



# Comment on suggestions 33

Punjabi Club of Victoria

4 pages

## Comment on Suggestions

We thank the Redistribution Committee for the opportunity to comment on Suggestions.

We have reviewed the various Suggestions published on the Committee's website as well as the Liberal Party's Suggestion that was published on their own website.

Again, we limit our comments to divisions in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne as that is the community we serve and are best placed to comment on. We also make comments on other divisions where the choice of boundaries in the eastern suburbs has a consequential impact on the Committee's consideration of boundaries further afield.

We have identified the following two key issues from the various Suggestions:

1. Crossing the Yarra River
2. No/Minimal Changes to Boundaries

### Crossing the Yarra River

One of the biggest strategic decisions of the Committee that will shape the whole map of Victoria, is where to draw a Division that crosses the Yarra River. This was a common theme in the Suggestions that recognised the distribution of population across Victoria.

The Yarra River has traditionally been the great dividing line through Melbourne, both physically and demographically. This is why it is the common starting point for redistributions at both state and federal levels. It provides a strong, easily identifiable boundary across a large expanse of Melbourne that conveniently flows on to the Great Dividing Range to the northeast of Melbourne through to the Victoria-NSW state border. Crossing the Yarra River has generally been avoided, as it best aligns with the requirements to consider communities of interest, means of communication, and physical features in s66(3)(b) of the Electoral Act, and has only been considered when required by the overriding requirements of s66(3)(a) to ensure each division is within 3.5% of the average divisional enrolment.

In the past, divisions have crossed the Yarra River in many places and in different divisions. In the early 20th century, Melbourne Ports crossed the Yarra River spanning Williamstown to South Melbourne. Up until the 1980s, Diamond Valley (as well as earlier divisions of Deakin among others) spanned the area from Diamond Creek, Heidelberg to Doncaster (and further afield). More recently, McEwen (until the 2010 Redistribution) covered areas across the northeast of Melbourne from Craigieburn, Kilmore, Marysville, Yarra Junction, among others, in the Yarra Valley. Currently, Casey crosses the Yarra River in the Yarra Valley and Menzies in Warrandyte.

This shows that divisions crossing the Yarra River have been quite common throughout the history of political cartography in Victoria. However, they also show that past Redistribution Committees have balanced the needs of ensuring equal electors with community of interest alignments. The Committee will once again need to do this at this redistribution given the need to enable a more equitable balance of electors across proposed electoral divisions in metropolitan Melbourne.

In the suggestions, three themes, one with two variations, for balancing elector numbers across the Yarra river were identified:

1. Yarra Estuary: A division crossing the Yarra River along the current boundary between the Divisions of Melbourne and Macnamara
2. Outer North-East: A division on the northeastern fringe of Melbourne, from the northern suburbs to the Yarra Valley.

3. Inner North-East: A division crossing the Yarra River along the current boundary between the Divisions of Jagajaga and Menzies, with two broad variations:
  - a. Crossing in the west, in the area around Ivanhoe, Heidelberg, Bulleen, and Templestowe
  - b. Crossing in the north, in the area around Eltham, Research, and Warrandyte

#### Yarra Estuary

We note the Liberal Party's Suggestion (as published on the Liberal Party website) of crossing the Yarra River between Docklands and Jolimont.

To quote the Liberal Party's 2018 Comments on Suggestions: "This is a questionable application of the matters for consideration in s66(3)(b) Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 as Docklands is separated by the Yarra River at its widest point from the remainder of the proposed division of Melbourne Ports with no direct pedestrian access and limited vehicle access via the freeway passing over the Bolte Bridge. There are also no shared local sporting teams or community groups that cross the Yarra at this point and all shops and amenities in Docklands would be located in the proposed division of Melbourne."

This related to a proposal by the Greens of including Docklands in the then Division of Melbourne Ports. While the Liberal Party have partially addressed their previous concerns about access across the river between the two parts by incorporating West Melbourne and the CBD, the concern remains that these are two disparate parts of Inner Melbourne, when considering the electors that reside in the areas to the north and south of the Yarra River. Most of the electors north of the Yarra River are not directly connected to those south of the Yarra River as they live in an outer circle across Docklands and West Melbourne, separated by the office towers and shopping districts of the Melbourne CBD. These residents do not cross the Yarra River to go south to access community amenities, they stay local, go to the CBD, or north into Carlton or Fitzroy. Similarly, residents in Southbank and South Melbourne similarly do not venture north beyond the CBD (much like most residents of Greater Melbourne who frequent the CBD).

We also note that Dr Charles Richardson has proposed an alternative where just Southbank is transferred into the Division of Melbourne. This would be a relatively small transfer of electors, but it does make more sense than the Liberal Party's Suggestion, as it only takes in the residents in Southbank that share common characteristics with those of Docklands and other residents of the CBD. Realistically Southbank could be included in either Melbourne or Macnamara, but generally in terms of physical features and existing boundary grounds, the Committee should keep it in Macnamara unless there is a clear need to ensure an equitable distribution of electors.

In paragraph 366 of the Committee's 2018 Proposed Boundaries Report: "The Redistribution Committee also considered arguments in favour of moving the locality of Docklands to the Division of Melbourne Ports, however, the relatively small number of electors transferred would not greatly assist in addressing the imbalance of electors in electoral divisions either side of the Yarra River."

