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2 pages

30 April 2021

AEC – Augmented Electoral Commission

Re: Macnamara and Higgins

Dear Redistribution Committee,

I am stumped by the proposal to change the boundaries of Macnamara. The suggestion that the boundaries should be changed because there is value in acknowledging the community of interest surrounding public housing does not sit well with anyone that has anything to do with the residents of public housing.

I live in public housing in South Melbourne. I consider myself very active in my community. I am a writer and a poet, and am fortunate to have been widely published in a number of Australian journals including *Overland*, *Meanjin*, *Southerly*, and the *Best Australian Poems* (2011, 2014 and 2015). I document the local stories of my area. My most recent book is ‘Poems from the 29th floor,’ the floor on which I live in Park Towers.

There cannot be a ‘community of interest surrounding public housing’ unless the residents within and across public housing complexes connect as a community and can in some way be reduced into their shared interests. It is my experience that we do not and we cannot be.

We residents of public housing live in blocks of flats. Ordinarily, we have as much to do with each other as one person living in a block of flats on St Kilda Road might have to do with a neighbour on another floor. While there is a sense of community within Park Towers, and I know some people that for example live in nearby Emerald Hill, we do not share some kind of community in common with all public housing towers in Melbourne, let alone ones in different suburbs and council areas. I also know that many would say that Park Towers is not the norm, and I have friends in other public housing towers that feel no sense of community with their neighbours in the same building, let alone the estates in other suburbs. We certainly as public housing residents have as much to do with each other across the towers as one person would with another person living in a block of flats next door or one further down the road. Just because we live as residents of public housing, rather than ordinary private flats, does not mean that we have some overlay of a community (we do not), or that we share economic, social, regional or political interests (we also do not). The only thing that is different between us and those living in flats is that we enjoy the support of the Victorian government in our housing.

We are all part of our own communities and it is with those communities that we have a real sense of affiliation. I for example am very involved in Melbourne’s writing community, and in local groups within the City of Port Phillip. Others are very involved in communities that advocate for the environment, or communities around the local school, or communities around faith or ethnicity. The list could go on forever. But nobody is involved in a ‘public housing community,’ and I certainly know of no person that would express a closer affiliation with a ‘public housing community’ than any of the other communities with which they actually affiliate.

It is very clear to me that there is no community of interest surrounding public housing that connects all the towers in the territory west of Williams Road (South Yarra and part of Prahran) and in Windsor with those in my local area and the areas of Macnamara.

To the same point, we as residents cannot and must never be compacted into a set of interests that others say we share. Others telling us what we should and should not want or who we should or should not vote for because we are residents of public housing is deeply hurtful. We come from vastly different backgrounds. We each have our own story. We live differently, and when it comes to politics, we certainly vote differently. We have no political organisation for public housing residents, and we have no single representative body. And every tower is different, with some towers for example only servicing people above a certain age. It is not possible to say that we share anything fundamental in the form of circumstances or interests, except for that, living in the same tower, we receive some of the same state government services. And that is not a strong connection at all – and especially not a connection that involves interests that relate to the federal government.

To the extent that the AEC's proposal is based on the idea that there is a community of interest surrounding public housing, I implore you to reconsider your proposal. It is not a very strong reason at all, and it should not excite any great changes to the boundaries.

With regards

Michael Crane