



Comment on objections 53

Charles Richardson

8 pages

FEDERAL REDISTRIBUTION 2020-21: VICTORIA

COMMENTS on the OBJECTIONS RECEIVED to the PROPOSAL of the VICTORIAN REDISTRIBUTION COMMITTEE

From CHARLES RICHARDSON

I congratulate the Redistribution Committee on the public engagement with the redistribution process that they have elicited. An unusually high proportion of the 67 objections received appear to be genuine expressions of public concerns, rather than having been manufactured for partisan political purposes. At the same time, very few of them strike at the root of the Committee's work; they mostly suggest relatively minor issues rather than fundamental disagreements.

In what follows I work through the issues that have been raised, proceeding in a roughly clockwise fashion around the state in the same manner as in my original submission. With the sole exception of the name "*Hawke*", which I had raised myself, I confine my remarks to questions about boundaries rather than names; I claim no special expertise in the latter and I am comfortable with the Committee's general conservatism on the question. (That said, if anything is going to be renamed I would have thought *Melbourne* would be a prime candidate, since it duplicates the name of a state electoral district that predated it.)

1. GELLIBRAND / LALOR BOUNDARY

Mark Mulcair (#37) agrees with my objection to the proposed boundary along Hacketts Road, although he fails to make the further suggestion of reverting to the existing boundary in Truganina. Without that, the change would leave *Lalor* intolerably small. Colin McLaren (#48) suggests undoing the Truganina move but goes further and proposes putting the centre of Werribee into *Gellibrand*; this seems to me quite unnecessarily disruptive.

I remain convinced that my objection advances the best solution. I note that it would incidentally meet the concern of the Liberal Party (#59) that Williams Landing should remain in *Gellibrand*.

2. YARRAVILLE

Several objections relate to the proposed boundary through Yarraville. Dr Mulcair would split the suburb the whole way along Francis Street, but this makes *Fraser* very large for, in my view, insufficient reason. Mr McLaren also suggests a small adjustment. Jonathan Schlossberg (#55) and the Liberal Party both propose a split of Yarraville along Stony Creek:

taken in isolation from the numbers I think this is very sensible, but it would exacerbate the imbalance between *Fraser* and *Gellibrand*, which inclines me against it. I think the small alteration that I proposed is a sensible compromise between competing aims.

3. NORTH-WESTERN SUBURBS

Objections #40, #43 and #52 all argue against putting Kensington into *Maribyrnong*; Adam Bandt (#56) is also unhappy with the proposal but seems to accept that it is necessary. I think it is a reasonably obvious move and is superior to both the existing boundary and to any reasonably alternative – I would urge the Commission not to change it. I note Dr Mulcair agrees with this position.

Objection #14 argues that *Maribyrnong* should straddle the river rather than extend into the outer suburbs. The problem is that while a neat-looking division can be constructed that way, it creates major problems further out. The disanalogy with the example of the south-eastern suburbs is that due to the different geology the rivers and creeks in the north-west mark out much more distinct corridors than they do south of the Yarra. (It's also not quite true that the proposed *Maribyrnong* extends to Bulla and the Organ Pipes; its remotest suburb is Gladstone Park.)

Mr Schlossberg and ALP both suggest that the suburb of Maribyrnong should be kept in *Maribyrnong*. I have no problem with that in principle, but as a practical matter the whole suburb is too big to move, and running a boundary through it risks being more arbitrary than the proposed boundary along the river. I'm not convinced that the ALP's suggestion is an improvement, and it would make the enrolments less equal.

Dr Mulcair suggests that the northern part of Hillside could be swapped for Rockbank. That's a perfectly reasonable move geographically, but it shifts the enrolments between *Gorton* and *Hawke* in the wrong direction: the proposed *Hawke* is too small already and the change would make it smaller. I therefore recommend against it.

4. GEELONG AREA

Martin Gordon (#4) agrees with me on the merits of using the Barwon River as the boundary between *Corio* and *Tucker*. I remain firmly convinced that this would be a desirable move. The Liberal Party, on the other hand, supports the Committee's proposal. Dr Mulcair suggests a minor change to the boundary in Moolap, but this would just make *Tucker* even smaller when the problem is that it's too small already.

