



# Comment on objections 110

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6 pages

Dear Redistribution Committee / Electoral Commission,

## **Introduction**

I am a resident of St Kilda where I have lived for six years. I have previously worked in the Electorate Offices of the former Member for Melbourne Ports, the former Victorian State Member for Southern Metropolitan Region and the current Member for Macnamara, for a combined total of nine years. I now work as a consultant, however I make this comment in a purely private capacity as a local resident with a deep knowledge of the electorate and local community.

My comment will primarily concentrate on Macnamara and its surrounding divisions and it will urge the Commission to affirm its proposed redistribution of Macnamara and to dismiss objections to it. The Commission's proposed division of Macnamara is clearly the best possible suggestion that satisfies all the requirements of the Act and provides the least disruptive such way to do so.

As a former electorate officer and electorate office manager, I take the general principle that the Commission should pursue its requirements under the Act with as minimal disruption to electors as possible. It is disruptive to constituents, to their parliamentarians (MPs) and to electorate offices (EOs) to have to change electorate. It disrupts the often longstanding relationships that MPs and their EOs have with constituents, community groups, schools, clubs and more. It creates confusion and the need for communication on the basis that a person, group or institution is now in a new division. Therefore, maintaining continuity of representation for a particular area and its residents and groups is to be preferred where it is possible within the requirements of the Act.

Clearly, given the requirement for the Electoral Commission to abolish a seat in Victoria during this redistribution, some disruption is necessary. Based on the Commission's draft proposal that this seat be Higgins, it is clear that changes will be required to surrounding seats which includes Macnamara. Macnamara also requires some changes to restore it to within the required quota, which it is currently short of.

I have seen a number of objections to the proposed abolition of Higgins (e.g. OB6, OB7, OB9, OB291, OB293, OB497 and many more), many of which are virtually identical, suggesting a coordinated letter writing campaign. And while many make sensible comments on the disruptive nature of dividing up the communities that exist within Higgins, none of these arguments strike me as applying to Higgins but not to any other division which the Commission could abolish instead. I grew up in Higgins and while I am aware of the division's history and familiar with the communities within it, I am unpersuaded by the arguments that it represents a "unique community identity" as

many such objections phrased it that is distinct from any other decades-old seat. The abolition of any division will create confusion, disrupt community projects, and could dilute communities' voice and influence and engagement with politics, but none of these arguments strike me as applying to Higgins any more than they could to another division such as Hotham, as the Liberal Party advocates.

For these reasons as well as those of practicality, I will take it for granted for the purposes of my comments on Macnamara and other divisions that the Commission will go ahead with its proposed abolition of Higgins.

### **Comments on Macnamara**

Both the Liberal Party (**OB398**) and the Australian Greens Victoria (**OB481**) propose alterations to the Commission's proposed redistribution of Macnamara. The Liberal Party proposes transferring parts (but not all) of Southbank, South Wharf, Fishermans Bend, Port Melbourne, South Yarra and Prahran from the proposed division of Melbourne into Macnamara.

The Greens propose transferring part (but not all) of Prahran into Macnamara.

The Commission's draft proposal moves 5,251 electors into Macnamara. The Liberal Party's proposal instead moves around 27,000 electors between Macnamara and Melbourne, which is vastly more disruptive and needlessly so. This is one reason the Commission should stick with its own proposal rather than make these changes suggested by the Liberal Party.

The Commission's proposed division of Macnamara retains the existing westernmost and northmost boundaries of the bay and the Yarra River, stretching to the west half of St Kilda Road, down to High Street and across to Williams Road before coming back down to the existing Dandenong Road/Princes Highway boundary which goes until it hits Grange Road. These are clear boundaries, all covering main roads and keeping suburbs united within a singular division as much as possible, certainly more so than the Liberal Party's objection.

The Liberal Party's submission proposes that boundaries variously cover the West Gate Freeway, Todd Road, Kings Way, Dorcas Street, St Kilda Road, Toorak Road, Williams Road and finally Orrong Road before making its way down to Dandenong Road. This unusual and seemingly arbitrary proposed boundary covers a large number of roads, zigzagging through the inner-south of Melbourne with seemingly no clear reason, creating an irregular shape, confusing boundaries between electorates and dividing several united suburbs and postcodes.

