



# Comment on objections 21

Peter Martin

3 pages

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**Redistribution Committee for Victoria**

Dear Committee

Please accept my submission as a comment on the objections that relate to Macnamara and Higgins.

I am a resident of McNamara and have been living and working in the areas of Macnamara and Melbourne Ports for more than 30 years. For 19 years, until 2020, I had the pleasure of being the **principal of Port Melbourne Primary School**. As of last year, I am a **Councillor in the City of Port Phillip for Gateway Ward, representing the suburbs of Port Melbourne, South Melbourne, Montague and Albert Park**. To be clear however I write this submission in my personal capacity.

I agree with a number of objections made against the proposed redistribution to these electorates. Specifically, I would like to endorse OB5, OB42, OB49, OB53, OB54, OB58 and OB63.

I understand these areas as well as anyone else. To me the proposed revision of the borders is very difficult to make sense of. I will briefly talk to the considerations that I understand the Committee must take into account.

**(i) Community of interests**

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There appear to be two allegedly relevant ‘community of interest’ reasons put forward for the proposed redistribution. I don’t think either of these justify the proposal.

**Reason 1**

The report of the Committee states that the communities south of Princes Highway are “well suited to a more suburban electoral division, sharing common characteristics with areas in Stonnington City Council north of the Princes Highway.” Conversely, the report states that the communities of Prahran and South Yarra are “better suited to the inner-city character of the proposed Division of Macnamara.”

There is little evidence to back up these claims. I strongly believe that these claims improperly characterise the parts of Macnamara west of Hotham St as having an inner-city character that is lacking in the parts east of Hotham St. The claims do not acknowledge that there is a strong suburban character in many areas west of Hotham St. The state of suburban development, renting and the concentration of home-ownership and the single-dwelling and townhouse style of living in Elwood (where I live), Albert Park, Middle Park, Port Melbourne, St Kilda West and many parts of St Kilda (but for the parts on Queens Rd/St Kilda Rd) is closely analogous to that of Caulfield, Caulfield North, Balaclava, Ripponlea, St Kilda East and Elsternwick. Indeed, the two are almost indistinguishable on this basis. This is self-evident in the census data. Meanwhile, mid-level and high-rise apartment buildings and major suburban developments are springing up in all of these areas.

This is not a consequential nor cogent distinction between communities. If the areas east of Hotham St are ‘suburban’ while those west are ‘inner-city,’ one would perhaps expect that these areas comprise two communities that socialise in different ways, or shop in different places, or work in different kinds of jobs, or have different styles of living, or otherwise are not connected as communities of interests. But this is simply not true. All these areas have a strong concentration of families that gather as communities around local schools. There are consistently high levels of education and a cross-section of employment largely concentrated in the professions, scientific and technical services, education, health, retail, hospitality, entertainment and the arts that holds true across the electorate. It is consistently a relatively wealthy area. Those west of Hotham St in St Kilda, Elwood, Balaclava and Ripponlea all connect and shop in the same places – in St Kilda, on Carlisle St and Balaclava Rd, and in Elsternwick.

In my view the ‘suburban’ and ‘inner-city’ distinction is not supported by evidence and relies on outdated assumptions that perhaps may have held true 10 or 15 years ago but today have no bearing on the character of the inner city of Melbourne. The argument that there is a significant difference between these areas east and west of Hotham St on this basis only has superficial appeal.

By contrast, there are tangible differences between those areas south and north of Princes Highway that have been detailed in the objections I cited earlier. In my opinion it is these differences, demarcated by the strong boundary that is the Princes Highway, that should form the basis of your decision.

## **Reason 2**

The Committee’s report states that there is value in “acknowledging the community of interest surrounding public housing.”

Most of the public housing tenancies in Macnamara are in the parts of town (South Melbourne, Port Melbourne and Albert Park) that I have come to understand deeply over several decades. The families in these estates have sent their children to Port Melbourne Primary School and to Albert Park College for many years.

These tenancies are not connected with those in Windsor, Prahran or South Yarra. The families in these tenancies send their children to Toorak and Stonnington Primary schools and to Prahran Secondary College. In no way are the two areas one ‘community.’ The tenancies exist independently, each building a community in its own right.

There is of course value in acknowledging the interests of public housing tenants. But public housing tenants are scattered across the inner-city, and the Victorian Government has set out areas within both Macnamara and Higgins (and across the State) as priority areas for its big public housing build. There will only continue to be more and more public housing tenancies in Higgins, especially in its eastern section. Even if Macnamara can now be characterised as a ‘public housing’ electorate, in but a few years it will not have that character any more than Higgins. And nor should it.

I think that the political representation of public housing tenants east of Hotham St and Williams Rd will in no way be significantly improved (or harmed) by being within the same electorate of Macnamara. It will simply not have an effect. The argument on this basis rests

on an assumption that they exist as a community. There is no evidence to this point – the overwhelming evidence is to the contrary.

### **The Effect of the Proposed Redistribution on Port Phillip Council**

I would like to briefly focus on one effect of the proposed revision, which is that the City of Port Phillip will be split down Hotham St. This is obviously unwelcome. This will complicate the work of the City in garnering the support of federal parliamentarians. This work is critical to ensure that important local partnerships and projects are fully funded and receive national attention.

Splitting Port Phillip would perhaps be understandable if there was a strong argument based on the community of interest or means of communication and travel considerations. But, there isn't. Considering that Macnamara can reach its quota of electors by simply moving Windsor back into Higgins, it's completely unnecessary.

#### **(ii) Means of communication and travel**

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I endorse all the comments made in the objecting submissions that I cited above to the effect that there are strong transport links between the suburbs along the Port Phillip Bay (Port Melbourne, Albert Park, Middle Park, St Kilda, Elwood) and those across St Kilda Rd including in Glen Eira (St Kilda East, Elsternwick, Caulfield and Caulfield North). These are areas that identify with each other and are all based around St Kilda, Balaclava and Elsternwick. Princes Highway and Punt Rd serve as barriers between these communities, the communities of the City of Port Phillip and the City of Glen Eira, and those that are in the City of Stonnington. That is clearly why the boundaries of Stonnington and Glen Eira are drawn roughly across Punt Rd and Dandenong Road, because those roads demarcate communities with a different character.

I endorse the alternative submission to put Windsor back into Higgins. This is the option that actually reflects the different ways in which the communities live in this area. It will also cause the least disruption to local electors and communities of interest including the City of Port Phillip and the Jewish community.

I trust that my submission is of assistance to the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Peter Martin

