seems to think it is required by numerical constraints, but this is not the case. Anonymous25 agrees with me about Brooklyn as well.

5. MELBOURNE AIRPORT and SURROUNDS (GORTON / HAWKE / MARI-BYRNONG)

Dr Mulcair, the Liberal Party, Mr Douglas and Anonymous25 all agree with my contention that this proposed change is quite unnecessary and should be reversed. Anonymous25 would make a direct transfer of the Keilor area from *Gorton* to *Maribyrnong*; crossing the Maribyrnong River in that way is suboptimal, but there are precedents for it and the Commission could consider it if wants to give priority to enrolment trends, given that the projections are almost certainly understating growth in *Gorton*.

6. PRINCES PARK and MELBOURNE GENERAL CEMETERY (MELBOURNE / WILLS)

PJ would go further than my suggestion and move not just the uninhabited area but also the suburb of Princes Hill back into *Melbourne*. This would make a real contribution to equality in enrolments and should be seriously considered.

7. CHRISTMAS HILLS and MUCH MORE (BRUCE / CASEY / LA TROBE / McEWEN / MENZIES)

Dr Mulcair and Adam Ray (#448) echo my comments on the awful *Casey/McEwen* boundary, and the Greens propose the same solution as I did. The Liberal Party appears to be in two minds about it. Mr Close agrees that *Casey* should not extend into the municipalities of Manningham or Nillumbik, but would instead give it territory from *Deakin*. This is possible, but I think the shift southward is more natural and also provides the opportunity to fix the *Bruce/La Trobe* boundary (Feras Jaber (objection #172) and objections #417 and #478 highlight this problem). Mr Shinkai and Anonymouse25 broadly agree with my approach, but they would give *La Trobe* an additional section of Berwick, between the highway and the freeway; this is worth considering if the numbers can be made to work, perhaps with minor adjustments to *Bruce's* boundaries elsewhere. (They would basically pass the deficiency through *Isaacs* to *Goldstein* and *Hotham*, which may perhaps be overambitious, but compare point 14 below.)

8. CHELSEA (DUNKLEY / ISAACS)

Mr Close suggests using the Patterson River all the way as the northern boundary of *Dunkley* and making a corresponding transfer to it from *Flinders*, but this doesn't work: there are not enough projected electors to keep both divisions within the permitted tolerance. See also my comments on Mount Eliza in point 22 below.

9. SOUTHBANK vs SOUTH YARRA (MACNAMARA / MELBOURNE)

I'm pleased to see there is a lot of support for my argument that Southbank is a better fit with *Melbourne* than South Yarra (e.g. Mr Sivakumar, Dr Mulcair, Mr McSweeney, Mr Ray, #482); this strikes me as something that the Commission can and should fix quite easily. (Although the member for *Melbourne* (#384) takes a contrary view.) Objection #91 agrees as far as South Yarra goes but would make the crossing in the Kew-Hawthorn area instead – this seems to me to have very little to recommend it. The Liberal Party and Mr Drake try to compromise between two different approaches and end with a boundary along Toorak Road running through the centre of South Yarra, which should be avoided at all costs.

Several objectors complain about North Fitzroy and North Carlton being split off from *Melbourne*, which is a perfectly reasonable point in isolation, but this is simply the obvious consequence of *Melbourne* taking territory from south of the Yarra: given that, there is nowhere else that *Melbourne* can conveniently lose electors (the ALP would give them to *Maribyrnong* out of North Melbourne and Parkville, which is clearly inferior), and without it, it is much more difficult to provide equitable representation to both northern and southern divisions. I think they also exaggerate the strength of the existing boundary along Park Street – I live between it and Alexandra Parade and would say that the latter is a stronger community divide.

10. PRAHRAN (KOOYONG / MACNAMARA)

Objection #3 agrees on the need to keep Prahran united in *Macnamara*, as do Crew Charleigh (#53), Mr McSweeney, the Liberal Party and the Greens.

11. KOOYONG / MENZIES BORDER

I could not find an objection that specifically addresses this point, but it is subsumed in much of the discussion about the abolition of *Higgins* and the fate of Balwyn North (points 23 and 24 below), and would be incidentally fixed by several of the proposals made in relation to them.

12. BOX HILL SOUTH (CHISHOLM / MENZIES)

There also do not appear to be other objections on this point, but I remain of the view that it should be addressed.

