



Comment on suggestions 62

Dr Charles Richardson

6 pages

Charles Richardson

LL.B., Ph.D.

PHILOSOPHER



8 December 2023

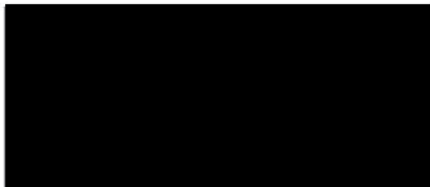
Redistribution Committee for Victoria
% Australian Electoral Commission
Locked Bag 4007
CANBERRA, ACT 2601

Dear Friends,

Thank you for the opportunity to present comments on the suggestions received in relation to the proposed redistribution of federal electoral boundaries for Victoria. My comments are attached for your consideration. Please let me know if you require any further information.

I again wish the Committee well in its deliberations.

Yours sincerely,



(Dr) Charles Richardson

enc.

COMMENTS
ON THE SUGGESTIONS RECEIVED
REGARDING THE 2023-24 REDISTRIBUTION
OF FEDERAL ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES
IN VICTORIA

BY

CHARLES RICHARDSON

Once again I congratulate the Redistribution Committee on the level of its public engagement, with 63 suggestions received. In what follows I shall comment briefly on some of the issues that they have raised, starting with the vexed question of population projections.

With Victoria's population growth recovering from its Covid-induced slump, it is quite likely – as several suggestions indicate – that a 39th division will again be added in the not so distant future. That reduces the likelihood that the results of this redistribution will still be around in eight years time. If I had been consulted beforehand I would have suggested that the Committee should exercise its power under section 63A(3) of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act* to set an earlier projection time, thus giving less weight to future population movement. But the Committee chose not to do this, opting for the standard period of three and a half years, for a projection time of April 2028.

As a result, it is bound by 66(3)(a) of the Act to strive as far as practicable for an equality of enrolments, within a 3.5% tolerance, as of that date. My very strong view is that in doing so it should not – indeed *must* not, under the law – rely on the published ABS projections, since they cannot in good faith be regarded as estimates of likely 2028 enrolments. Four of the other suggestions received endorse this point, clearly explaining the problem. Mr Waddell (#35) argues that the “redistribution should be stopped”; the Australian Labor Party (#57) describes the figures as “untethered from reality” and says there is a “compelling case for a reassessment of the current phase of the redistribution”; Mr Mitchell (#58) says that in the circumstances he does “not feel in all good conscience ... able” to make complete suggestions; and Anonymous 3 (#63) points out (and illustrates with some nice graphs) that “there is a clear systemic fault” that if not corrected “will lead to significant malapportionment.”

Others seem to have a vague awareness that there is something wrong with the projections, including Mr Drake (#41) and the Australian Greens (#61), but basically ignore

the issue. Dr Mulcair (#32) goes further in recognising what has happened but concludes philosophically that “we can only work with the numbers we are given.” And the majority of the suggestions, even those that offer plans for the whole state or a substantial portion of it, proceed as if the problem did not exist. Nor can they be blamed for that: they are just working with the numbers that the Committee published. But those numbers are fundamentally useless.

Worst of all is the submission from the Liberal Party, which did not arrive on time for the Committee to consider but is available online at <<https://vic.liberal.org.au/media-releases/federal-redistribution-submission>>. It shows itself to be fully aware that the projections are not what they should be, but aggressively maintains that the Committee should utilise them anyway and “not ... entertain attempts to second guess” them. The call “to respect the methodology used and the resulting mathematically derived figures” is a nonsense if (as appears to be the case) the published figures have nothing to do with the alleged methodology and have simply been uploaded in error. It is one thing to argue that because there may well have to be another redistribution in three years time, it would be better if the Committee didn't have to concern itself with what the enrolments might be in 2028. I broadly agree with that. It is quite another thing to say that, the Committee having taken on the legal duty to try to equalise 2028 enrolments, it should now ignore that duty and break the law – yet that is what the Liberal Party's argument amounts to.¹