Objections #45 and #65 want *Corangamite* to stay rural, but the boat has well and truly sailed on that one. If "*Corangamite*" is to be the name of a non-urban district, the only realistic way to achieve it would be to rename *Wannon*.

The ALP suggests swapping Anglesea for the Moriac area. While it would certainly be good for *Tucker* to gain some electors, that change would make it impossible to conduct the larger swap with *Corio* that I recommend; *Tucker* would then be fractionally over the limit for projected enrolments. In any case, I think the ALP's proposed boundary is inferior to that proposed by the Committee. Separating Anglesea from Aireys Inlet is problematic, as is separating Moriac from Mount Moriac.

Objection #6 and the Shire of Golden Plains (#22) both argue that Inverleigh, Teesdale and Lethbridge or Shelford should remain in *Tucker* rather than be moved to *Ballarat*. On community of interest grounds they are quite right, but numerically they just won't fit: the proposed *Tucker* is already 2.2% above the average on projected enrolments, so there's no way it can accommodate another 2,500+ electors. Dr Mulcair would just move Inverleigh, and into *Wannon* rather than *Tucker*: that makes some sense on the geographical front, but it would further unbalance the enrolments and it means giving up the argument of community of interest with Bannockburn.

5. MALLEE / WANNON BOUNDARY

The Liberal Party agrees with my proposal to swap Stawell for Lexton (its numbers for this are slightly different to mine because they don't include the Elmhurst area, which is in the Rural City of Ararat but in Avoca SA2; it seems to me it would make more sense in *Mallee*). I remain strongly convinced of the merits of this, but I note that taken in isolation it leaves *Wannon* very large: the Commission should also adopt my suggestion of extending *Ballarat* westward to take some of that excess.

Objection #64 argues for transferring Dergholm from *Mallee* to *Wannon*. This seems an obvious piece of good sense; the numbers concerned are much too small to be an issue (there are only 156 electors in the whole SA1, of which Dergholm is just part), so I urge the Commission to make the move.

6. "HAWKE"

Objection #21 objects to putting Ballan in *Hawke*; objections #23, #24 and #32 go further and argue for not putting Bacchus Marsh there either. Objection #46, approaching the question from the opposite direction, wants Sunbury kept out of it. None of them have any serious suggestion for how else this part of the state could be organised. While the objective of keeping urban and regional areas distinct is a sound one, the numbers and the other criteria do not always permit it to be met, and it seems to me that this is one of those cases.¹

A large number of objectors (#8, #9, #17, #21, #23, #24, #32, #36, #62 and #65) argue against honoring the late Bob Hawke, for some combination of political and personal reasons. It seems to me that this is the wrong way to look at the question, and that the presumption in favor of naming a division after a former prime minister is a very strong one. No doubt there are very many figures who have been honored in such a way whose characters would not stand minute examination, but that in general is not the Commission's task. Hawke was unquestionably one of Australia's most important prime ministers, and I think the Committee has made the right call.

I reiterate my view, however, that the division that the Committee calls "*Wills*" is a much better candidate for bearing the name "*Hawke*". Mr McLaren agrees with me about giving the name "*Burke*" to the proposed *Hawke*, although he would keep *Wills* and rename *Maribyrnong*.

¹ In my original submission I argued that this division (which I called "*Burke*") should include the Shire of Macedon Ranges rather than Sunbury. I still think that is a better plan, since it would allow for the reconstruction of *McEwen* via a swap with *Calwell*, but I am assuming that the Commission will not wish to revisit that question.

7. NORTHERN SUBURBS MISCELLANEOUS

The Liberal Party suggests transferring a section of Westmeadows from *Calwell* to *Maribyrnong*. It's debatable whether or not that would improve things in geographical terms, but it would take the numbers the wrong way: the proposed *Calwell* is already much too small, so the last thing it needs is to lose territory.

The Liberal Party also proposes to undo the transfer of a section of Brunswick East from *Wills* to *Melbourne*, which, while it would be a neater boundary, is open to the same objection – the proposed *Wills* is already smaller than the proposed *Melbourne*, so why add to the imbalance?

