



Comment on objections 20

Anonymous 3

8 pages

The 2021 proposed redistribution of Victorian seats attracted 67 objections. The 2023 proposed redistribution has drawn 508. Clearly the commissioners have done a much more controversial job of this one.

Or have they?

It was hard to miss the large number of identically worded objections to the abolition of Higgins; the objectors seem to think that this is a democratic, rather than deliberative, decision. Using the same weak arguments in objection hundreds of times (well over 300 from my count) doesn't better inform the decision making of the committee, but does place an unnecessary burden on that committee to filter through the noise. It's a perfect example of poorly executed astroturfing, and a mediocre example of "flooding the zone with [excrement]".

After wading through the flood I noticed another attempt at astroturfing, this one much better executed. It revolves around the boundaries of Maribyrnong and Wills, and looking into it suggests it has been orchestrated by someone intent on preserving the status quo in Wills. I counted about 60 objections to the Wills-Maribyrnong border. Like with Higgins, the objections offered no alternative solution, which I suspect was the point. A number of them were quite concerned about the AEC's proposal to break up Merri-bek council; it seems that they were misinformed by the organiser.

As with Higgins there seems to be a lot of very similarly worded objections to moving the boundary between Wills and Maribyrnong. I thought that there would be something to these objections, because although the same phrases and structure are used, each seems to have been constructed by a human rather than a lithopress – differing concerns are mentioned.

If the commissioners feel the arguments for retaining united suburbs of Pascoe Vale South and Brunswick West in Wills are strong, that could be achieved with a nett transfer of 80 electors. Realigning the boundary to (instead of following the Freeway and Pascoe Vale Rd) follow the Moonee Ponds Creek and the railway line has a total effect of adding 1998 electors and removing 1917 electors. The railway line is a less permeable boundary than Pascoe Vale Rd, and provides a second transport link through the electorate (and incidentally direct to the current electorate office location); the freeway offers little in the way of connection within Maribyrnong.

One distinct group of objecting organisations was sporting oriented, which I found odd; sporting competitions typically span multiple federal electorates, so flipping certain suburbs between neighbouring electorates I see as immaterial to the ambitions of those clubs. Why a darts club has an interest in electorate boundary locations is lost on me.

I've identified other more reasonable concerns voiced by individuals and community groups as:

- The Nepalese-speaking community
- The Alevi community, and the broader Muslim community
- The Arabic-speaking community
- The Farsi-speaking community
- Kastorians (those of a small city in the Macedonian region of Greece) OB489

Unfortunately the ABS doesn't publicly supply geographic data on Alevi members of our community, so I have used the broader Muslim community as a proxy, as dividing the Muslim community itself was also a concern. As context, here is the distribution across Metro Melbourne with the top 5% by proportion in purple and the next 5% in Teal:

