



**THE FEDERAL
REDISTRIBUTION
NEW SOUTH WALES**

Objection 720

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4 pages

Chairman
New South Wales Redistribution Committee
Australian Electoral Commission

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Subject: Objection to the draft plans to abolish the federal seat of North Sydney in the proposed 2024 NSW redistribution

Dear Committee members

My name is Margaret Stoneman, I have been a resident of Kirribilli in the electorate of North Sydney for over 34 years.

Having worked in econometrics and forecasting for much of my professional life, I submit that the projections on which the proposed abolition of North Sydney is predicated are flawed. There is a strong case to be made, based on fact rather than hypothesis, that the simplistic projections used should be adjusted to make them consistent with visible reality and knowledge of those who live in the electorate.

Demographic projections fail fact check test

It is difficult if not impossible to find any population data to substantiate the projected decline of 0.06% in electoral numbers for the Division of North Sydney between 9 August 2023 and 10 April 2028. Official ABS data confirms the following facts (all years ending in June):

- The population of North Sydney electorate grew by 9.2% (0.89% pa) in the 10 years to Jun 2023.
- Although disrupted by Covid, this population rose by 0.84% between 2020 and 2023.
- North Sydney Division's growth outstripped that of Bradfield (at 0.44%) in this period, while Warringah's population declined by 0.40% and Wentworth's by 1.66%; the latter continuing a long-term trend.
- Nothing in the actual data points to a decline in the population of electors in the division of North Sydney as projected in the AEC.

The NSW government also provides detailed projections of population growth using the cohort component method. The base data being that collated by the ABS. Figures published in its 2022 NSW Common Planning Assumption Projections are broken down by LGA. Comparing actual population changes over the latest 10 years of ABS data shows that the data for LGAs North Sydney, Lane Cove, Hunters Hill and Willoughby, combined are well correlated with the North Sydney Division, which encompasses the first 3 LGAs and approx 60% of Willoughby. Likewise, population movements in percentage terms in Bradfield broadly accord with those of Ku-ring-gai. Those in the Warringah electorate reflect the direction of changes in the Northern Beaches LGA but with greater declines. The NSW data show:

- For the four LGAs in North Sydney Division:
 - a projected rise of 0.35% between 20 and 23 against an actual outcome of 0.53%.
 - a projected 4.4% increase in population between Jun 23 and Jun 28, compared with the AEC's already superseded projection of a 0.06% decline. This projected increase is close

to that of NSW as a whole (5.4%). Once the new government's planned intensification of development in the division, it will almost certainly exceed the statewide growth.

- an implied increase in population of between 13,206 (6.6% - high growth scenario) and 10,366 (5.2% - low growth scenario) in the five years to Jun 2027, according to the NSW Dept of Planning's housing supply projections.
- These projections were made prior to the change of government in NSW. New policies have been implemented with the goal of accelerating the pace of residential development around a series of transport nodes. Close to 6,000 new dwellings are planned to be built in North Sydney LGA alone by 2029.
- For the electorates of Warringah and Mackellar, official data and projections show:
 - greater actual declines, of 0.4% and 0.15% respectively, against a projected decline of only 0.09% for the Northern Beaches LGA in the 3 years to June 2023.
 - a projection by the NSW government of only a 1.24% rise in the population of the Northern Beaches LGA between 2023 and 2028.
 - An AEC projection of electoral growth for Mackellar that is 4.5 times faster in a shorter timeframe than that of the whole LGA in which it sits, while the Division of Warringah comprised mostly of the balance of this LGA is projected to grow twice as fast. This does not add up; especially in a district with relatively low growth historically.
- For the electorate of Wentworth that falls below the electoral quota by more than any other division in NSW – by 14% now and over 21% per AEC projections - data show:
 - This electorate has experienced a long-term decline in population of 1.4% over the 10 years to June 2023. The rate of decline accelerated to 1.66% in the last three years of the period.
 - While projecting a further 1.6% decline in the number of electors, there is no suggestion by the AEC that this electorate should be abolished, despite missing the requisite quotas by such large margins.

Housing supply projections in the near term are based on actual data on building approvals and dwelling commencements, so have a higher degree of confidence. Such more concretely quantifiable assumptions underpin the NSW Department of Planning projections, as opposed to evidently generalised, hypothetical assumptions relied on by the AEC. There is also the value of physical proof, where large numbers of recently completed dwellings in what were brown field sites are now on the market or already sold off the plan. Developments well underway in St Leonards and imminent in Crows Nest, demonstrate just how seriously astray are the AEC's projections for the Division of North Sydney. Any proposals made based on these flawed and already superseded projections will have severe and lasting consequences for constituents, businesses and their elected representatives.