We now have additional data on this question, in the shape of actual enrolment figures (by division) as at 31 October 2023, published on the AEC website at <https://www.aec.gov.au/Enrolling_to_vote/Enrolment_stats/gazetted/2023/10.htm> and extracted in the table on the next page. Comparing them with the published ABS projections, it can be seen that half of the existing divisions – 19 out of 39 – have been moving relative to average enrolment in the opposite direction to what is projected. Four of the others have been moving in the right direction, but doing so at such a pace that they have already overshot the 2028 projection, less than three months in. And several of the remainder are clearly headed for huge errors: *Wannon*, for example, was 0.35% below average enrolment (for 38 divisions) in August and is projected to undergo gradual relative decline, so as to be 1.26% below in April 2028. But after only three months it is already halfway there, at 0.80% below; barring some radical demographic reversal, it is obviously headed for a point well below the 3.5% mark.

To illustrate the practical impact of this problem, consider the two divisions of *Kooyong* and *Lalor*. On the published ABS figures, both are well within the 3.5% projected tolerance. *Kooyong*, currently 2.8% below average enrolment, is projected to grow modestly to 2.2% below; *Lalor*, currently 0.3% below, is projected to grow at basically the same rate, to reach a projected 0.5% above. If those figures were to be taken at face value, there would be much to be said for leaving both divisions unchanged: each is geographically coherent with quite strong borders. Sure enough, a number of the suggestions recommend exactly that.

But to anyone acquainted with Melbourne's growth patterns, the idea that *Kooyong* and *Lalor* will grow at the same rate is preposterous. In the three years to August 2023, *Kooyong*'s enrolment barely changed (in fact it declined by 0.3%) while *Lalor*'s grew by 15.9%. In the three months to 31 October, *Kooyong* showed growth of 0.76%, but *Lalor*'s was more than double, 1.73%. If the current trends continue to 2028 – and no-one thinks they will exactly, but they probably won't be far off – *Kooyong* by then will be outside the 3.5%

1 For reasons that it is not necessary to elaborate on the Liberal Party has evidently decided that use of the published ABS figure would be more likely to work to its political advantage. While I fully endorse the ALP's comments on those figures, I have no doubt that its attitude springs from basically the same political calculation rather than a detached concern for due process.