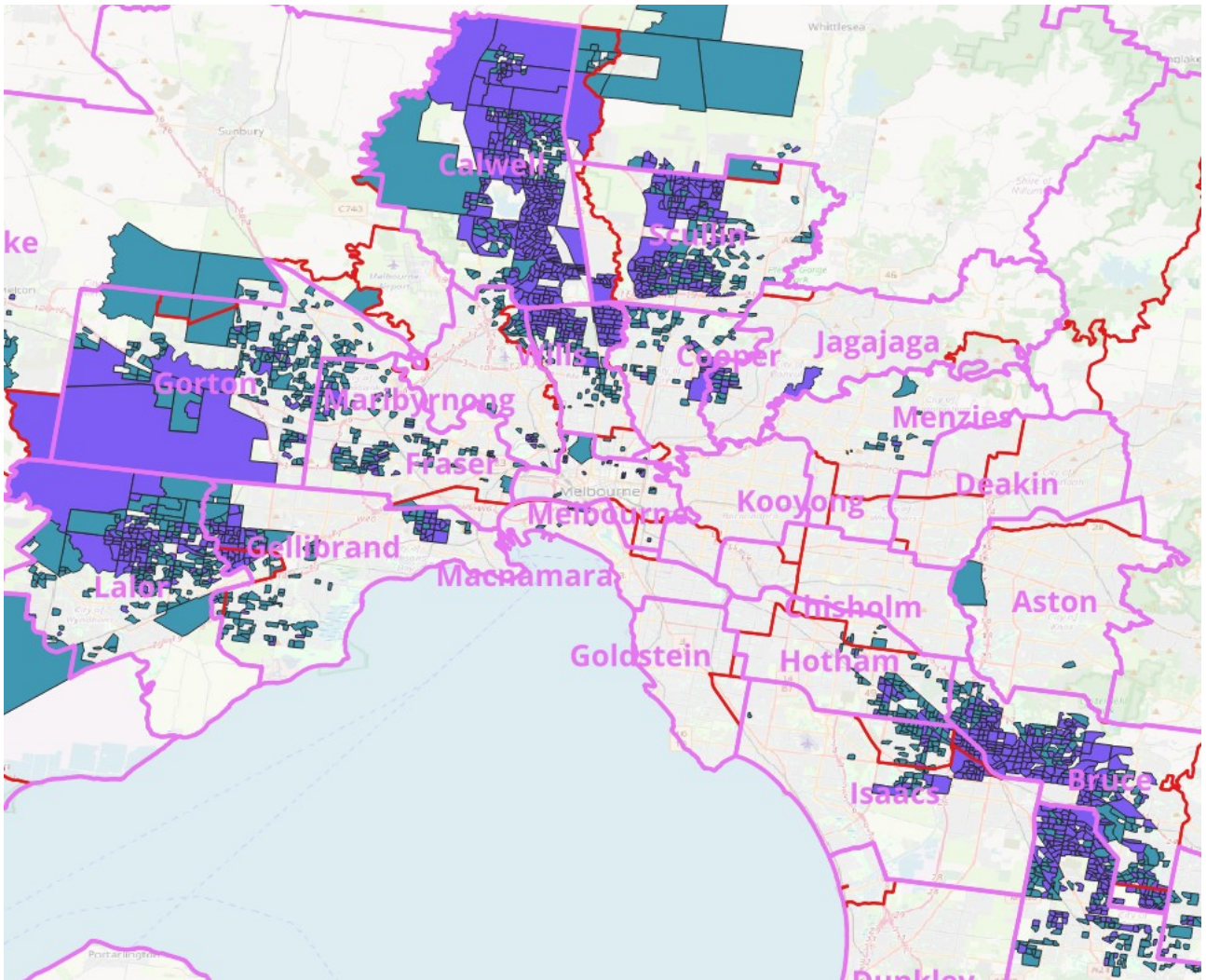


Figure 1: Top decile of Muslims per population in the Melbourne Metropolitan area

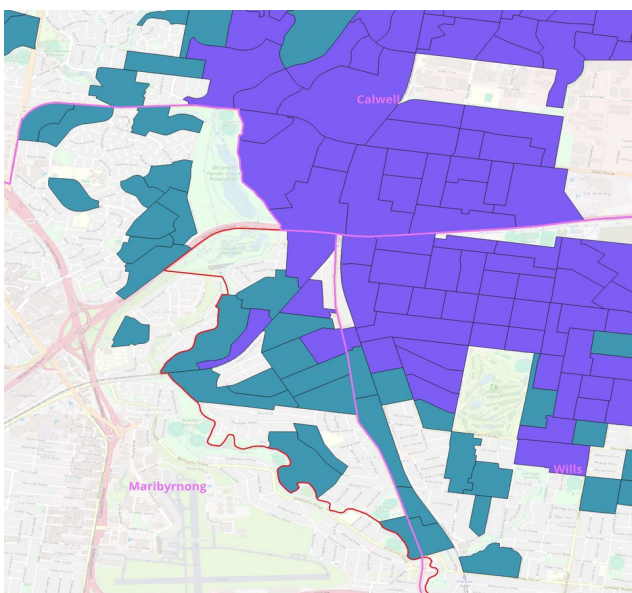


Figure 2: Top decile of Muslims around the proposed Wills/Maribyrnong transfer area

And more specifically, the boundary area between Maribyrnong and Wills.

While there is a high Muslim population, Maribyrnong already has Gladstone Park with a similar proportion of Muslims. The proposed boundary move does not create a unique island within Maribyrnong and in fact improves their representation within the seat.

Concerns about the Farsi speaking population seem unfounded, appearing in each electorate and other electorates around Wills.

