



Objection 123

Malcolm Mackerras AO

6 pages

AEC VIC SO 26 APR 2018

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20 April 2018

Redistribution Committee for Victoria
Australian Electoral Commission
GPO Box 768
Melbourne Victoria 3001

Dear Committee members

I have subjected your *Proposed redistribution of Victoria into electoral divisions* to significant study and I wish to make one strong objection. Before I do so I should say that you have done a very good job (as always) and I commend your decisions to change the names of McMillan to Monash, Melbourne Ports to Macnamara and Murray to Nicholls. I also approve the new seat being called Fraser.

My objection is to the elimination of Corangamite as a division name. In my opinion the elimination of that name would be as offensive to Australian political history as would be the elimination of Kooyong or Werriwa.

The elimination of Kooyong could be justified on the ground that the Melbourne suburb of that name does not lie in the Division of Kooyong. The elimination of Werriwa could be justified on the ground that Lake George lies *nowhere near* the present Division of Werriwa.

Back in 2006 the then NSW committee proposed to eliminate the name Gwydir from the map. I thought I might object but I decided not to do so. The justification for Gwydir's elimination was essentially the same as the present justification for Corangamite's elimination. However, there was a critical difference - and that difference caused me not to object.

Sir Henry Parkes (1815-1896) is thought by many to have been the greatest Australian who ever lived. It was, therefore, worth eliminating Gwydir to keep the names Parkes on the map. I submit that May Cox (1883-1953) is not in the league of Sir Henry Parkes. While teaching swimming and lifesaving to Victorians was a worthy occupation it does not place Cox in the same league as Parkes who is generally regarded as the Father of Federation

I find the Committee's arguments for eliminating Corangamite very unpersuasive. It is true that Lake Corangamite is now wholly outside the Division of Corangamite. So what? Corangamite is a famous Federation division and the name should be kept for that reason.

Compared with Kooyong and Werriwa the case for Corangamite's elimination might run along these lines. Kooyong and Werriwa were represented by a famous prime minister. I admit that the famous prime minister was (at the time he held the office) the member for those seats. However, Corangamite was also represented by a prime minister, James Henry Scullin, from 1910-1913. The fact that he was not the member for Corangamite at the time he held the highest office should not be allowed to count against the name Corangamite which remains a famous Federation division.

Kooyong and Werriwa have had by-elections which I remember. However, they were not interesting by-elections. Those were safe seats. Corangamite has had one interesting by-election which I remember but that is not my point. Once upon a time Corangamite had a by-election of very great historical significance. Over the coming weekend of Friday 14 December, Saturday 15 December and Sunday 16 December this year I shall celebrate the Corangamite by-election held on Saturday 14 December 1918. I ask the Committee not to wreck my celebrations by making me admit that the name Corangamite is to be eliminated from the map.

The point is that the 1918 Corangamite by-election was the first use of preferential voting for the House of Representatives.

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Most of my time these days is consumed by my writing a book which I plan to call *Unrepresentative Swill* and which I plan to have published in March 2020. Its sub-title would be *Australia's Ugly Senate Voting System*. My book, likely to come to 300 pages, would be a full-bottle attack on the system of above-the-line voting for the Senate.

I attach to this letter the chapter outline of this book. Pages 4 and 5 of this letter are an extract from my first chapter which would be called *Celebrating a Century of Preferential Voting*.

Please acknowledge receipt of this letter and reply by e-mail for which my address is:

[REDACTED]

Kind regards

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

Malcolm Mackerras

My whole life has been a celebration of the uniquely Australian preferential vote which combines preferential voting with compulsory voting. A few other countries have the fully optional preferential vote commonly known as "the alternative vote". A significant number of countries has mandatory voting. Australia is unique in combining the two. I support each of the two - and their combination.

The other reason is simply to note the centenary of a particular date. On Saturday 14 December 1918 electors in the federal electoral division of Corangamite (Victoria) went to the polls in the first ever federal use of that which is still used to elect members of the House of Representatives. That was a by-election caused by the departure of the previous Nationalist member, James Chester Manifold, who died at sea on 20 October 1918, whilst on a voyage from San Francisco to Sydney. There were 34,895 electors on the roll and 25,040 formal votes were cast. Compulsory voting was still six years into the future but the system that day was, in effect, an adumbration of compulsory voting. To record a formal vote the elector had to number the five candidates in consecutive order 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. The Labor candidate, James Henry Scullin, led the primary count. He had 10,630 votes followed by 6,604 votes for the Farmers candidate, William Gerrard Gibson. Then there were 5,737 votes, 1,174 votes and 895 votes for the Nationalist, bigger independent and smaller independent candidates, respectively. Preferences were distributed and Gibson won the seat with 14,096 votes to 10,944 for Scullin.

In addition to celebrating a century of preferential voting in a general sense I was able, in December 2018, to celebrate the actual centenary of that election. That such a result should occur in 1918 tells us about the future of the Country Party. Its big breakthrough into the House of Representatives came with that by-election and the subsequent general election in December 1919. It also tells us that today's Nationals are still the party which loves this system. They have no need to defend it. They no longer own it since it is now owned by all Australians. All they need to say is that which I say: this system is a hundred years old, it has been very successful, let us not change it but let us celebrate it.

In recent times, however, there has grown a view that the system should be modernised and made more logical. It should not be the full preferential vote, such people aver, but the optional preferential vote, known in the United Kingdom as “the alternative vote” and OPV in Australia. To that I say, along with Winston Churchill: logic is a poor guide compared with custom. That this is the customary Australian system is illustrated by some facts and figures I now describe very briefly.

There are 837 Australian politicians today in our 15 houses of parliament. Of that number 606 (72.4 per cent) are in lower houses and 231 (27.6 per cent) are in upper houses. The most interesting statistics, however, are these. A total of 438 (52.3 per cent) are directly chosen by the people from systems of single member electoral districts with full preferential voting. That 438 is made up of 151 in the House of Representatives, 88 in the Victorian Legislative Assembly, 93 in the Queensland Legislative Assembly, 59 in the Western Australian Legislative Assembly and 47 in the South Australian House of Assembly.

The next biggest category is 216 de facto party machine appointees in the Senate (76) and the combined Legislative Councils of New South Wales (42), Victoria (40), Western Australia (36) and South Australia (22). Technically those systems can be described as PR-STV – but I do not like doing so! The next biggest category is 118 members in the Legislative Assembly of New South Wales (93) and that of the Northern Territory (25). Then come 50 members of lower houses directly chosen by the people of Tasmania (25) and the Australian Capital Territory (25) by Hare-Clark which TRULY IS a PR-STV system. Finally 15 members of the Legislative Council of Tasmania are elected from single member electoral divisions by partial optional preferential voting.

I make no secret of my preferences. I like the conventional system by which a clear majority of all our politicians is elected. When asked to defend it I simply say: “You can have your logic but logic is a poor guide compared with custom. In my submission I point out that the British first-past-the-post system (used for House of Commons elections) has its logic anyway. So too does our system to elect our House of Representatives.

The title of the book would be "Unrepresentative Swill" to which the sub-title would be "Australia's Ugly Senate Voting System"

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