The Commission's proposed Macnamara divides some of Melbourne 3004 but along the clear boundary of St Kilda Road – a divided major arterial road that services up to eight

driving lanes, nine major tram routes, parking lanes, cycling lanes and physical separation between some driving lanes. St Kilda Road also separates the municipalities of the City of Melbourne from the City of Port Phillip, further demonstrating the sense in using it as a division boundary. The use of High Street and Williams Road then allows the division of Macnamara to take in the entirety of the suburb of Windsor.

It is clearly generally preferable to unite singular suburbs within singular electorates wherever possible. It is easier for residents of Port Melbourne for example to know they are all in the division of Macnamara than to be asked if they live west or east of Todd Road and north or south of the West Gate Freeway.

Port Melbourne and Fishermans Bend share one postcode and function essentially as one united suburb with different sub-precincts or districts. While Fishermans Bend remains a key growth area in Melbourne, its residents still essentially live in a part of Port Melbourne in a continuous community with common school zones, transport routes, shopping centres and more. It makes no sense to divide these communities on boundaries of the West Gate – a major freeway which is completely separated from the suburbs it passes through and on top of which several road and footbridges exist to pass over – or Todd Road. Furthermore, the suburb of Port Melbourne has been in the previous division of Melbourne Ports (its namesake) or its successor Macnamara since establishment – so suddenly dividing part of it into Melbourne makes little sense.

These communities also share common such uniting places, spaces and modes of transport with the communities of South Melbourne, Southbank and South Wharf – which have been in Melbourne Ports/Macnamara since the early 1900s. They are all oriented southwards and again share much in common in terms of major roads – such as Bay Street/City Road, Clarendon Street and their surrounding streets – tram routes and future planned transport routes. While parts of Southbank are accessible to the CBD over bridges, these are major bridges that cross a major river, unlike the smaller overpass bridges that cross over the West Gate.

By contrast, Port Melbourne/Fishermans Bend has no direct connection to the CBD and no way of crossing north of the Yarra at all without either getting onto the Citylink tollway and going over the Bolte Bridge – one of Melbourne’s major Yarra crossing bridges – or by transferring into South Wharf/Southbank and over the Montague Street/Docklands Highway bridge which is also a major bridge and a connection of these highways. Thus the most coherent community of interest would be to retain Port Melbourne, Southbank, South Wharf and South Melbourne all united within Macnamara.

Furthermore, they are in close proximity to Albert Park and its surrounding Middle Park, St Kilda West and then St Kilda which all share the Albert Park lake and reserve as a central park, lake and recreational precinct (and the namesake of the state electorate of Albert Park which contains all these suburbs), as well as the beach, Beach

Road/Beaconsfield Parade, the route 96 light rail and adjoining Canterbury Road all of which connect them all with each other and down to St Kilda and St Kilda Beach. Living in St Kilda, I can attest that we remain a central hub connecting these suburbs and orienting both northwest along the beach and through the aforementioned suburbs, as well as closely linked to our southern neighbours in Elwood and our eastern neighbours in St Kilda East, Balacalava and Ripponlea which are themselves connected closely to Caulfield and Elsternwick.

Finally, I will come to Prahran and South Yarra. Having grown up in Armadale, I can attest to the close connections that exist between the communities of Malvern, Armadale, Toorak, South Yarra and Prahran. While there are certainly some demographic differences between these suburbs, they share common central shopping and dining hubs including Chapel Street, Toorak Road, Commercial/Malvern Road and Malvern's Glenferrie Road which all provide extensive options to all of those living in the suburbs in between without having to travel south across Dandenong Road, itself a major arterial highway with 8-10 lanes divided by separate tram tracks in many parts.

While Windsor could easily remain connected to Prahran, it is also on the doorstep of St Kilda and there is much crossover and connection between Windsor and St Kilda. Part of Windsor also exists in the LGA/City of Port Phillip, the entirety of which remains in Macnamara. Given the need to add some electors to Macnamara to keep it within the required quota, the addition of Windsor, which previously sat in Macnamara from 2019-2022 makes eminent sense and provides minimal disruption to electors. Uniting all of Windsor in one electorate is preferable.