13. CHADSTONE (CHISHOLM / HOTHAM)

The Committee's awkward split of Malvern East is a common theme in the objections,

sometimes as one aspect of the abolition of *Higgins* (see point 23 below) but also as a free-standing grievance (e.g. #176). I still think my limited remedy is worth pursuing. The ALP would move the boundary in the opposite direction, as part of its general plan of forcing *Chisholm* southwards.

14. BENTLEIGH EAST (GOLDSTEIN / HOTHAM)

There is a substantial amount of agreement that the split of Bentleigh East is unsatisfactory and should be addressed. Among the several options, I particularly like Dr Mulcair's suggestion of a clockwise rotation of territory between *Goldstein*, *Hotham*, *Isaacs* and *Bruce*. This would also address two other problems, the less-than-optimal *Bruce/Hotham* boundary down Jacksons Road and the awkward division of central Dandenong between *Bruce* and *Isaacs* (both also noted by Mr Jaber), and I urge the Commission to give it serious consideration. Mr Drake has a rather similar plan. The Greens would go the other way and split Bentleigh East down the middle, which strikes me as much less sensible.

15. MOOLAP (CORANGAMITE / CORIO)

Dr Mulcair suggests a small eastward shift of the *Corangamite/Corio* boundary to align it more closely with the actual boundary of the Geelong built up area. This would make sense; there is no problem with it in terms of numbers, although it does take the already very low *Corangamite* even lower.

16. BALLAN (BALLARAT / HAWKE)

Anonymous25 suggests transferring the Ballan-Blackwood area from *Hawke* to *Ballarat*; this is something that could reasonably be considered if the Commission is worried about enrolment trends.

17. NULLA VALE (BENDIGO / McEWEN / NICHOLLS)

Objection #120, from a resident of Nulla Vale (north of Lancefield), suggests that it would be better off in *McEwen* than in *Nicholls* (or, presumably, *Bendigo*, where the Committee proposes it should go). This makes considerable sense, as the hills north of there (between Emu Flat and Tooborac) form a natural barrier – the municipal boundary (which the current boundary follows) is arguably in the wrong place. A similar argument could be made for Baynton, a little further west in the Shire of Macedon Ranges. The numbers are too small to worry about, so whether it is worth making the adjustment is a matter of judgement, but I would urge the Commission to consider it.

18. GLENROY-OAK PARK (MARIBYRNONG / WILLS)

A large number of objections (examples are #4, #32, #93, #113, #170) criticise the proposed boundary down Pascoe Vale Road, which I had mentioned as something I disliked but had no solution to. A number of them also mention the same boundary further south along the Citylink, which I think is more defensible (and affects a much smaller number of electors) but still less than ideal. Most of them unfortunately offer no solution to the problem; Dr Mulcair however presents a plan with a rotation of territory through *Calwell*, *McEwen* and

Scullin that seems to me to work very well (Mr McSweeney has a similar idea, but he proceeds via *Cooper* rather than *Maribyrnong*, thus leaving the Glenroy problem unsolved). Although it would mean undoing more of the Committee's work, it would preserve the existing boundaries along Moonee Ponds Creek and Merri Creek. The ALP's suggestion involves the southward extension of *Maribyrnong* referred to and disapproved in point nine above.

19. CLIFTON HILL (COOPER / MELBOURNE / SCULLIN)

Having *Cooper* cross Merri Creek to take Clifton Hill is less than ideal (as Mr Longford points out); the creek is a strong local boundary. *Cooper* could instead gain the necessary electors by moving north to the Ring Road, taking Bundoora-West SA2 from *Scullin*. The problem is then how to make the appropriate equalising changes to *Melbourne* and *Scullin*, presumably passing them through *Calwell*, *McEwen* and *Wills*. Since some changes to those boundaries are desirable anyway (see point 18), the Commission may well find that this would be worth the effort.

20. McEWEN

Objection #35 bemoans the lack of coherence to *McEwen* and suggests that its share of the Shire of Macedon Ranges would be better off in the same division as Sunbury (currently *Hawke*). They are entirely correct, as I and others have been saying for a long time. But within the Committee's general scheme of things in the northern suburbs I cannot see any way this can be achieved; it would require a major restructuring, which I assume the Commission will not wish to undertake. (Objection #153, which proposes just such a project, serves to demonstrate how drastic it would be.)

21. WELSHPOOL (GIPPSLAND / MONASH)

PJ suggests moving the Welshpool area from *Monash* to *Gippsland*. This would, as he says, produce greater equality in the projected enrolments, but it would produce greater inequality in the actual enrolments. Since, as I have said before, the actual electors are real but the projected ones are only hypothetical, I believe that (other things being equal) equality of the former should take priority. The case for disturbing the existing boundary (which is also the municipal boundary) is therefore not made out.

