



Objection Number 102

Tim Colebatch

11 pages

From: Tim Colebatch
Sent: Friday, 27 August 2010 4:45 PM
To: VIC Redistribution
Subject: objection to proposed redistribution of Victorian electorates
Attachments: OBJECTION.doc

To the Redistribution Commissioners for Victoria

I enclose my objection to the Proposed Redistribution of Victorian electorates.

A separate copy of this objection is being sent by fax.

Yours sincerely

Tim Colebatch

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OBJECTION

To the Draft Redistribution
of Federal Electoral Boundaries
in Victoria

By Tim Colebatch

I hereby lodge an objection to the proposed boundaries for Victorian Federal electorates put forward by the Redistribution Committee.

I object on four grounds;

1. The redistribution is based on an incorrect assumption that northern Victoria cannot retain three electorates without breaking some fundamental principle. As I show, this is not true. There is no need to abolish Murray, and past and future population growth in Victoria can be comfortably accommodated in the existing 37 electorates.
2. The committee's proposals are unnecessarily disruptive. They would transfer 638,000 Victorian voters (on 2014 projections) into new electorates. Some 17 per cent of voters, one in six, would be displaced. They would have one MP and one place to seek help before the election, and another MP and another place to seek help after it. This should be avoided if possible. I submit that it is possible.
3. The proposals for outer suburban Melbourne, as in 2002, cram the city's growth corridors into too few electorates, with the result that by the latter years for which these boundaries would apply, we would once again have far too many voters in the seats of Lalor, Gorton and Holt, all of which by 2018 would have between 12,000 and 16,000 more enrolled voters than the state average.
4. The proposals for inner Melbourne do not make sufficient allowance for future growth, on the committee's own projections. By 2018 Melbourne and Melbourne Ports would have enrolments of 6 to 9 per cent above the state average, while those in almost all middle suburban electorates would be below average.

I am a journalist who has studied and written about redistributions and elections since 1973. I have no political affiliation or axe to grind. I write only because I think the redistribution committee made a mistake, or several mistakes, which if confirmed, would make the distribution of boundaries worse rather than better.

I note that, for the second redistribution in succession in Victoria, the committee has been heavily influenced by the submission of Charles Richardson, who emphasises that he is politically independent.

I have great respect for Charles' expertise in this area, and for the quality of his political commentary. But I think you should also know that he is a former Liberal government staffer, that he is/was writing a history of the Liberal Party, and that his suggestions for redistributions, both now and in 2002, have repeatedly favoured the Liberal side.

I point to the dramatic changes made in 2002 to McEwen and McMillan, which sharply improved the Liberals' prospects in both seats, at the cost of breaking the principle of maintaining community of interest. I point too to the changes proposed this time for Corangamite, Deakin and McEwen, which ABC analyst Antony Green estimates would deliver the Coalition another two seats.

I agree that redistribution commissioners should not be swayed by the political implications of their decisions. They should aim at setting boundaries that give the electors fair representation, and not at maintaining any political status quo. I suggest simply that commissioners should be wary of where they take their advice.

I would like to deal first with my objections 3 and 4.

The draft report focuses on the projected populations of seats in 2014. But in 2014 the new boundaries would have only just taken effect, and on the normal electoral timetable, they would have effect from late 2013 at least to 2019, the earliest year in which the next redistribution might take effect. 2014 is the start of the period in which they will be in force, not the midpoint or anywhere near it.

I suggest we focus rather on the projected populations in 2018, after two elections have been held on the new boundaries. On the committee's proposals, and on an arbitrary but logical assumption that the pace of population growth in each seat from 2010 to 2014 continues on to 2018, these are the projected populations:

	2014	2018	
Aston	101,990	108,563	
Ballarat	100,786	106,921	
Batman	101,938	109,108	
Bendigo	98,488	105,501	
Bruce	99,904	104,542	
Burke	100,031	116,209	* 6.7 % above average
Calwell	103,721	106,390	
Casey	98,960	104,051	
Chisholm	98,312	105,150	
Corangamite	98,753	106,101	
Corio	102,153	106,681	
Deakin	100,291	105,173	
Dunkley	98,427	103,415	# 5.1 % below average
Flinders	102,063	107,147	
Gellibrand	102,639	111,353	
Gippsland	102,036	108,770	
Gorton	103,422	124,401	* 14.2 % above average
Higgins	98,292	104,451	
Holt	102,125	120,932	* 11.0 % above average
Hotham	101,669	106,774	
Indi	101,473	106,216	
Isaacs	101,959	112,004	
Jagajaga	103,446	107,493	
Kooyong	100,361	105,383	
LaTrobe	99,782	111,325	
Lalor	102,771	121,461	* 11.5 % above average
Mallee	103,723	107,050	
Maribyrnong	103,770	106,065	
McEwen	102,609	109,975	
McMillan	102,394	110,882	
Melbourne	101,081	118,321	* 8.6 % above average
Melb Ports	99,726	115,329	* 5.9 % above average
Menzies	98,443	101,487	# 6.9 % below average
Scullin	100,650	107,257	
Wannon	104,239	110,207	
Wills	102,631	109,965	
Average	101,222	108,952	
Total	3,745,205	4,031,228	