Objection #11 suggests that Northcote and Kew should go together in a division that would unite parts of *Cooper* and *Kooyong*. I see no need for this at all.

8. INDI / NICHOLLS BOUNDARY

Mr McLaren proposes to transfer a small section of territory from *Nicholls* to *Indi*, including the towns of Longwood and Miepoll. But *Indi* is already larger than ideal, and there seems no compelling reason to move further in that direction: there is nothing sacred about the SA2 boundary, since it would still involve splitting the Shire of Strathbogie, just in a slightly different place.

9. COOPER / JAGAJAGA / McEWEN / SCULLIN

Dr Mulcair proposes the same small rotation of territory as I did to fix a series of anomalies in these divisions, with the refinement that he would move the part of Greensborough north of the by-pass road (the Apollo Parkways estate) instead of Research-Kangaroo Ground from *Jagajaga* to *McEwen*. I don't think this is as good; Apollo Parkways is very much urban territory and thus out of character with *McEwen*. It would, however, do a better job of equalising the enrolments. In any case, either his proposal or mine would in my view be an improvement on the draft boundaries. (Neither would address the concerns of objection #44, but I fear they may be beyond assistance.)

Mr McLaren proposes a general reconstruction of *Calwell*, *McEwen* and *Scullin*, which he suggests (correctly, in my view) may also need to involve *Hawke*. I applaud the intent; while I don't think what he is proposing would quite work, it's on the track of the proposal that I made in my initial submission, which would have all three divisions adopting a north-south orientation, keeping *McEwen* east of Darebin Creek. If the Commission is interested in reviewing the unsatisfactory state of *McEwen*, I would suggest it go back and reconsider that proposal.

10. OUTER SOUTH-EASTERN SUBURBS

There is widespread recognition of the problematic nature of the Committee's plan for *Bruce*, *Holt* and *La Trobe*, and in particular the way that it splits the central business district of Berwick. The Liberal Party broadly agrees with my solution, except that its proposed transfer from *Holt* to *Bruce* is an additional slice of Hampton Park rather than the tail end of Berwick South; that seems to me an inferior option.

Dr Mulcair also proposes a small rotation between the three divisions, but he would go clockwise instead of anti-clockwise; Mr McLaren seems to be thinking along the same lines, although he doesn't have a fully worked-out plan. I don't think that moving clockwise works as well; for one thing, it takes *Bruce* and *Holt* in the wrong direction on enrolments (*Bruce*, already too big, would get bigger, while *Holt*, already very small, would get smaller). It also results in a slightly odd shape for *La Trobe*, starting in the Dandenongs but then reaching right around in the south as far as Pearcedale. Returning Tooradin and the eastern part of Clyde to *Holt* seems to me a better solution; it also addresses the problem that the ALP identifies of the high rate of growth in *La Trobe*.

At the other side of *Bruce* and *Holt* is the problem of the Lyndhurst triangle, which I mentioned in my objections without being able to offer a solution. But objection #50, with which the ALP agrees, proposes a route to such a solution, by transferring the southern part of Dandenong back to *Isaacs*. If that is done, then Lyndhurst can stay in *Holt*, and *Holt* can instead compensate *Bruce* by giving it territory in Narre Warren South.² Two simple ways of doing that would be (a) continue the proposed *Bruce/Holt* along Pound Road to the south-east in the same direction, along Market Lane and then a linear reserve as far as Glasscocks Road; or alternatively (b) from the south-eastern end of Pound Road run the boundary south along the Narre Warren-Cranbourne Road to the locality boundary, then east to Glasscocks Road, and in return transfer the northern end of Hampton Park back to *Holt*, returning the boundary to the Hallam Main Drain. (In both cases assuming that my suggestion of giving the tail in Berwick South back to *Bruce* has already been adopted.)

This change, it seems to me, would improve boundaries all round while making almost no net difference to the enrolments. Its only drawback is the continued split of Dandenong, which if objection #50 is correct is not really a problem at all – although I note the Liberal Party disagrees with this and is supportive of the Committee's proposal.