We submit that the small number of electors that would be moved from Docklands, West Melbourne, and the CBD into Macnamara as proposed by the Liberal Party, or the transfer of those in Southbank to Melbourne as proposed by Dr Richardson, would similarly not assist in addressing the imbalance of electors in electoral divisions either side of the Yarra River, while creating issues relating to communities of interest in an unnecessarily disjointed division.

### Outer North-East

We note the Labor Party's Suggestion to abolish the Division of Casey and extend the Division of McEwen across the outer North-East and East of Melbourne's urban fringe. The Labor Party is advocating a quasi-pre-2010 alignment of the Division of McEwen where it takes in bits and pieces that remain once all the other divisions in regional Victoria and Melbourne have been already created. While we acknowledge that it is likely that there will always be a "bits and pieces" division in a redistribution, given the various competing pressures of ensuring equitable enrolment, population growth, and communities of interest, means of communication, and physical features, any such division needs to still comply with these requirements of the Electoral Act.

The Labor Party's Suggestion incorporates Mill Park in the Division of McEwen while failing to provide any means of communication between Mill Park and the remainder of the Division. The Plenty River, on the eastern locality boundary of Mill Park, is not a navigable river and its incorporated length is actually within the Plenty Gorge Park - with very high ridges on either side of the Plenty River. So even if the Plenty River was a dry river bed, it would not be easy to cross where the Labor Party has suggested. Also, there are no road or pedestrian bridge (or otherwise) crossings to provide means of communication across the Division in this part.

Additionally, in the 2018 Redistribution, the Committee considered the transfer of the Nillumbik Shire Council into the Division of Casey and found "for community of interest reasons, the Nillumbik Shire Council not transfer to the proposed Division of Casey." (pp 111-112, *2018 Proposed Boundaries Report*) This was likely due to the very limited means of communication between the area of the Nillumbik Shire Council and the rest of Casey. Nothing has changed since then in terms of roads or other crossings across what are the foothills of the Great Dividing Range.

We note that the Greens also suggest Casey crossing across this area into Hurstbridge and Pantom Hill.

For the foregoing reasons, we would strongly urge the Committee to not balance electors north and south of the Yarra River in this manner.

### Inner North-East

The third and final area that has been suggested for a division crossing the Yarra River is the transfer of electors from the Division of Jagajaga into Menzies.

For expediency, we refer to our Suggestion relating to this transfer and maintain the position in our submitted Suggestions that the best place to transfer these electors is from the western part of Jagajaga (around Ivanhoe, Heidelberg, Rosanna, and Lower Plenty) into Menzies. We would add that these electors in Jagajaga orient towards various different activity centres and community amenities, in particular within their local area, and also across to Preston, Doncaster, and Greensborough in equal measure. These electors could equally be in Cooper, Jagajaga, as well as Menzies - but to ensure an equitable distribution of electors across all electorates, in this Redistribution they would be best placed in the Division of Menzies.

We note the Greens Suggestion for the transfer of electors from the eastern part of Jagajaga to Menzies. This would largely reverse the changes at the previous redistribution in 2021 and revert to the previous boundaries from 2017. In isolation, this is a reasonable proposal. However, in the context of other, more compelling changes that need to occur across Victoria - namely the reduction in the total number of divisions - this approach boxes in the Division of Jagajaga to the north-east and will create problems in future redistributions by

limiting the areas into which Jagajaga may move to address population growth issues. Additionally, it leads to other subpar outcomes to divisions to the north-east of Melbourne, where Hurstbridge and Panton Hill are cut off from Diamond Creek and transferred into the Division of Casey - with limited means of communication between those areas.

Given that we believe the Committee has other alternatives for the transfer of electors between divisions north and south of the Yarra River, the Committee should avoid creating electorates that devalue the communities of interest, means of communication, and physical features in the north-east of Melbourne.

### **No/Minimal Changes to Boundaries**

A number of Suggestions expressly or implicitly suggest that the Committee should make no or minimal changes to existing boundaries wherever possible. We acknowledge s66(3)(b)(v) of the Electoral Act makes this a consideration that the Committee must take into account, while also making it subordinate to the equitable distribution of electors across all divisions and the other matters in (3)(b) — s66(3A).

The legislative intent is clear: where possible the Committee should maintain boundaries as they are, unless there are clear and necessary reasons to change them. While we submit that continuity in boundaries is a good thing for electors, it is not the most important factor the Committee must consider. The Committee should look at Redistributions in isolation to see where it can improve boundaries on communities of interest, means of communication, and physical features, and only consider previous boundaries where these other matters are equal. Given that previous redistributions have well considered these matters, it makes sense to minimise changes. However, in this Redistribution it is inevitable that larger scale changes will have to occur as there is one less division. So, Suggestions that propose minimal change to the eastern suburbs of Melbourne inevitably ignore the relative population changes in these areas and their future trends. Major changes to the alignment of these Divisions is inevitable now and in future redistributions.

It is for this reason that we suggested that Kooyong and Deakin act as bookends to the Divisions of Menzies and Chisholm, allowing the Redistribution Committee to make minor adjustments to these Divisions in future, while providing a population pressure release valve across the Yarra River in Menzies that also allows Chisholm to move north or south as required to address differences in population growth between the north-west and south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne.

### **Conclusion**

We thank the Redistribution Committee for their consideration of our Comments on Suggestions and we welcome any future opportunities to contribute to and inform the Committee's deliberations and creation of boundaries.

Kind regards

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Treasurer

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