I suggest that these projections show the draft proposals are badly flawed. On reasonable projections, exactly the same projections as was used in the proposed report, the disparities between enrolments in 2018 will be as high as 22.5 per cent, between Gorton (124,401) and Menzies (101,487). Three electorates would have enrolments more than 10 per cent above average, six would be more than 5 per cent above average, and two would be more than 5 per cent below average.

I also note that the nine largest electorates (in enrolment) in 2018 are all Labor seats, while the four smallest electorates are all Liberal seats. It is highly undesirable that a redistribution commission be open to even a suspicion of partisanship.

With the greatest respect, when the committee's own projections lead to disparities of that size, the draft redistribution is a draft that should be thrown away. I suggest the commissioners start again, making three changes to the draft:

- Enrolments in inner city seats (Melbourne, Melbourne Ports and Gellibrand) should be slightly reduced.
- Enrolments in middle suburban Melbourne seats should be slightly increased.
- The boundaries for outer suburban Melbourne should be completely redrawn to resemble a pie chart, with each outer electorate having one growth corridor only. Melbourne's outer suburban growth needs to be spread among more electorates than the draft proposes.

I will return to this issue at the end of my submission.

For further comparison, I have used the same growth projections to estimate what enrolments in the existing 37 electorates would be in 2018, as follows:

Projected enrolment of existing divisions

	June 2014	Oct 2018*	% above average	% below average
Aston	98,260	104,420		
Ballarat	100,786	106,921		
Batman	93,702	101,268		- 7.1 %
Bendigo	104,722	111,866		
Bruce	91,765	95,853		- 12.0 %
Calwell	109,034	119,742	+ 9.9 %	
Casey	95,903	101,430		- 6.9 %
Chisholm	91,635	98,571		- 9.5 %
Corangamite	106,032	114,316		
Corio	95,139	100,448		- 7.8 %
Deakin	90,731	94,894		- 12.9 %
Dunkley	97,784	102,760		- 5.7 %
Flinders	102,669	107,763		
Gellibrand	102,248	111,443		
Gippsland	102,038	108,772		
Goldstein	97,749	103,702		
Gorton	126,751	145,608	+ 33.6 %	
Higgins	95,284	102,330		- 6.1 %
Holt	121,943	141,192	+ 29.6 %	
Hotham	93,256	98,022		- 10.0 %
Indi	95,386	99,799		- 8.4 %
Isaacs	109,577	119,864	+ 10.0 %	
Jagajaga	96,909	99,892		- 8.3 %
Kooyong	92,087	96,533		- 11.4 %
La Trobe	105,762	117,792	+ 8.1 %	
Lalor	129,351	151,397	+ 39.0 %	
Mallee	91,721	94,508		- 13.2 %
Maribyrnong	88,363	89,117		- 18.2 %
McEwen	122,829	136,236	+ 25.0 %	
McMillan	97,313	105,317		
Melbourne	112,694	130,973	+ 20.2 %	
Melb Ports	107,152	121,466	+ 11.5 %	
Menzies	92,932	95,728		- 12.1 %
Murray	92,402	96,174		- 11.7 %
Scullin	94,598	99,546		- 8.6 %
Wannon	96,331	101,855		- 6.5 %
Wills	102,337	109,195		
Average	101,222	108,952		

I turn now to objections 1 and 2. In short, my objection is that you have dramatic changes to the boundaries when only relatively small changes were needed. I argue for the principle of imposing the minimum change necessary. And I show that it is easily possible to do it within the existing 37 electorates.

Please forgive me if I make my suggestions in broadbrush form, without the degree of detail in some other submissions. Because of the Federal election campaign, I have not had time to get into that level of detail, and I see no need to do so.

Let's start from the same place you did: on the banks of the Little River, at the boundary between greater Melbourne and greater Geelong.

Unlike your draft, I would respect that boundary. Lara is clearly part of the Geelong region. It is in Geelong under the defined state government boundaries, it is part of the greater Geelong council, and it is part of the Barwon region as defined by the Bureau of Statistics. Your statement that it is more part of Melbourne was unsupported by any evidence of that. I find it very odd that you have followed Charles Richardson's proposal on this, which again, offered no evidence to justify what appears a clear breach of the principle of community of interest.

