

OBJECTION

The Federal Redistribution 2009
NSW



Objection Number **126**

by

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4 Pages

Australian Electoral Commission (AEC)
PO Box K406
HAYMARKET NSW 1240



Dear Madam/Sir

Re: objection to the proposed redistribution and abolition of
the Federal Electorate of Reid

I am writing to place a formal objection to the recently proposed redistribution leading to the abolition of the Federal Electorate of Reid. While I live in Blaxland, my work has made acutely aware of the composition, issues and strengths of Reid. I am a Social Worker and a Community Services Coordinator at the NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS). STARTTS works with over 50 refugee communities in NSW and I have personally been engaged with most of them over my 15 years at STARTTS. During the last five years most of my contacts and work were focussed on newly arrived and emerging communities such as South Sudanese, Afghan (Hazara in particular), Iraqi, Sierra Leonean, Somali, Liberian and Karen. All of those communities have significant representation in the various suburbs that form Reid particularly Auburn, Granville, Berala, Merrylands and Guildford.

Some of the issues refugee communities in Reid face include: need to develop community capacities and infrastructure, lack of understanding of Australian systems and processes including the political processes, challenges to family and community cohesion, high unemployment and difficulties finding affordable accommodation. On the other hand refugee communities have brought many strengths to Reid and Australian community in general including willingness to work, art and culture, commitment to Australia and high levels of social capital. It is clear that a number of suburbs within Reid share very similar characteristics and face similar issues.

Additionally, all refugee communities I have worked with have developed very positive and mutually respectful relationships with the current member for Reid, the Hon. Laurie Ferguson. Through this relationship, community leaders have developed an increased understanding of Australian political processes and were able to educate their communities. Additionally, they often speak of the fact that being able to raise their issues directly and with one MP (rather than 3 they would need to deal with should the redistribution occur) give them and their

communities a sense that their voices are being heard and that they are participating in a legitimate democratic process.

You may be aware that in the countries, majority of refugees come from, democratic processes are usually non-existent. Most refugees have faced regimes where dissent is punished by torture and/or death. Thus, it is essential for their settlement and social inclusion to be able to participate in genuine democratic processes and feel that their needs and opinions matter. Being able to raise issues for community members living in a number of suburbs with one politician is an important element of this process. Additionally, as numbers of refugees in Reid are significant, their opinions truly matter.

I believe that the Reid electorate should be retained for a number of reasons including:

1. The eighty years of existence and the significance of the electorate to the local population.
2. I am aware that it is desirable that all Federal seats are named after Prime Ministers. The Federal seat of Reid was named after Sir George Houston Reid (1845-1918). He was elected to represent East Sydney in Federal Parliament in 1901 after being Premier of New South Wales between 1894-99. He was instrumental in advancing plans for the Constitutional Convention in 1897-98 which he attended and where he chaired the Finance Committee.

According to AEC guidelines, the naming of federal divisions has been the subject of a number of recommendations from parliamentary committees. The subject was dealt with most recently by the 1995 Inquiry of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters.

From these recommendations, a set of guidelines or conventions has been developed and these are referred to by redistribution committees and augmented electoral commissions. The recommendations include that **divisions should be named after deceased Australians who have rendered outstanding service to their country. When new divisions are created the names of former Prime Ministers should be considered.** In this case, the committee has recommended the removal of a former Prime Minister's name and replacing with a later one. This is a very unfortunate and puzzling decision. George Reid's historic merit is evident and should not be lightly dismissed.

3. The commonality of characteristics, strengths and issues of newly arrived refugee communities with high numbers settling in Reid. I have already outlined the benefits of retention of Reid to those communities. I also believe that retention of Reid provides an effective and efficient avenue to address the needs and challenges of those communities thus enhancing the rate of integration and furthering their social inclusion. This is essential to Australian social cohesion and economic and social development.
4. The reality that Reid was over quota;
5. The expected further population increases in the areas of Homebush Bay, Sydney Olympic Park, the former Lidcombe Hospital and Regents Park RAAF site, former Brickwoods site at Holroyd and Auburn Shopping Centre. Retention of Reid will also endure that the issues that may arise from population increases are addressed effectively and efficiently. Clearly, the retention of Reid is in the best interest of Australian community and the community of Reid.
6. The very long presence of an electoral office in Granville – the office is located in a central location and is accessible by public transport. Many community members (refugee and non-refugee) have visited the office and received assistance. The removal of the office will result in a reduction of service for a very underprivileged area of Sydney. This is likely to cause significant disruptions and affect lives of many community members.
7. The extraordinary boundaries for Blaxland with both Parramatta and McMahon.
8. Public transport patterns.
9. Probability of an even higher informal vote due to local association with Reid and odd boundaries.
10. The reality that this redistribution is not sustainable for a time beyond the next Parliament.
11. The fact that this redistribution will divide refugee communities in 3 electorates where their proportion of the overall population will be less than in Reid thus increasing likelihood that their issues will not be perceived as priorities. According to the ABS 2006 Census, Reid currently boasts 49.5 % overseas born with over 70% of population speaking language other than English at home. This can be compared with numbers for Lowe (40.5 % overseas born and 50% speaking language other than English), Blaxland (44.5 % and 69.4%), Parramatta (35.1 % and 39.2%) and the whole of Australia (22.2 % and 21.5%)

Clearly, Reid is highly culturally diverse. In the interest of the issues of refugee communities being considered political priorities and an effective and efficient avenue to progress these issues towards improvements in policy and service delivery it is essential to maintain the seat of Reid.

I hope this letter has provided you with some of the arguments to maintain the seat of Reid. Should you require any further information please contact me using one of the avenues below:

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Yours sincerely

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30th of August 2009