The Liberal Party's proposal creates unusual boundaries and a more split coherent community. Toorak Road as a boundary between electorates makes minimal sense – there is little distinction between the two sides of Toorak Road. Toorak Road in the South Yarra/Toorak western part is basically an inner-city shopping strip with many shopping strips, restaurants, cafes, bars and facilities on either side of it. It is slow moving at 40km/h with often heavy traffic, designed to make it easy for heavy pedestrian traffic to cross the road at all times. In its South Yarra part, it is almost an extension of Chapel Street, and is home to South Yarra station. Further down, it contains the Toorak Village precinct which is also home to several shopping and office complexes with plentiful supermarkets, restaurants and cafes. In all of these cases there is clearly no division between people on one side of the road or the other – it does not divide suburbs, local government areas or any other distinct communities.

By contrast, High Street, while also a busy shopping street in much of it, makes sense as a boundary purely for the purpose of it being a divider between the suburbs of Windsor and Prahran. By contrast, the boundary between Prahran and Armadale is not even one clear road but a confusing and somewhat arbitrary line that weaves between

houses, parks and other aspects to the west of Orrong Road. The eastern side of Prahran in this sense shares much in common with Armadale.

One other comment the Liberal Party makes is that the inclusion of Prahran would place more Jewish electors into Macnamara which is already the division with the highest population of Jewish electors in Victoria (although not, as the Liberal Party claims, Australia – Wentworth in NSW has a higher population of Jewish electors). While this is true that it would increase the raw number of Jewish electors in the seat, in fact the Jewish population of Prahran sits at 3 per cent of the suburb (per 2021 census data), lower than the electorate's current proportion which sits at about 10 per cent. Thus, the inclusion of Prahran would actually dilute the Jewish community's proportion in the seat, not enhance it. Next door Armadale has twice the proportion of Jewish residents as Prahran, at six per cent. And if the goal was to find additional suburbs which could increase the proportion of Jewish residents in Macnamara, it would make more sense to extend the seat into Caulfield South – part of Melbourne Ports prior to 2010 – which has a significant 36 per cent Jewish population and which could easily be reunited with Caulfield and Caulfield North.

Furthermore, while the Jewish community is undeniably a community of interest, there is less in common between the Jewish community of Prahran with, for example, the Jewish community of Ripponlea, Balaclava and St Kilda East, which has a more religious (Orthodox) and conservative character, or the Jewish community of Caulfield North and Caulfield, which is more traditional and less Orthodox. While previous draft redistributions proposed splitting these Jewish communities south of Dandenong Road across Hotham Street, which clearly separated distinct communities of interest such as the Adass community on either side of Hotham, the Prahran Jewish community is not as clearly linked to the communities south of Dandenong Road. It makes just as much if not more sense to keep the Jewish community of Prahran united with the Jewish communities of nearby Armadale, Malvern and Toorak which are of a similar proportion and share other common characteristics and features in their community.

The Greens proposal to divide Prahran into two different seats of Melbourne and Macnamara (as opposed to the Commission's proposal to divide it between Kooyong and Melbourne) also makes minimal sense. It cleaves off the eastern part of Prahran into Macnamara creating an unusual shape – which features more houses and older or detached units and flats – and places the western part into Melbourne – closer to Chapel Street which features more high-rise and more modern, medium to high-density apartments. This creates an unusual little box that makes no sense in the context of the shape of the electorate. Furthermore, Orrong Road is also a strange boundary to select, meaning that a small part of Armadale would end up in Macnamara, separated from the rest of Armadale in Kooyong.

## **Conclusion**

Ultimately the abolition of Higgins requires disruption to all these suburbs, but the Commission's proposed boundaries are the neatest and least disruptive, reuniting all of Windsor within Macnamara as it was only three years ago, keeping the western part of Prahran united with South Yarra where it is most closely suited in Melbourne, and keeping the eastern part united with Armadale where it is also most closely suited in Kooyong.

In summary, I again submit that the Commission's proposed redistribution is the most coherent, least disruptive and best solution to satisfy the Act and the requirements of the redistribution. I recommend that the Commission reject the objections of both the Liberal Party and Greens submission and stick to its own proposal with regards to Macnamara.

Kind Regards,

Dean Sherr