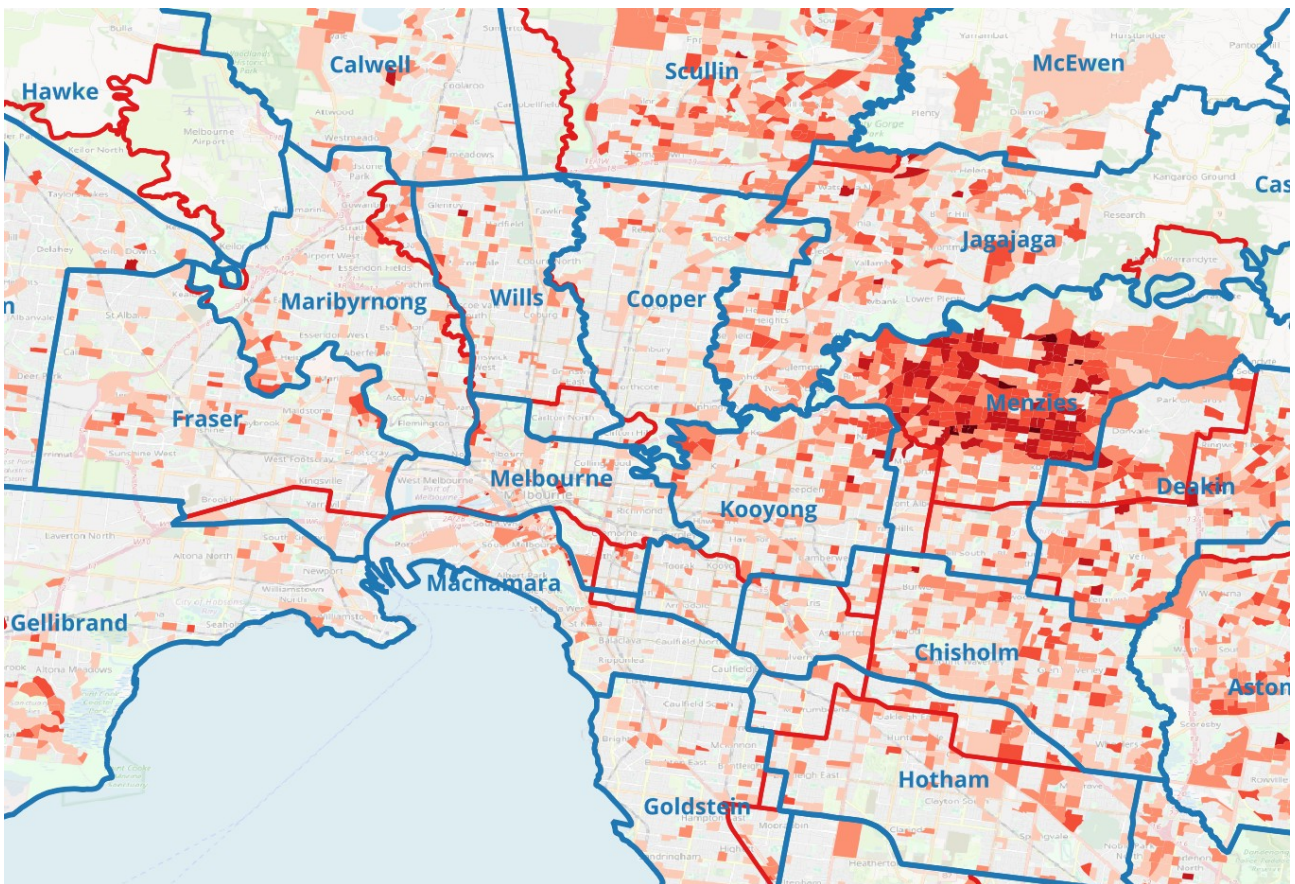
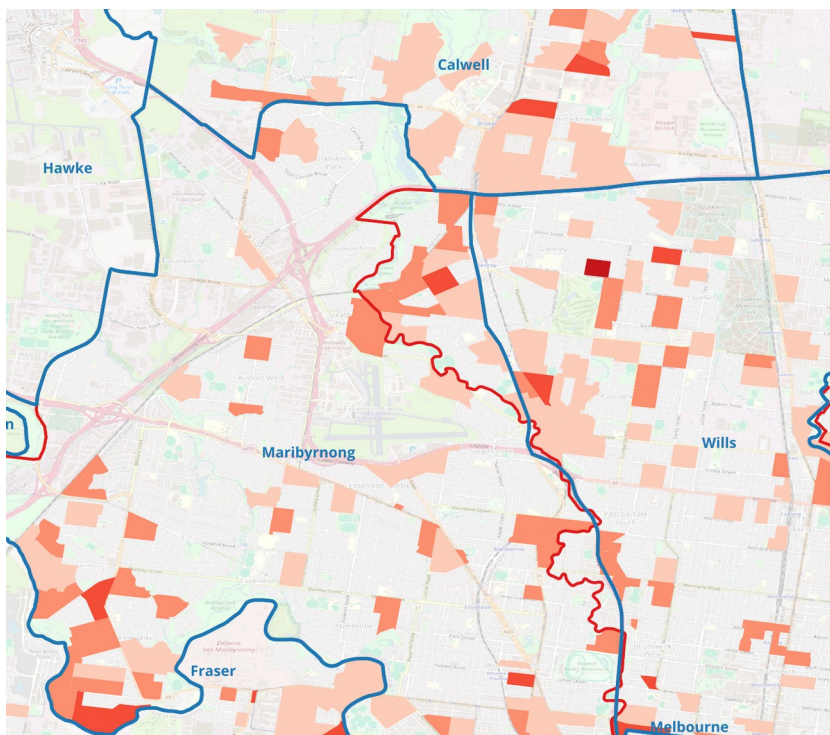