TABLE: ENROLMENT FIGURES AND PROJECTIONS WITH CURRENT GROWTH

Existing division	August 2023 actual enrolment		Published ABS projections for April 2028		October 2023 actual enrolment		Aug-Oct growth projected to 2028	
	Electors	Deviation	Electors	Deviation	Electors	Deviation	Electors	Deviation
Aston	110,768	-5.24%	120,615	-5.21%	111,660	-5.32%	129,178	-6.72%
Ballarat	112,875	-3.44%	121,873	-4.22%	113,749	-3.55%	130,913	-5.47%
Bendigo	113,381	-3.01%	122,771	-3.51%	114,231	-3.15%	130,924	-5.46%
Bruce	114,307	-2.21%	124,753	-1.95%	114,981	-2.51%	128,217	-7.41%
Calwell	115,327	-1.34%	125,369	-1.47%	117,515	-0.36%	160,484	15.89%
Casey	115,636	-1.08%	124,041	-2.51%	116,371	-1.33%	130,805	-5.54%
Chisholm	110,672	-5.32%	121,345	-4.63%	111,068	-5.83%	118,845	-14.18%
Cooper	110,943	-5.09%	121,431	-4.56%	111,974	-5.06%	132,221	-4.52%
Corangamite	116,531	-0.31%	127,763	0.41%	118,009	0.06%	147,035	6.17%
Corio	113,985	-2.49%	123,102	-3.25%	114,335	-3.06%	121,208	-12.47%
Deakin	113,714	-2.72%	123,966	-2.57%	114,489	-2.93%	129,709	-6.34%
Dunkley	112,715	-3.58%	122,613	-3.64%	113,444	-3.81%	127,761	-7.74%
Flinders	114,469	-2.07%	124,658	-2.03%	115,365	-2.18%	132,961	-3.99%
Fraser	113,089	-3.26%	123,858	-2.66%	113,886	-3.44%	129,538	-6.46%
Gellibrand	112,851	-3.46%	123,999	-2.55%	114,285	-3.10%	142,447	2.86%
Gippsland	116,666	-0.20%	126,776	-0.36%	117,404	-0.45%	131,897	-4.76%
Goldstein	111,083	-4.97%	121,366	-4.62%	112,125	-4.93%	132,588	-4.26%
Gorton	118,708	1.55%	129,116	1.48%	120,756	2.39%	160,976	16.24%
Hawke	111,225	-4.85%	119,315	-6.23%	112,581	-4.54%	139,211	0.53%
Higgins	109,335	-6.47%	119,660	-5.96%	110,311	-6.47%	129,478	-6.50%
Holt	113,159	-3.20%	122,766	-3.51%	114,971	-2.52%	150,556	8.72%
Hotham	117,704	0.69%	128,957	1.35%	117,961	0.02%	123,008	-11.18%
Indi	118,876	1.70%	128,444	0.95%	119,680	1.48%	135,469	-2.18%
Isaacs	113,084	-3.26%	123,385	-3.03%	114,068	-3.28%	133,392	-3.68%
Jagajaga	114,336	-2.19%	124,073	-2.49%	115,075	-2.43%	129,588	-6.42%
Kooyong	113,586	-2.83%	124,455	-2.19%	114,450	-2.96%	131,418	-5.10%
La Trobe	113,306	-3.07%	122,917	-3.40%	115,463	-2.10%	157,823	13.97%
Lalor	116,506	-0.33%	127,852	0.48%	118,519	0.49%	158,051	14.13%
Macnamara	112,881	-3.43%	124,756	-1.95%	113,712	-3.59%	130,032	-6.10%
Mallee	121,563	3.99%	131,342	3.23%	121,737	3.22%	125,154	-9.63%
Maribyrnong	110,438	-5.52%	120,461	-5.33%	111,546	-5.42%	133,306	-3.74%
McEwen	114,082	-2.41%	122,185	-3.97%	115,834	-1.79%	150,241	8.49%
Melbourne	115,139	-1.50%	126,170	-0.84%	116,506	-1.22%	143,352	3.52%
Menzies	112,994	-3.34%	123,466	-2.96%	113,425	-3.83%	121,889	-11.98%
Monash	113,398	-2.99%	123,796	-2.71%	114,162	-3.20%	129,166	-6.73%
Nicholls	114,691	-1.88%	124,233	-2.36%	115,447	-2.11%	130,294	-5.91%
Scullin	111,244	-4.83%	121,016	-4.89%	112,070	-4.98%	128,291	-7.36%
Wannon	116,485	-0.35%	125,633	-1.26%	117,000	-0.80%	127,114	-8.21%
Wills	110,228	-5.70%	120,751	-5.10%	111,566	-5.40%	137,842	-0.46%
Total for state	4,441,980	-100.0%	4,835,048	-100.0%	4,481,731	-100.0%	5,262,383	-100.0%
Quota (38 divisions)	116,894		127,238		117,940		138,484	

tolerance at 5.1% below average enrolment, and *Lalor* will be not only outside that but beyond the 10% mark, at 14.1% above. Yet three suggestions (Mr McSweeney (#25), Mr Lumsden (#42) and the Greens) propose to take territory (net) from *Kooyong*, and two (Mr McSweeney and the Liberal Party) propose to give additional territory to *Lalor*!

How the Committee should proceed from here is up to it, but to comply with the Act it will need to find some means of making allowance for the likely change in enrolments between now and 2028. In my submission I took the liberty of offering a set of projections at SA2 level that the Committee could use. I make no pretence that they would be more than a rough guide; they could be improved upon a bit if someone were to make the same calculations at SA1 level. But a rough guide is all that projections will ever be, and that is better than nothing. The published ABS figures, on the other hand, are worse than nothing.