22. MOUNT ELIZA (DUNKLEY / FLINDERS)

Once again there are objections to the northward movement of *Flinders*: last time it was Mornington, this time it's Mount Eliza. But *Flinders* is experiencing relative population decline, so it has to expand somewhere, and Mount Eliza is the obvious place. No doubt it will eventually reach the municipal boundary and then some more difficult decisions will have to be made, but for now there is no reasonable alternative. The idea that Pearcedale and Tooradin have a better connection to the Mornington Peninsula than Mount Eliza does (as argued, for example, by the Liberal Party, #462 and Anonymous25) strikes me as a little fanciful – particularly Tooradin; Pearcedale would make some sense, but doesn't have enough electors on its own. Moving in that direction also involves disruption of *Holt*; being a high-growth division, it doesn't really want to be losing low-growth territory.

23. ABOLITION OF HIGGINS

The division of *Higgins* has been the subject of a concerted campaign by those who object to its abolition. The vast majority of them either offer no alternative or do so only in the most general terms. Many of them also adduce the sort of considerations that the Commission should pay no heed to, often brazenly political in nature (#466 is a particularly egregious example, but there are many others). It simply isn't true that the existing *Higgins* represents a single community of interest; as others have pointed out, there is very little in common between Prahran and Ashburton.

Others argue that *Hotham* instead should be abolished (see for example Mr Longford). I don't dispute that this is possible, but it would require a comprehensive rethinking of the Committee's proposal and I am not at all convinced that the result would be as good. Assuming that *Melbourne* is to be the division that crosses the Yarra (and no-one has produced an alternative that works), the general *Higgins-Macnamara* area is where consequent movement has to happen, so it makes sense to abolish a division in that area. It can't really be *Macnamara* because it is wedged in against the coast; it could be *Kooyong* or maybe *Chisholm*, but they don't present the same opportunities for dividing up the existing territory as *Higgins* does. To get to *Hotham*, much more movement has to take place.

Nor am I convinced that *Hotham* is as heterogeneous a division as many objectors claim; I agree that it would be better without Bentleigh East (see the discussion under point 14 above), but the rest of it is held together quite nicely by the Princes Highway and the Dandenong railway (as Mr McSweeney points out). The Committee has given it good strong northern and southern boundaries, although it would be better if it could run east as far as the Eastlink rather than stopping at Jacksons Road, which is not a particularly sharp dividing line.

Part of the motivation of some of the objections concerning *Higgins* is the idea that it is unnatural for *Kooyong* to cross Gardiners Creek (although I note that the local member (#501) seems to have no problem with it) and that the latter division should confine itself to the City of Boroondara, which conveniently is just the right size for a division. But while this sounds nice in theory, it doesn't really work; if you stretch *Chisholm* west to take more of *Higgins* (as suggested by #37) you end up with a long thin east-west division running from Williams Road to Dandenong Creek. This is the problem that has plagued previous redistributions: because the City of Stonnington narrows sharply at Malvern East, a division has to either cross its (strong) northern and southern borders or else take on a strange geographical shape. The price for a neat self-contained *Kooyong* would have to be a general reconstruction involving *Goldstein*, *Hotham* and *Macnamara*, and I don't believe this is worth paying. (If, however, the Commission is inclined to go down that route, I would commend the plan outlined in objection #152, which has a number of very sensible features.)

Some of the objectors content themselves with more limited suggestions, such as #8 and #153, which argue for using Burke Road instead of Tooronga Road as the *Chisholm/Higgins* boundary (echoed by the Liberal Party). Taken in isolation this is a good idea – it would also improve the shape of *Kooyong* a bit – but a compensating transfer would have to be made elsewhere along that boundary, presumably in the Camberwell-Hartwell-Riversdale area, and I'm not sure that this can be done neatly. The member for *Chisholm* (#461) suggests a slightly more radical revision that involves abandoning the southern boundary along the Monash Freeway, a move I would advise against (see also the next point).

24. BALWYN NORTH (KOOYONG / MENZIES)

Several objections argue, either incidentally or as their main point (e.g #282, Mr Ray, Anonymous25), that Balwyn North should move from *Kooyong* to *Menzies*. This had been my thinking in my original submission and I still support it in principle; it is not so easy to reconcile with the Committee's general scheme for that part of Melbourne, but I suggest it is worth investigating to see whether it can be made to work. Something like what Mr McSweeney suggests could be the way to go. The Liberal Party's proposal also seems quite sensible in this area, although it has the flow-on effect of shifting *Chisholm* back south of the Monash Freeway, which I think should be avoided.