Figure 3: Farsi speakers as a population proportion within a broader metropolitan area

Colours are <1%, 1-2%, 2-3.5%, 3.5-7%, >7% of population speakers of Persian.



The number of transferred electors who speak Farsi will number in the dozens, not hundreds.

The population profile is similar to that of Ascot Vale.

Figure 4: Farsi speakers within Maribyrnong and Wills

Arabic speakers are less common in the transferred areas than elsewhere in either Maribyrnong or Wills, with a profile not dissimilar to Ascot Vale.

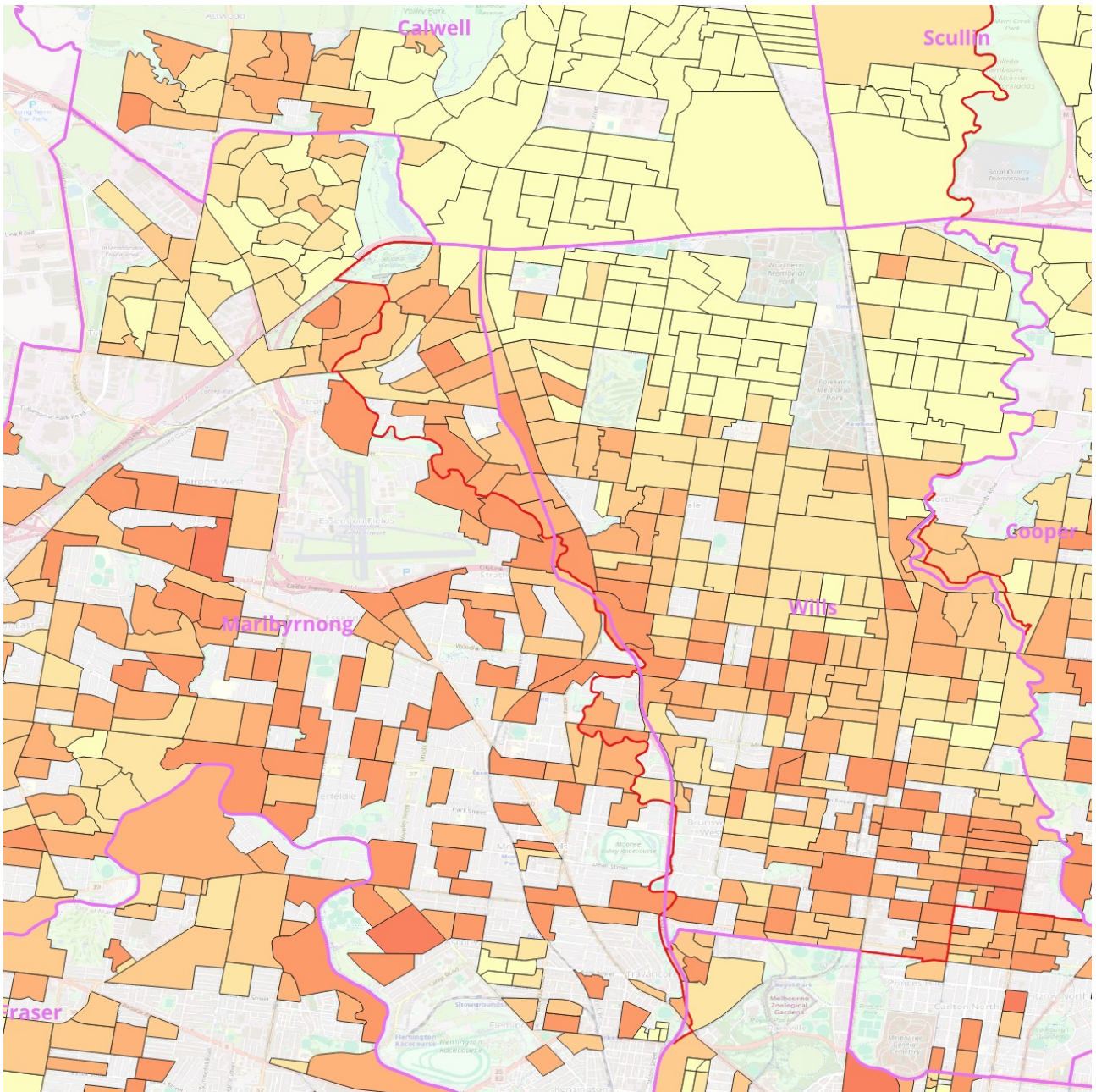


Figure 5: Proportion of Arabic speakers around the proposed transfer area; Yellow highest, dark orange lowest

The transferred area is clearly the Nepalese-speaking centre of Melbourne. While the transfer will reduce the proportion of the electorate speaking Nepalese, that local community is already divided between Calwell and Wills. In the image below, colours are <1%, 1-8%, 8-16%, 16-32%, >32%