Mr Gordon suggests going the other way, and realigning *Isaacs* so as to keep it out of the Dandenong area. This accords with what I had originally proposed, but I think it's difficult to manage given the Committee's general scheme. He doesn't explain what would become of the Lyndhurst triangle

11. AVONSLEIGH

As far as I can tell, none of the other objectors have referred to the Avonsleigh area on the proposed *Casey/La Trobe* border, but I remain very strongly of the view that this is a significant problem that needs to be fixed. It is not demanded by the numbers: Avonsleigh (and for that matter Clematis, further west) can be put back into *La Trobe* without putting it outside the 3.5% tolerance. I see no plausible reason not to do so. If other adjustments to *La Trobe* permit it, it should take the whole of Macclesfield as well.

And if for some reason Avonsleigh must go into *Casey*, the western boundary should at least be run further west, along the edge of the golf course, rather than splitting a single residential neighborhood. This would involve approximately an additional 219 electors (212 projected), which can be easily accommodated.

² Incidentally, it would be nice to know which genius at the ABS decided to name two different SA2s “Narre Warren – South West” and “Narre Warren South (West)”.

12. MAROONDAH HIGHWAY CORRIDOR

The Committee's drastic revision of the *Deakin/Menzies* boundary is one of the most controversial aspects of its proposal. Objection #3, with which the ALP agrees, argues strongly against taking *Menzies* across Koonung Creek, and against using Whitehorse Road as a boundary through Box Hill, Blackburn, Nunawading and Mitcham. I support their reasoning, and I would urge the Commission to return to a more traditional east-west alignment for both divisions. That said, I think the ALP's alternative solution, by which *Menzies* would extend as far as Croydon, is very unsatisfactory, particularly when there is an alternative readily available of taking the northern parts of Ringwood, as I had proposed.

Ruixing Zhang (#35) and Abdullah Bin al-Azziz (#39) would go in the other direction and extend the Committee's logic to make both divisions run north-south: this would avoid the Whitehorse Road problem, but it doesn't really work on the numbers; *Menzies* would end up having to include all of Forest Hill, which would give it a very awkward tail.

Others, including Dr Mulcair, Mr McLaren and Justin Lamond (#61), propose (in somewhat different ways) a more limited rearrangement to fix the Whitehorse Road problem while remaining within the Committee's conceptual framework. Mr Gordon and the Liberal Party, on the other hand, are both supportive of the Committee's work. I cannot say I particularly like any of the alternative suggestions; Mr McLaren's is neat on the map, but it puts *Menzies* well above the 3.5% projected tolerance, and Mr Lamond's I think would be equally far out in the other direction, making *Chisholm* much too big. Dr Mulcair's proposal leaves an odd dogleg at the south of *Menzies* and splits the centre of Nunawading.

Nonetheless, if the Commission is set on taking *Menzies* across Koonung Creek, something like Dr Mulcair's suggestion would be a distinct improvement on the Committee's proposal.

13. CHISHOLM AND SURROUNDS

Objections #1, #3 and #34 and Mr Zhang and Mr Bin al-Azziz object that the southern boundary of *Chisholm* in the Committee's proposals has been moved too far south, and that it should lie wholly or in part along the Monash Freeway. Dr Mulcair also suggests a move in that direction, and would bring *Bruce* into the mix to help equalise the numbers. The Liberal Party, evidently sympathetic to that general idea, suggests only a small step, running the boundary part way along Ferntree Gully Road and shifting the remainder of Burwood East from *Deakin* to *Chisholm* to compensate.

The ALP, without proposing any change in this part of *Chisholm* (although it would move its western boundary to give *Kooyong* the rest of Surrey Hills), suggests a swap of territory between *Bruce* and *Hotham*; this is logical to the extent that the area north of Police Road shouldn't be in *Bruce*, but putting it in *Hotham* leaves that division with an unsightly projection to the east. It would be better in my view to rotate territory through *Chisholm*.

The problem in this part of Melbourne is that because the Committee has been unable to find enough stable growth territory for *Holt* and *La Trobe* it has been forced to set them very low on actual enrolments (in order to fit within the projected tolerance), which in turn means that the divisions further in – *Bruce*, *Chisholm*, *Deakin* and (to a lesser extent) *Hotham* – are all well over quota. This is not only undesirable in itself, but it restricts the capacity to move them around without bumping up against the numerical constraints.

