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**Objection Number 106**

**Dr. Liz Curran, Director - West Heidelberg Community Legal Service  
Inc.**

**3 pages**

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**From:** Liz Curran [liz.curran@bchs.org.au]  
**Sent:** Friday, 27 August 2010 5:31 PM  
**To:** VIC Redistribution  
**Subject:** Submission: Electoral boundary redistribution in Victoria - Jaga Jaga  
**Attachments:** AEC Redistribution Boundaries 27 August 2010.pdf

Dear AEC see Submission attached.

Regards,  
Dr Liz Curran  
Director  
West Heidelberg Community Legal Service Inc.  
21 Alamein Rd  
Vic, 3081  
phone (03) 94502032  
Fax (03) 94581067

WEST HEIDELBERG  
COMMUNITY  
LEGAL SERVICE



21 Alamein Rd, West Heidelberg 3081

Ph (03) 9450 ABN 48 964 511 645

2002 Fax (03) 9458 1067

27 August 2010

Dear Australian Electoral Office,

*Re: Electoral boundary redistribution in Victoria - Jaga Jaga*

We are aware that the AEC has put forward proposed maps for electoral boundary redistribution in Victoria. For Jaga Jaga, we understand this means losing West Heidelberg and Ivanhoe, west of Waterdale Rd.

The WHCLS commenced operation in 1975 with the volunteer legal services of John Cain, the former Premier of Victoria. Informed of the high levels of legal need in the area<sup>1</sup> he offered his services to the newly established West Heidelberg Health Service on a Monday night. The legal service is based within the Olympic village of 1956, the facilities of which were handed over for public housing. Today, due to tightly targeted, segmented waiting lists, many but not all, of the clients of the service come from significantly disadvantaged social backgrounds including families fleeing domestic violence, newly arrived and older migrant communities with a large proportion of people from the Horn of Africa, people with some form of disability or mental health issues, people with poor income support or on social security benefits. The legal service has been fortunate for thirty years to partner with a Clinical Legal Education Program of La Trobe University and is co-located with Banyule Community Health (BCH). The health service provides health, allied health and social welfare services and enables the legal service to reach out to more people in need through these partnerships.

As a local service provider we are concerned this redistribution may split West Heidelberg and Heidelberg Heights into two separate electorates which we believe may not to the community's advantage. We do a lot of community development work and have been trying to build on understandings between these two communities.

Many staff from La Trobe University (LTU) reside in Heidelberg Heights. LTU is a partner of this legal service and so severing this link could also have implications for the continuance of LTU commitment to the area as staff currently see the legal service as part of their own community's response and LTU invests significant resources (unique in Australia) to enable our service to reach

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<sup>1</sup> M Cass, R Sackville, *Legal Needs of the Poor*, Australian Government Printing service (1975); M Noone and S Tomsen, *Lawyers in Conflict: Australian Lawyers and Legal Aid* (2006) 216 and J Dickson, '25 Years of Clinical Legal Education at La Trobe University' (2004) 29(1), *Alternative Law Journal*.

more clients through the offering of the LTU student clinical program. This program assists approximately half of the legal services 512 clients per annum to receive legal assistance.

West Heidelberg is a community of significant disadvantage. West Heidelberg is one of the most disadvantaged communities in Victoria, Australia. In research into social disadvantage in Victoria conducted in 2006, West Heidelberg was ranked twentieth in the 40 highest-ranking postcodes (out of a total of 726) for general disadvantage. This level of disadvantage was similar in 1999 and 2004. This research looked at 24 indicators, the major ones being computer use, internet access, low-income families, post-school qualifications, disability/sickness support, interventions by State child protection agencies, early school leavers, low work skills, year 12 incomplete, dependency ratio and criminal convictions.<sup>2</sup> Even with this context, West Heidelberg remains a resilient and proud community but one which with proper support, resources and infrastructure would be able to reduce the points of tension, pressure and strain that the community is often placed under that are revealed in these statistics above. Heidelberg Heights and Ivanhoe also have some public housing but is an area which has a population that is better off. At the legal service we are trying to avert any further separations between the communities that might allow West Heidelberg to become even more of a pocket of disadvantage. As we try hard to unite people in these two areas and encourage the sharing of their stories and commonalities and use local media to increase understandings, we hope to reduce barriers that inhibit such interactions and opportunities for these areas to work together on a range of community activities, policy and advocacy initiatives.

The AEC is working off the premise that the community will experience no disadvantage as there are not sufficient community links. Our work in this area would seem to suggest that there are community and university links being forged and already in action and that the redistribution may place one further impediment to enabling our local geographic community to better engage and advance together.

We hope you will consider this letter in your deliberations,

Yours faithfully,



Dr Liz Curran

Director

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<sup>2</sup> Vinson T, *Dropping off the Edge: The Distribution of Disadvantage in Australia*, Jesuit Social Services Australia (2007) 66-70.