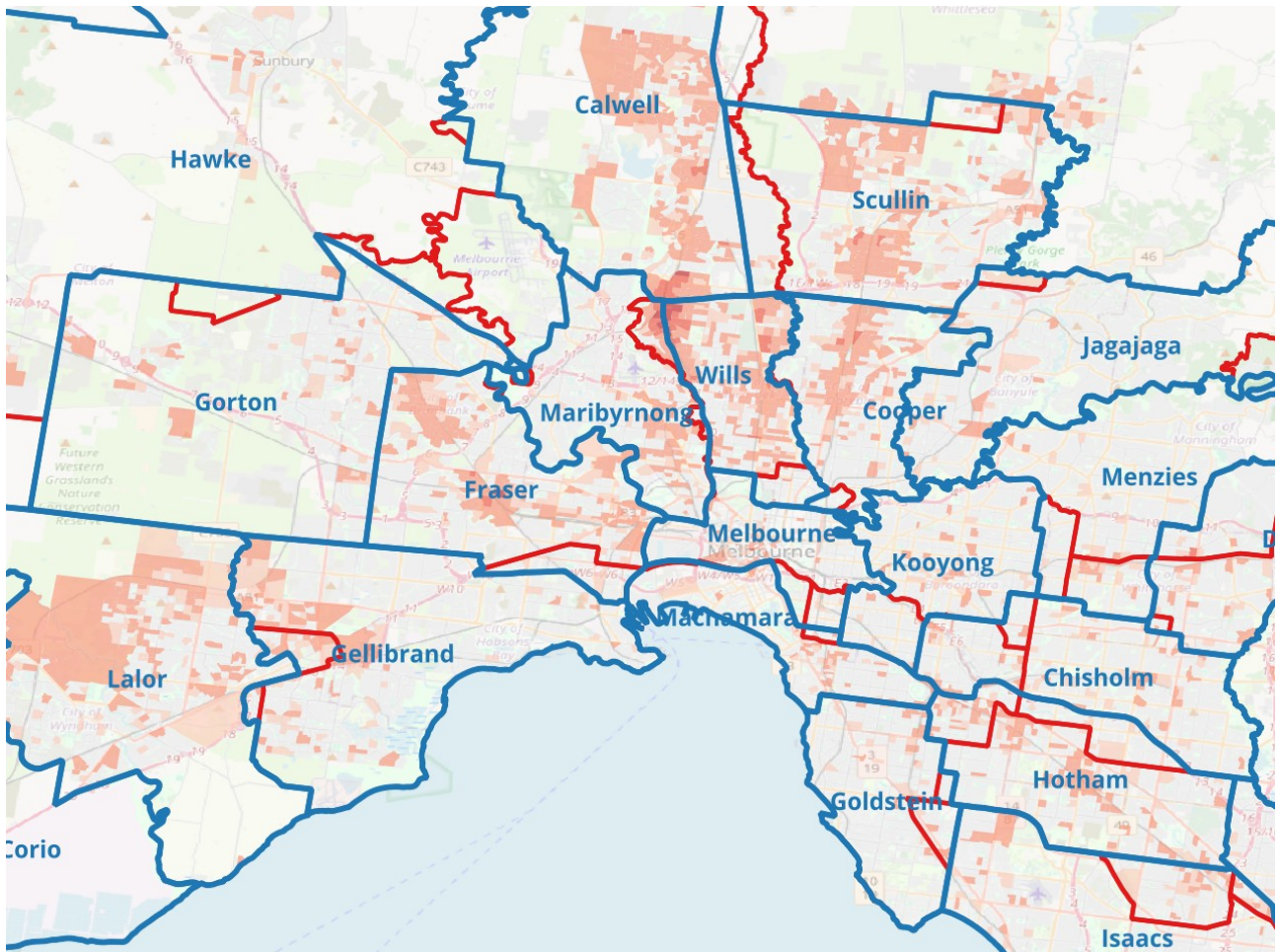


Figure 6: Nepalese speakers as a proportion of population, wider Metropolitan area

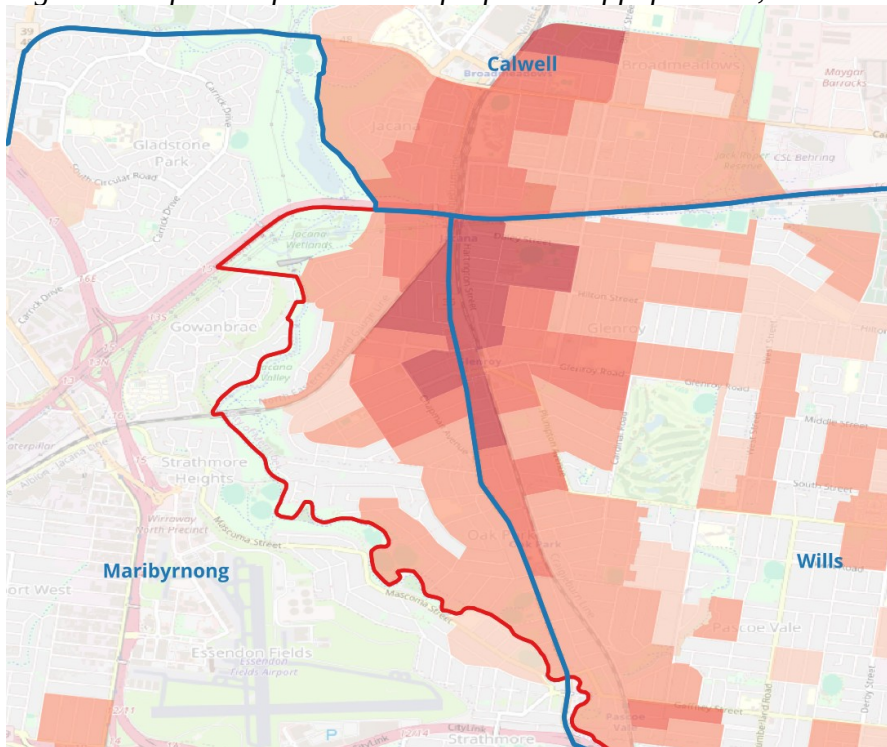


Figure 7: Same image zoomed to around area of proposed transfer

Urdu speakers have also been mentioned as a community of interest, but their concentration is higher in regions outside of the proposed transfer – elsewhere in Wills and Calwell.

