



Comment on objections 12

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4 pages

Comments on objections to proposed redistribution of electoral boundaries in the Australian Capital Territory

Introduction

I did not expect that 75 objections would be lodged in regard to what I considered to be a rather innocuous proposal.

On further inspection, the overwhelming majority of objections lodged relate to the name of the new division – Bean.

I had hoped to lodge my own objection, but time got the better of me, so I have attached my original thoughts as an appendix to these comments. Those remarks should be considered to form part of these comments on objections, although written prior to reviewing the lodged objections.

Boundaries of divisions

I have no objections to any of the boundaries proposed by the Committee, however I feel that some consideration should be given to the following objections:

I would support the objection of Martin Gordon, advocating for a more direct, logical boundary of Fenner and Canberra through the suburbs of Belconnen.

I would support the objection of Josh Wyndham-Kidd to include Symonston in Canberra. This small area is detached from the remaining areas on Bean, and not well served by being included with Tuggeranong.

I would support the objection of Ned O. Strange that Norfolk Island is placed in Canberra instead of Bean, and this, in fact, aligns with my original suggestion.

I do not support the objections of Natalie Ragg, the Canberra Liberals, or Eric W Firth, that suggest uniting all of Belconnen and Woden in their own divisions. The end result of attempting to adopt these suggestions is entirely unsatisfactory, including uniting Belconnen with Weston Creek, two areas completely separate.

While in time, the development of the Molonglo Valley District may lessen this divide, at the present time, there is no justification for including Belconnen in a division with Weston Creek.

Name of the new division

The vast majority of the objections relate to the choice of the name Bean, honouring Charles Edwin Woodrow Bean.

Had I been present in the Committee discussions, I would have likely voted for either Cullen or Nott, as I believe both individuals are probably more representative of the character and endeavours that should be honoured with a division name. I was, however willing to accept that the Committee voted and a decision had been reached.

It does seem that not everyone agreed with the Committee however. Many objections speak directly to Mr Bean's character, in particular his apparent anti-Semitism and opposition to Sir John Monash. It does seem rather ironic that at the same time that the Victorian redistribution Committee is preparing to name a division after Monash, the ACT redistribution Committee is considering naming a division for the man that apparently conspired to downplay his role.

I feel that perhaps the Committee has erred in this regard and failed to read the mood of the community. Especially more so with the coincidental timing, this being the centenary of the World War I Armistice, and the opening of the Sir John Monash Centre on ANZAC Day falling within the objection period.

As a result of this, *I propose that the Committee reconsider naming the newly created southern division Cullen or Nott.*

Other considerations

There were a number of objections that made reference to the redistribution process, and the inclusion of Norfolk Island within a division the Australian Capital Territory.

These comments are out of scope and therefore cannot be considered by the Committee.

The public consultation method and notice period are clearly articulated in the redistribution process, forms part of the Commonwealth Electoral Act, and with suggestions; comments on suggestions; objections as well as comments on objections, there is clearly adequate opportunity for community input and the process is evidently well-defined. I do not support these parts of the objections of Kim Fischer or Jim Mallett and Jack McCaffrie.

Likewise, the Committee cannot determine whether Norfolk Island is included in a division, merely which division. The self-government of Norfolk Island is not a consideration in this process. The objections of John G. Howard and Rosemary H. Howard, Matthew Hawkins and the Norfolk Island People for Democracy would be better directed at their local Member of Parliament.

Summary

Some minor adjustments could be made to better align local communities in Belconnen and Symonston. Norfolk Island community is clearly detached from the remaining areas of the Territory, so consideration could be given for placement within either Canberra or the new division. Otherwise, the boundaries and general composition of the divisions should be left relatively unchanged.

The Committee should take note of the general sentiment of the community, and opt to not name the new division Bean, but rather select from one of the other short-listed nominees, namely Cullen or Nott.

As always, I look forward to the final decisions by the Augmented Committee.

Objection to proposed redistribution of electoral boundaries in the Australian Capital Territory

Introduction

I will start by stating that I am pleasantly surprised by the results of the proposed redistribution. Overall, there is very little that is unsatisfactory, and I commend the Committee on their efforts.

The boundaries of the new divisions are succinct, reasonable and logical.

Specifically, I approve of the new Fenner, Canberra and proposed Bean division boundaries. While my original suggestion proposed splitting Gungahlin rather than Belconnen, it was always a toss-up between the two. I swung north, the Committee (and other suggestions) swung south.

While I am not fully sold on the decision to name the new division Bean, I approve of the decision made by the Committee, indeed, I would like to commend the Committee on the explanation of the report, especially regarding the naming process. Providing the alternative considerations, the short-listed name and the vote results provided clear and thorough details of how these names were decided and displays transparency and clarity to the process.

I would suggest that the Committee return to the previous style of report, where divisions are discussed according to their location within the state. It makes it easier to dissect the information if divisions are outlined in relation to each other, rather than alphabetical. It can also aid with providing reasons for the Committee making certain decisions about elector transfers. I feel that considering merits for transferring one area over others should be more the focus of the report, rather than the basic numerical exercise, which is related in tables and maps anyway.

Objections

I do not have many specific objections, as I believe the decisions made by the Committee to be sound. Had I been present in the Committee discussions, I would have likely voted for either Cullen or Nott, however, I accept that the democratic process has resulted in Bean as the selected name.

Summary

Overall the Committee is to be commended for a logical, sensible and cohesive proposal. There are no glaring holes, no own goals, no unexpected (and unexplained) decisions.

I will leave the political projections to others to determine, but I think in this case the Committee got the decision right.

While I tend to prefer not relying on locality boundaries in the redistribution process, I concede that the unique composition of the Australian Capital Territory makes suburb boundaries the most logical building blocks for the redistribution of the Territory.

I look forward to the speedy resolution of this redistribution and eagerly await the Augmented Committee's decision in the coming months.

If I may end on a rather cheeky suggestion. With outcomes as attractive as this, and with similarly pleasing results in South Australia and Victoria, maybe redistribution Committees for all states should in future restrict themselves to such a tight timeframe!