



Comment on suggestion 56

Adam Bandt MP

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From: Lawson, Damien (A. Bandt, MP)
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Please find attached a comment on public suggestions from Adam Bandt MP.

Regards

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ADAM BANDT MP
FEDERAL MEMBER FOR MELBOURNE

Redistribution Committee for Victoria
Australian Electoral Commission
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COMMENTS ON PUBLIC SUGGESTIONS – VICTORIAN REDISTRIBUTION

I write to make comment on a number of public suggestions that have been made on the Victorian redistribution.

I particularly want to comment on suggestions for boundary changes to the Division of Melbourne, which I currently represent.

I am a longstanding resident of the electorate of Melbourne and I was elected as the Federal Member for Melbourne in 2010. I currently live in Flemington with my wife and two children and as would be expected have an extensive knowledge of my whole electorate, but especially the area of Flemington-Kensington which surround my home.

While I reluctantly recognise that because of the population growth in Melbourne some changes will need to be made to the boundaries of the Division of Melbourne, I would urge the committee to reject a number of suggestions, in particular that proposed by the Labor Party, that propose a radical dismembering of the electorate. The Committee should instead make more moderate changes outlined by other suggestions.

Flemington & Kensington

For the first time in almost 100 years, Labor proposes to remove Kensington and Flemington from the electorate of Melbourne.

Since 1922, a number of suburbs have formed the core of the electorate of Melbourne, never having been outside it: Kensington, Flemington, North Melbourne, Parkville, CBD, West Melbourne, East Melbourne and Carlton. Whilst other suburbs have come and gone as boundaries and the number of Victorian seats has changed, these suburbs have been the centre of gravity for this Federation seat.

(The Liberal Party also submission proposes excising parts of Parkville, a suburb that has been in the electorate in its entirety since Federation.)

The electoral commission has long understood the strong community of interest that binds these inner-suburbs together and gives Melbourne its distinct identity. Whilst history isn't determinative

of new boundaries, we submit there would have to be a strong case for such a radical break-up of an established community of interest.

The Labor submission fails to give any justification for removal of Flemington from Melbourne.

The Labor submission contains arguments for the removal of Kensington, about which I make the comments below. The Labor submission also splits Kensington from Flemington and sends them both to separate new electorates, about which I also make comments below.

Kensington

It is simply pointless to assert, as Labor does, that 'The urban and residential aesthetics of Kensington align far more closely with Yarraville or Footscray than Docklands or the CBD'. That is not the relevant comparison, as there is little in Victoria similar to Docklands or the CBD (other than Southbank). Kensington's 'urban and residential aesthetics' are of a piece with inner-city suburbs like Flemington, Richmond and Fitzroy, with a mix of Victorian and Edwardian freestanding homes combined with modern, medium density housing developments.

As to Labor's main claim that transport connections now run from Kensington to western suburbs, this is thoroughly irrelevant: transport connections spread out from inner-Melbourne to almost every other suburb. It is the nature of a capital city electorate that contains the four main inner-Melbourne train junctions – Flinders Street, Southern Cross, Richmond and North Melbourne stations – as well as by definition all major city-bound roads. The fact that one can travel from Kensington to Footscray, as the Labor submission emphasises, is as meaningful as saying that there are roads out of the city that pass through other suburbs. The same could be said of virtually any suburb to the north, east and south of the electorate, as well as the west.

In any event, the mere fact that people can travel from Kensington across the river to other western suburbs is not the same as saying that they do this on a regular basis so as to form a community of interest. In fact, experience suggests the opposite is the case: Kensington residents are far more closely bound to suburbs like Flemington for shopping, recreation, education and community groups, it is a fair distance from Kensington to any common facilities in the electorate of Gellibrand, but merely a short walk to the schools, shops and parks of Flemington.

Flem/Ken

Indeed, one glaringly obvious community of interest that does currently exist is the Flemington/Kensington community, but this is ripped asunder by Labor's artificial proposals. The Flemington/Kensington community – which often goes under the shorthand 'Flem/Ken' – is well known to locals and has bound together historical communities of interest for many years, as exhibited by the following:

- The Flemington/Kensington News, a local community newspaper of four decades' standing that is very popular amongst residents sharing common communities;
- The Flemington/Kensington Legal Centre
- The Flemington & Kensington Bowling Club
- The Flemington/Kensington RSL

- The high school with Kensington in its catchment area, Mount Alexander college, is in Flemington
- The closest supermarket for most Kensington residents is located in Flemington

The two suburbs share a great deal of history, including their connection with the racecourse and stock trade. The common boundary along Racecourse Road is a hub of shops, services and community facilities that both Kensington and Flemington residents regularly use. The Moonee Valley Library on the south side of Racecourse Road, for example, is within walking distance for many residents in both suburbs and is the weekly location for educational and interactive events for nearby parents and their children. To send these two suburbs into different and new electorates, as proposed by Labor, works directly against the provisions of the Act that guide redistributions.