25. WARRANTDYTE vs BLACKBURN (DEAKIN / MENZIES)

A number of objections either directly or tangentially deal with the fact that the extension of the proposed *Menzies* into Warrandyte (and, if my objection seven is accepted, Wonga Park as well) looks awkward given the other changes that have been made. (See, for example, Mr Charleigh.) It seems to me that the Committee has tried to compromise between two different approaches and ended up with the worst of both: Warrandyte separated from Park Orchards (creating an awkward shape) and Blackburn split between two divisions. A decision should be made to go fully one way or the other – either unite Blackburn in *Menzies* and put Warrandyte into *Deakin* (Dr Mulcair offers a clear example of this solution), or keep all of the semi-rural parts of Manningham in *Menzies* and unite central Blackburn in *Deakin* (as argued, for example, by #160 and #465). I am inclined to prefer the second option, but either is better than trying to split the difference.

Objection #157 argues that *Deakin* should go back to stretching east-west along the Maroondah Highway, essentially undoing the reorientation of the two divisions that was undertaken in 2020-21. I argued against that reorientation at the time and I endorse her comments now, although I doubt that the Commission will be interested in reversing itself. The ALP has a similar proposal, accompanied by a restructure of *Aston's* northern boundary that I find unconvincing.

26. HEATHMONT (ASTON / DEAKIN)

A number of objectors are unhappy with the proposed extension of *Aston* into Heathmont and Bayswater North (e.g. #317, #359). I agree that this is less than ideal, but *Aston* needs to gain electors from somewhere and I am inclined to agree with the Committee that this is the least disruptive place for it to get them. Mr Close suggests that it could take Vermont and Vermont South instead; this is possible, but it seems to me that Dandenong Creek is a stronger boundary at that point than it is further upstream. Similar remarks apply to #376's suggestion of taking part of Mulgrave. Better, perhaps, is Mr Waddell's suggestion that it could move into *Casey* along the Belgrave corridor. Objection #411 proposes a radical redesign of *Aston* and *Deakin*, which I fail to see much merit in.

27. CLARINDA (HOTHAM / ISAACS)

PJ suggests the transfer of the southern part of Clarinda from *Hotham* to *Isaacs*. While I applaud the aim of equalising enrolments, that is not achieved in this case as compared to the Committee's proposal; it would move actual enrolments further from equality. If my suggested changes to the two divisions (numbers eight and 14 above) are made, or something

else of similar effect, then there would be an advantage to shifting some of Clarinda, but even then I doubt whether it be worth disrupting the strong boundary along the Dingley By-pass.

28. NAMES

Many objections are concerned solely or primarily with the names of divisions, a subject I regard as of secondary importance. I remain of the view that *Melbourne* should be renamed, given that it duplicates a state electoral district and that the state had priority with it, but apart from that I have nothing to add to the discussion. I would strongly urge, however, in contrast to the suggestion from some objectors, that the Commission should not use names as a criterion in deciding which division is to be abolished: the boundaries should be worked out first, then names allocated to the resulting divisions.

29. ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

A number of objectors comment on the problem with the initially published enrolment projections and lament the fact that inadequate opportunity to make submissions was therefore available in the first place. (I cannot help noting the Liberal Party's change of front on this point: having originally argued against any "attempts to second guess" the figures, it now admits that "it was intuitively clear that there was an error in that data.") Objection #437 points out that it is disingenuous (my word, not his) for the Committee to cite, in support of aspects of its proposal, suggestions that were made on the basis of a completely different set of projections and have therefore lost relevance.

Mr Waddell argues eloquently for abandoning the whole idea of projections, which are so often wrong, and just relying on trend growth with a larger tolerance. I concur wholeheartedly. I realise (as does he) that this is something the Commission cannot do on its own, but it should make the case for legislative change in its report.

Dr Mulcair notes that the Committee has abandoned its previous practice of providing a narrative that worked through the divisions in some geographical order, and points out that this was easier to follow than the current purely alphabetical presentation. I fully endorse his comments on this.

It also struck me that when listing the objections or submissions received, the Commission used to indicate the size of the relevant files; this was very helpful as an indication of how substantial they were and therefore how much time might be required both to download and to consider them. I notice that this useful feature has disappeared – could we please have it back for the comments?

Respectfully submitted,

Charles Richardson

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