Some improvement, however, could be made. Objection #10 suggests that the Commission should reverse the decision to move Hughesdale from *Higgins* to *Hotham*, arguing that Warrigal Road is a better boundary than the municipal boundary. I think he's right about that (I note that the Liberal Party disagrees); *Higgins* can cope with the extra electors (especially if it loses the small rectangle of St Kilda East in the City of Port Phillip), and by taking them out of *Hotham* it creates more flexibility to deal with *Chisholm*.

I suggest that the *Chisholm/Hotham* boundary west of the Monash Freeway should move north at least to Ferntree Gully Road (it may be possible to go further if revisions to the Maroondah Highway corridor result in net gains to *Chisholm*), and that *Chisholm* in return should gain the part of Mulgrave east of the freeway and north of Police Road. The *Bruce/Hotham* boundary can then be adjusted so as to equalise enrolments, with *Bruce* taking the triangle bounded by Police Road, Jacksons Road and the Princes Highway.

14. "GLEN IRIS"

Dr Mulcair objects to the Committee's proposed change to the *Higgins/Kooyong* boundary, suggesting that the area west of Burke Road should be transferred instead. I think the Committee's boundary is rather good, since it unites the main Burwood (Toorak Road) shopping strip, and his suggestion makes the enrolments less equal – especially if *Higgins* is to make gains as suggested above. But the Commission may wish to consider my original proposal of a boundary along Back Creek as an alternative.

The best boundary, in my view, would be along Back Creek and the Ferndale Trail as far as the railway, then down Baker Parade as per the Committee's proposal, but that would make *Kooyong* too big. Clarity in this area is impeded by the fact that although Camberwell South, Hartwell, Burwood and Glen Iris (i.e. the area south of Back Creek) are all distinct neighborhoods, the locals, in pursuit of higher property values, have decided to call them all "Glen Iris".

15. HIGGINS AND MACNAMARA

Along with the Maroondah Highway corridor, the proposed rearrangement of *Higgins* and *Macnamara* has attracted the most controversy. Objections #5, #38, #42, #49, #53, #54, #58 and ALP all argue against change, while #20 along with Mr Gordon, Dr Mulcair and the Liberal Party are supportive of the Committee's proposal.

Clearly some of the objectors are politically motivated, but some of their concerns are nonetheless valid. Dandenong Road is a strong boundary, while there is real community of interest between the two sides of Hotham Street. That said, Dandenong Road has already been breached in the eastern part of *Higgins*, and while it may legitimately be said to be a long way from Elsternwick to Ashburton, it's hardly an easy trip from Port Melbourne to Caulfield East either. I confess I am also a little uneasy about giving so much weight to the preferences of just one ethnic community.

I would also not be as dismissive as are some of the objectors of the role of shape in determining boundaries. Although it is not specifically mentioned in the legislation, other things being equal it is always preferable for divisions to be compact in nature: this has practical value for travel and communications, but it is also important to the credibility of a

redistribution. Oddly shaped divisions will always arouse suspicions, and if they were to become the norm then it would be easier for some future hypothetical set of biased Commissioners to create unfair boundaries.

On balance I support the Committee's proposal, but I can see the argument the other way. I would also suggest (as some of the objections mention) that the current northern boundary of *Goldstein* is less than ideal and that this should be an agenda item for the future.

16. BAXTER

Mr Bin al-Azziz suggests that the suburb of Baxter should move from *Flinders* into *Dunkley*. It would, as he says, do a better job of equalising the enrolments, at least on the projections, but even there the difference is small; on the actuals it is essentially nil (*Flinders* currently has 808 more electors than *Dunkley* – with the change it would be 871 the other way). While Baxter probably does look more towards Frankston than to Somerville and the eastern Peninsula towns, the freeway and the municipal boundary between them make a significant barrier.

Add to that the convenience of maintaining the existing boundary and I think it would be best to leave Baxter where it is.

Respectfully submitted,

Charles Richardson

30 April 2021