Kensington is also connected to the suburbs to its east. Kensington is very similar to North Melbourne, another suburb in the electorate since 1922. Further, the 'Arden Macaulay Structure Plan', which takes its name from two main roads in North Melbourne and Kensington respectively, is an initiative of the Melbourne City Council for urban redevelopment in the border-zone of these two suburbs. It is an initiative that the Kensington Association of residents, for example, has taken a significant interest in because of what it means for Kensington. This development will bind the two suburbs even closer together and strengthen communities of interest. By comparison, there is no such plan to tie Kensington in more closely with suburbs to the west, unsurprising given the river, industrial space and large distance between them.

CityLink is not a line of 'clear division' between Kensington and the east, as Labor suggests. Indeed, in Kensington, City Link is in fact raised above ground, with two well-used roads, Racecourse Rd and Macaulay Rd, passing underneath it to North Melbourne. The Macaulay Train Station is access this way by Kensington residents. Commuters walk or ride their bikes along these two roads out of Kensington and join the Moonee Ponds Creek bike trail into and from the city.

Labor's submission claims that the Melbourne Metro will change the nature of transportation links in the Kensington area, but such changes are a decade away and existing transport links, including buses, trams, trains and bike paths mean people in Flemington and Kensington are much more connected to the east than the west. In fact, the Melbourne Metro proposal will connect Footscray directly to North Melbourne bypassing Flemington and Kensington altogether. It is difficult to see how this will lead to closer connection between Kensington and the west.

Public housing

Melbourne is currently home to many public housing residents. The housing commission tower blocks that dot the inner-Melbourne skyline in Richmond, Carlton, Collingwood, Fitzroy, Flemington, North Melbourne and Kensington contribute to Melbourne having the highest number of public housing dwellings of any electorate. Approximately 10% of dwellings in the electorate are public housing. Many extended families live across estates, as government policies have seen groups from similar ethnic backgrounds co-located within close suburbs. Families from many Horn of African countries, and to a lesser extent Vietnam and China, are connected across the estates. There is also a very strong community of interest between public housing residents based on common need and experience.

By definition, public housing tenants are low-income and often have significant common need with respect to the Federal government, in areas such as welfare, immigration and housing support. It has been our experience that a significant amount of Federal electorate staff time has been devoted to supporting the needs of public housing tenants, but also in strengthening connections between estates. There is a very strong argument of community of interest for keeping the 'public housing high rise' suburbs within the one electorate.

Labor's motivation

Overall it appears to me that Labor's proposed radical and unjustified changes to the west of the seat of Melbourne are driven by a desire to remove certain areas from Melbourne to allow areas favourable to the Greens from the seats of Wills and Batman to be put into the seat. This has a knock-on effect across the inner west, as evidenced by the shape of the proposed new seat.

Labor's proposals for the inner-west are simply ridiculous. This is obvious just by looking at the contorted shape of their proposed new electorate of Fraser, which looks like a 2 year old was asked to build a gantry crane with reject Lego blocks that don't fit together. Nowhere else in Victoria – or, as far as I can see, in the country – does a seat twist like a middle-aged man doing yoga, bumping into neighbours at odd-angles or cutting its width by a third in the middle before careening around a corner and crashing in a puddle.

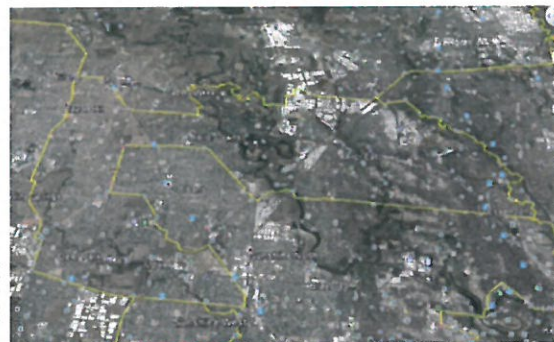
The word 'gerrymander' came about when then Massachusetts Governor Gerry designed self-serving boundaries for a seat that many said looked like a salamander. The boundaries of that seat (and the cartoons it spawned) bear an eerie resemblance to Labor's new seat proposal:



The original 'gerry-mander' seat



In 1812 Jeffersonian Republicans forced through the Massachusetts legislature a bill rearranging district lines to assure them an advantage in the upcoming senatorial elections. Although Governor Elbridge Gerry had only reluctantly signed the law, a Federalist editor is said to have exclaimed upon seeing the new district lines, "Salamander! Call it a Gerrymander." This cartoon map first appeared in the Boston Gazette for March 26, 1812.



Labor's proposal for the new seat of Fraser

This new 'electorate' must rank as one of the most ambitious proposed gerrymanders in recent political history. Its purpose appears to be to create a new safe Labor seat by picking the eyes out of neighbouring seats, while substantially redrawing the boundaries of the only Greens-held seat in the country in a way unprecedented since Federation, with the flow-on effect of attempting to make the marginal seats of Wills and Batman 'safer' for their party. Evidently such a gerrymander should not be a legitimate basis for electoral redistribution.

Even if the Committee does not consider Labor's apparent motivations relevant, there is no case for the removal of Kensington and Flemington from the electorate. I urge the committee to reject the Labor proposal and consider more moderate and appropriate changes to the division of Melbourne.

Yours faithfully



Adam Bandt
Federal Member for Melbourne