



# Suggestion 89

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3 pages

## SUGGESTION RE REDISTRIBUTION OF VICTORIA'S FEDERAL ELECTORATES, 2020

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### Overview

1. I represent only myself, a journalist with a longstanding interest in elections and redistributions.
2. Electorates, in my view, should be named after places, not people. The vast majority of Australians have no idea where Federal electorates are because the names have no connection to the place. It would be useful if they did, and would make the electoral process less remote. I urge the commission to reconsider its attitude on this, and carry out a survey of public opinion to guide its decisions.
3. In my view, Victoria's new seat should be located in Melbourne's outer north-west, more or less where the former seat of Burke was in the 1990s.

### Electoral Names

Whether Federal electorates are named after dead white men, dead white women, dead black men, or dead black women is a matter of interest mainly to activists. Personally, I am glad that we finally got the mass murderer McMillan out of our Parliament, but the gender and racial balancing, I suspect, is irrelevant to most people. They don't know where the electorates are, or who they are named after. I am sure Jean Macnamara was a woman of great achievements, and I know Doug Nicholls was a leader worthy of honour, but I don't think naming a Federal electorate after either of them was an appropriate way to honour them – or to honour the ex-Prime Ministers and other worthies who dominate our electoral names.

I would like to see the Commission reconsider its whole approach to naming electorates to make it user-friendly. Give electorates names that tell people where they are. Ballarat, Bendigo, Gippsland, Melbourne Ports: geographical names immediately inform people of the location of the seat, and that must enhance their understanding of and identification with the electoral process. Those of us who have spent our lives involved in this stuff know instantly where seats like Curtin, Dawson and Solomon are, but the vast majority of Australians would not have a clue.

I would urge the commission to carry out a survey of public opinion to guide it on this issue. It would be useful to find out how many people know where electorates are. The survey could ask if they know who or what their own electorate is named after. It could have a little checklist, asking them if they know the location of half-a-dozen randomly chosen electorates named after people, and half-a-dozen randomly named after places. And finally, and most importantly, it could ask them whether they would prefer electorates to be named after people or places.

If you are going to keep naming electorates after people, I would urge you to be more creative in the way you do it. Doug Nicholls, for example, was known to everyone fifty years ago as Pastor Doug. The name fitted him perfectly: he was the leader of his people, their pastor, and he was an unpretentious bloke on first name terms with everyone. If you're going to name an electorate after him, and you want to honour him and remind people of him, why not name the seat Pastor Doug (or Pastor Doug Nicholls), a name which embodies his virtues? And rename the seat of Macnamara as Doctor Jean Macnamara?

## The redistribution

This redistribution will be unlike any other, in that we can anticipate relatively little population growth in the next three years. Nonetheless I think it is reasonable to assume that rapid population growth will return in the second half of the seven-year lifespan of this redistribution, and probably in similar locations as that of the past.

Looking back over the three years since the past redistribution, a brief summary shows that population growth by area was:

Melbourne, south-east of the Yarra (16 seats, including Menzies): 60,591 average 3787 per seat.

Melbourne, north-west of the Yarra (12 seats): 80,864 or 6739 per seat.

Regional Victoria (10 seats, including Monash): 59,656 or 5966 per seat.

In my view it's safe to assume to in the lifetime of this redistribution, rapid population growth will return, primarily in Melbourne's north and west, and that south-eastern Melbourne will continue to shrink its relative share.

The average size of electorates in September 2020 was:

Melbourne south-east: 110,866 (1.25 per cent below average, growing slowly)

Melbourne north-west: 112,101 (0.1 per cent below average, growing rapidly)

Regional Victoria: 114,658 (2.1 per cent above average, growing medium-fast)

Of course there is a wide range of growth rates within each of these groups: within Melbourne's south-east, Chisholm's enrolment has declined while LaTrobe's has skyrocketed. But it is clear that in broad terms, population growth, while also strong in the outer south-east, has been primarily in the north-western suburbs and inner regional Victoria, mostly on Melbourne's western fringe.

I would move the existing seats of western Melbourne southwards to create a new seat on Melbourne's north-west fringe. Provocatively, I would call it Macedon, after the mountain that dominates the area. It would include territory now in Bendigo, Ballarat, McEwen, Calwell and Gorton. To make room for it, Melbourne's western seats would edge south and its northern seats would edge east. You know far more than I would about what detailed boundaries would fit that plan best.

Four other points:

1. The middle suburbs generally have been losing their share of Melbourne's population at a rapid pace, faster than recent redistributions have anticipated. They will continue to do so, just at a slower rate. In the 2017 redistribution, middle seats like Chisholm, Deakin, Goldstein, Hotham and Kooyong were all given below-average enrolments to start with, and of course became increasingly below-average over the three years. I think all middle suburban electorates should be drawn with above-average enrolments for this redistribution.
2. Outer suburban growth will return, with a vengeance, over the life of this redistribution, and I urge you to create room for it. Putting an extra seat in the outer north-west will allow the outer growth corridors to be shared among more electorates, which should reduce the burden on any one of them, on that side of town. For the south-east, I would simply urge you to make the maximum sensible use of your ability to vary electorate numbers.

3. Most seats in regional Victoria were given above-average enrolments in the 2017 redistribution, but it was really only Mallee, Wannon and Corio that warranted them. The rest of the state has kept pace with the average growth rate, or in the case of Corangamite and Monash, far exceeded it. It looks at first sight as though the problems of adjusting electoral boundaries in regional Victoria this time should be relatively straightforward – and the main problem could be that you will have to move Lake Corangamite out of Corangamite, as Wannon edges east, and Mallee edges south.
4. If there were another change worth thinking about, in my opinion, it would be to consider abolishing one of Aston, Bruce or Hotham, and creating a new seat in the outer south-east, so you have one seat based on Berwick, and another based on Pakenham. I think this will be needed eventually, and it might be a good time to look at it.

Thank you for reading my thoughts. I wish you luck and an interesting job ahead.

Tim Colebatch