An inequitable approach to determining proposed electorate abolition

There is a fundamental inequity in proposing that the division of North Sydney be abolished under the proposed redistribution.

There are 16 other federal electorates in NSW that fall further below the AEC's benchmark for redistribution on the current enrolment than does North Sydney. Five of those are adjacent to or near this electorate; one of which fails by far more than any other – Wentworth, at -13.99%.

Similarly, there are six electorates that miss the projected benchmark quota to a greater extent. Three of which, Bradfield, Warringah and Wentworth, are adjacent to North Sydney, with two abutting it. In the case of each of these electorates, the projected growth over the applicable period reflects recent and historical population (and hence electoral roll) growth trends. Trends that have been on average negative for Wentworth for over a decade and for

the past five years in Warringah. In the case of Bradfield, the trend of weak or negligible growth over the recent years is projected to continue. These are realistic projections based on recent trends, as is the projection for Berowra nearby.

But there are two other electorates for which the projections applied by the AEC bear little connection to actual growth trends or the observable reality of multiple new dwellings recently completed or under construction – the best predictor of residential population growth. These are the divisions of Mackellar and North Sydney but for opposite reasons.

- Mackellar, due north of Warringah and largely in the same LGA of Northern Beaches, is projected to grow by 5.61% - a questionable figure given that it is 4.5 times faster over a shorter timeframe than is projected by the NSW government for the LGA within which it sits. An LGA that encompasses much of the demographically and socio-economically similar division of Warringah, projected to grow by only 0.19%.
- In sharp contrast, the population of the division of North Sydney has been growing consistently at a little under 1% pa. It is almost impossible to comprehend, how the electoral roll is suddenly projected to decline by .06% between Aug 23 and Apr 28. The projection is clearly flawed. Much of continuing buoyant pattern of population growth is projected by the NSW government to continue. An unremarkable fact given the continuing intensification of residential development recently completed, currently in progress and already approved. In North Sydney's case, the AEC projection has already been overtaken by reality.

The AEC has provided no explanation as to why North Sydney is slated for abolition, when so many other electorates are growing more slowly or actually declining. Two of these slow growth electorates about North Sydney, and a third in active decline is adjacent to it. All undershoot the AEC's benchmark for redistribution to a greater extent than North Sydney – even on the demonstrably inaccurate and unfounded projection used.

It would be both iniquitous and an aberration to abolish one of Australia's foundational electorates which has served its constituents with elected members of all political stripes since Federation.

Community of interest not shared

My husband and I have strong connections in the community, having presided at various times over our local Precinct and been active participants in a range of community projects. I value the cultural depth and vibrancy of our inner-city electorate, and share few of the lifestyle interests and aspirations of the much less densely populated beachside electorate of Warringah.

Of the manifold arguments to retain the electorate of North Sydney in or close to its current configuration is this shared community of interest. Also, its notably individual status as a very important business centre. There is a very strong argument to retain this locus of business in the corridor of North Sydney CBD, St Leonards, Chatswood and Crows Nest within one electorate. Rather than randomly dividing it between three other electorates, none of which have this central focus.

In contrast to the division of North Sydney, the divisions of Warringah, Mackellar, Bradfield and Bennelong are far more heterogeneous. The first three of which share similar socio-economic demographics and comparable cultural values.

A less disruptive and more equitable alternative

A more logical and fair realignment of electoral boundaries that would also preserve community shared interests and values would be as follows:

1. Retain the division of North Sydney
2. Realign the division's northern boundary to include the rest of Willoughby LGA and reunite the Chatswood CBD.
3. Maintain North Sydney's eastern boundary with Warringah.
4. Adjust the northern and north-western boundaries of Warringah to take in parts of Mackellar, and Bradfield.
5. Apportion the electorate of Bradfield between Mackellar / Warringah to the east and Bennelong / Berowra to the east.

On the basis of a more realistic, amended growth projection that accords with the current and continuing intensification of development of North Sydney, the need for other boundary adjustments would be minor.

In respect of this redistribution the AEC, although chartered to be impartial, is being inadvertently drawn into being unduly influenced by the major parties, particularly the Liberals and the Nationals and their proxies. Letters advocating the abolition of the division of North Sydney have been lodged by Nationals, who to my recollection, have never run a candidate in this seat. The AEC. Despite the statistical and factual evidence to the contrary, has chosen to adopt their position. The advocacy of more independent, non-ideological appears to carry little weight.

In the light of the official data and more informed, rather than hypothetical, projections summarized above, I would ask the Committee to reconsider its proposal to abolish the division of North Sydney. It would be a unwarranted and a great mistake to carve it up on an ad hoc basis between neighbouring electorates that share few of its particular characteristics as a rapidly intensifying, inner metropolitan area.

Yours faithfully

Margaret Stoneman