



Objection 42

Adjunct Associate Professor Mark Baker

2 pages

Dear Committee,

I am writing to object to the proposed redistribution of Macnamara and Higgins. I am objecting because in my view the proposal will injure the Melbourne Jewish community as a community of interest, especially having regard to its political and organising capabilities. I also detail how this proposal does not have appropriate regard to the means of communication and travel in these areas.

This is a community that I am deeply involved in. In 1994 I co-founded *Keshet*. Now known as *Stand Up*, it exists to mobilise Australian Jews to work together with marginalised communities to tackle Australia's most pressing social, humanitarian and environmental challenges through action and education. From 2006 and for the following ten years, I was the founding president of *Shira Hadasha*, an inclusive orthodox congregation that has evolved into one of Melbourne's fastest-growing synagogues.

I am also a researcher and educator specialising in the Australian Jewish community. I am an Associate Professor at Monash University and for ten years was the Director of the Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation ('the ACJC') at the University, finishing only recently in 2018. The ACJC is an interdisciplinary centre based in the Faculty of Arts that teaches and conducts research into the cultures, literatures, politics and history of Jewish civilisation.

Among other things, the ACJC has conducted two comprehensive national surveys of Australia's Jewish population – the first in 2008 ('Gen08') and the second in 2017 ('Gen17'), which surveyed over 8,000 people. This project is led by renowned demographer Professor Andrew Markus. The objective of the survey is to establish a better understanding of the views and needs of Jewish Australians, incorporating the feedback and needs of Jewish leadership; the services provided by communal organisations; future expectations; and a range of challenges relating to social, educational, religious, political and other dimensions of Jewish life. Both surveys have played an essential role in driving policy and resourcing decisions within the community and in governments.

There a number of points that in my view are important for your consideration, insofar as they reflect on the Jewish community of Macnamara as a community of interest:

1. Gen17 establishes that members of the Jewish community have a keenly felt and widespread sense of Jewish identity;
2. The Jewish community is highly integrated and connected, with over 70% in Gen17 indicating a sense of connectedness to the community;
3. The population of Jews in Australia is estimated to be around 113,000. 87% of the community lives in Victoria or NSW, and of those living in Victoria, 98% live in Melbourne.
4. The community of Melbourne is geographically highly concentrated across the suburbs of Caulfield, St Kilda East, Elsternwick, and to a lesser extent Elwood and St Kilda. While it can be inferred from the census data that while there are small pockets of Jews living north of Dandenong Rd in the suburbs of Malvern, Armadale, Toorak and South Yarra, the community can be described as being anchored south of Dandenong Rd.

5. Many of the leading community organisations, businesses and shops at which the community intersects and connects are based in Elsternwick, Ripponlea, Balaclava, St Kilda East and St Kilda. The parts of the community from Caulfield, and indeed the other suburbs further south of Brighton East and Bentleigh, turn to these areas to socialise and shop, and have very limited connectedness north of Dandenong Road.

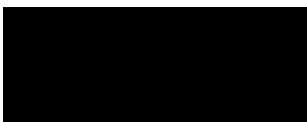
The Committee has proposed that Macnamara and Higgins be divided across Hotham St. There is no doubt in my mind that this would not conform with the 'community of interest' criteria in Section 66 of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act*. The Jewish community of Melbourne is a community of interest of crucial significance, with obvious and tangible shared interests, including economic, social, political and other concerns that are derived from its members' strong sense of Jewish identity and connectedness to each other. Looking at the 2019 boundaries in Victoria, it only has a significant presence in Macnamara, and in recent history only has had a presence in Melbourne Ports.

The Jewish community is a politically organised community. It regularly engages with the commonwealth government, the opposition and third parties to advocate for political outcomes on the issues that affect its members. In doing so it relies significantly on its concentration in Macnamara (and beforehand, Melbourne Ports), being a seat that is increasingly marginal between all parties. Many political issues have a disproportionate impact on the community as Jews. The proposal to divide Macnamara and Higgins across Hotham Street will break apart this community of interest and scatter it across two electorates. It will wound its political capabilities.

More broadly, the Jewish community's dispersion and social organisation south of Dandenong Rd reflects that the means of communication and travel in the proposed electorate of Higgins would put the Jewish community and the communities of Caulfield, Elsternwick, St Kilda East and Elsternwick, into an electorate (Higgins) with which they share very little by way of communication and travel. Conversely, it would split up these communities from those with whom they do share means of communication and travel and inhabit shared communities of interest - those that would live across the proposed Hotham St divide. Put simply, dividing Higgins and Macnamara at Hotham St will split communities, because Hotham St in reality offers no divide between the communities south of Dandenong Road. The actual divide is Dandenong Road.

I urge the Committee to reconsider its proposal. It seems to me thoroughly unnecessary to disunite the Jewish community. A far better proposal, having regard to the relevant considerations, is to move Windsor back into Higgins.

Yours sincerely



Adjunct Associate Professor Mark Baker