Unfortunately, the reliance on such worthless figures means that large parts of most of the comprehensive submissions that the Committee has received can be of no assistance. On the published ABS figures, the divisions north of the Yarra and the mountains are to have approximately 20.52 quotas in aggregate in 2028, and those to the south 17.48. If that were true, it would make sense to create a division that straddled the Yarra, with about equal parts north and south, and it would then be just a terminological question as to whether it was a northern or a southern division that was abolished – in effect (if not in name), one of each would have disappeared, replaced by a merged division. This in substance is how the majority of the comprehensive submissions have proceeded.

But if more realistic projections are used, the position is quite different. Growth is higher on average in the northern divisions, so in reality they will be not much under 21 quotas. (On the compromise projections that I used the figure is 20.77, which is probably an understatement; if the last three months worth of growth holds up it will be 20.90.) That makes abolition of a southern division unequivocally necessary, with at most a small transfer from south to north (such as the Southbank area that I suggested) to even up the enrolments.

I do not mean to suggest that there is nothing of value in the submissions that have relied on erroneous figures. Quite the contrary: many of them have interesting and useful discussions of particular problems, and I would urge the Committee to consider them carefully. But I have not thought it worthwhile to attempt any critique of their specific proposals.

The more limited suggestions that have been received can be briefly dealt with. A group of obviously co-ordinated suggestions (of which Mr Kirwan's (#2) is the first) concern the division of *Bruce* and its surrounds. Their objectives are sensible, although I am not sure that they can all be satisfied at once; I was unable to get the strategy of shifting the eastern end of Mulgrave to either *Chisholm* or *Hotham* to work, but the Committee may have better luck.

Mr Nye (#5) argues that the detached segment of Point Cook (west of Hacketts Road) currently in *Lalor* should be in *Gellibrand*; I think he is quite right. He and Mr Sivakumar (#10) both argue for uniting Yarraville in *Fraser*, with which I also agree. Mr Sivakumar's other suggestions are also sensible; I'm not convinced that Bentleigh East can be moved out of *Hotham* at this point, but it is certainly worth looking at. Mr Boatman (#52) and Mr Fletcher (#55) argue for putting Bannockburn into *Ballarat*: I see no merit in this, since it is clearly part of the greater Geelong area and on the numbers would fit neatly in *Corio*.

Several suggestions (Mr Pharaoh (#28), D.G. Clarke (#36), Mr Lappin (#44)) plead for *McEwen* to be made more coherent in some way. I concur heartily with the objective but I despair of being able to achieve it without a radical rearrangement of most of northern Victoria. Mr Scalia (#3) also suggests a drastic rearrangement, but in the inner city; I understand his logic, but I am not convinced that the gain is worth the disruption. Mr Ma (#48) argues for fixing the boundaries in the Box Hill area; I outlined a partial solution for this in my submission, but perhaps more could be done.

A number of suggestions, as always, argue for keeping particular divisions intact, or for keeping particular local government areas (LGAs) united within a single division. These are always desirable objectives, but they cannot be considered in isolation; sometimes the pressure of changes in neighboring divisions will make them unattainable (as I suspect may be the case with the City of Manningham). Ms Daniel, the member for *Goldstein* (#34), suggests keeping that division substantially intact but shifting its eastern boundary from the railway to the Nepean Highway: the larger scale changes that I proposed would make that question moot, but I think she is quite right about the superiority of the highway as a boundary.

Many suggestions concern themselves only with the names of divisions. As indicated in my submission, I claim no great expertise on that issue, but the range of suggestions received confirms my contention that there are many worthy historical figures who could usefully be commemorated in this way. I would particularly like to endorse the comments of Mr Thomas (#51) on the inconvenience of duplicating LGA names, and the desirability of renaming the divisions of *Casey*, *La Trobe*, *Maribyrnong*, *Melbourne* and *Monash* at some early opportunity.