Only minor internal changes are needed to the boundaries of Corio and Corangamite. On current enrolment (election 2010) they are 0.5 per cent above quota. On your projections for 2014, they would be 0.6 per cent below quota. Presumably in 2018 they would be slightly more below quota, but still very close. I propose that you leave the external boundaries unchanged, and simply redraw the line between them to even up the disparity, taking account of projected population growth to 2018. Minimum disruption.

Wannon on present boundaries would be 5000 or so voters below average enrolment. It doesn't need to add Horsham, and disrupt Mallee. It simply needs to be extended north to the Divide, or a line from where it ends to the SA border, taking in Edenhope and a few smaller polling booths. If more are needed, I suggest the boundary be moved to the southern border of the Little Desert, and/or across to the Western Highway between Stawell and Green Lake. Minimal disruption.

Mallee needs 15,000 or so voters, taking account of those lost to Wannon. Obviously these would come by extending the seat east into Murray, taking in the shire of Loddon and if necessary, Echuca, but not otherwise across the Campaspe.

Murray and Indi would then need about 30,000 votes about them, and by 2014 there will be pretty well exactly that number living north of the Divide, outside Melbourne, but enrolled in McEwen: Seymour, Alexandra, Broadford, Kilmore, Yea, Flowerdale etc. You don't even need to bring the rural electorates to the outer boundary of greater Melbourne, although that would be justified if needed. I don't have any insights to offer on the boundary between Murray and Indi.

The arithmetic set out above is pretty clear. It is simply incorrect to assert, as the draft report does, that 'it is no longer feasible to maintain three divisions in northern Victoria without significant compromise to community of interests or without crossing significant geographical boundaries'. I have shown how it is feasible, and can be done with minimal disruption to voters' existing enrolments.

It is not correct to say that the rural seats would have to be brought to the boundaries of Melbourne (although it would not matter if they were): it is simply enough to bring them to the Great Divide. It is not correct to say that maintaining three northern seats would require changes to Ballarat and Bendigo. In my submission, both seats are unchanged.

I am not saying this to insult anyone or cause trouble, but the Redistribution Committee was misinformed. It based its decisions on statements which were not correct, and are not supported by the evidence. And the effect of its proposals would be to cause major disruption to enrolments, shifting 176,000 rural and regional voters into new seats. It's not necessary or desirable.

Gippsland and McMillan, taken together, need only 3000 or so additional voters – but they do need an internal boundary which respects the first principle set out in the Act: community of interest. My knowledge of the Latrobe Valley dates from long ago, so I may be wrong, but the notion that Moe and Morwell do not share a community of interest seems to me utter nonsense. To the extent that there was a divide in the Valley, it always seemed to me to be between them and Traralgon, not between Moe and the other towns.

I urge you to correct the mistake made by the commissioners last time, and put Moe, Morwell and Churchill back into one electorate. Ideally, all four towns should be in the one electorate, and all of South Gippsland in one electorate, as in the past. If you believe it is no longer desirable to extend Gippsland to Korumburra, then maybe the best solution would be to put Moe into Gippsland and all of South Gippsland into McMillan: Yarram, Port Albert, Longford, Seaspray etc. At least that would respect the mandate you are given by Parliament to keep together communities of interest. McMillan could then make up its numbers by adding a bit more at the Melbourne end of the seat.

On the Melbourne electorates, I suggest three changes:

1. Melbourne and Melbourne Ports should lose a few thousand voters each, to prevent them becoming oversized within three years of the new boundaries taking effect in 2013.
2. Future enrolments in outer suburban electorates, especially Lalor, Gorton and Holt, should be reduced by redesigning the electorates. I urge the commission to design outer suburban electorates on radial lines, extending out from settled suburbs into the growth areas, so that the growth is shared among a number of seats rather than a few. The proposal design of Menzies and Jagajaga is a good example of what could be done with Aston, McEwen (which in my submission becomes purely metropolitan), Scullin, Calwell, Gorton and Lalor.

Aston should extend into the growth areas along the Princes Highway. McEwen should extend out along the Plenty corridor. Scullin should extend up the Hume Highway. Calwell should extend north-west along the Calder Highway. Gorton should extend west along the Western Highway. And Lalor should extend south-west along the Princes Freeway, stopping at the boundaries of Melbourne.

3. The middle suburban electorates should have slightly higher enrolments than proposed by the committee, to

allow for the growth in enrolments in inner and outer areas.

I hope you consider this submission carefully, and look again at the committee's proposals. I think there is a better way to do it, which would be less disruptive.

Yours sincerely

Tim Colebatch