The colour gradient is <2%, <4%, <8%, <16%, >16%

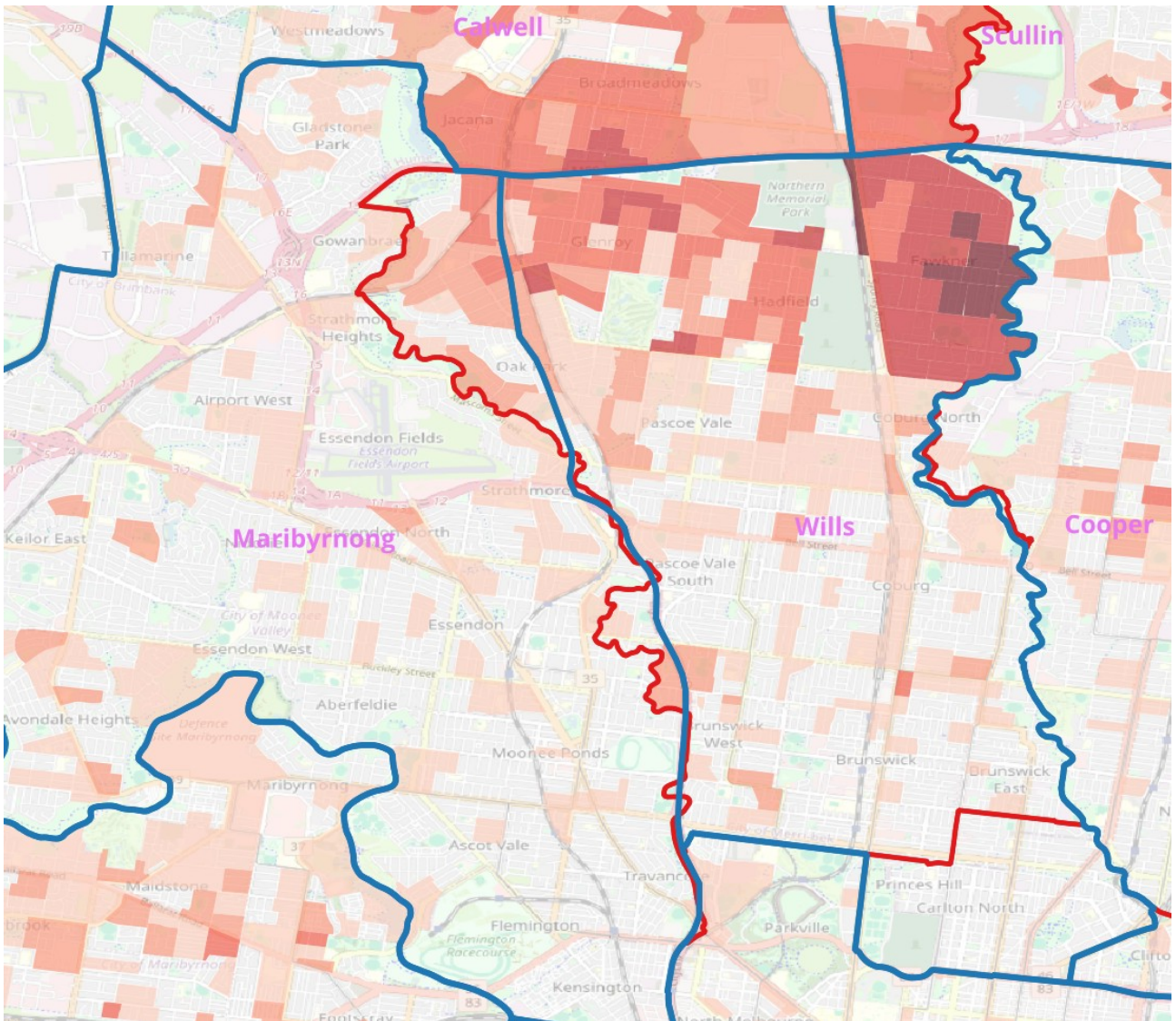


Figure 8: Urdu speakers as a population percentage around Maribyrnong and Wills

Macedonians are the nearest proxy for Kastorians, given Kastoria is a small city within Macedonia and identifying as Kastorian is not recorded on the census. However, it seems any Macedonian in Wills would find themselves with more other Macedonians in literally any other electorate.

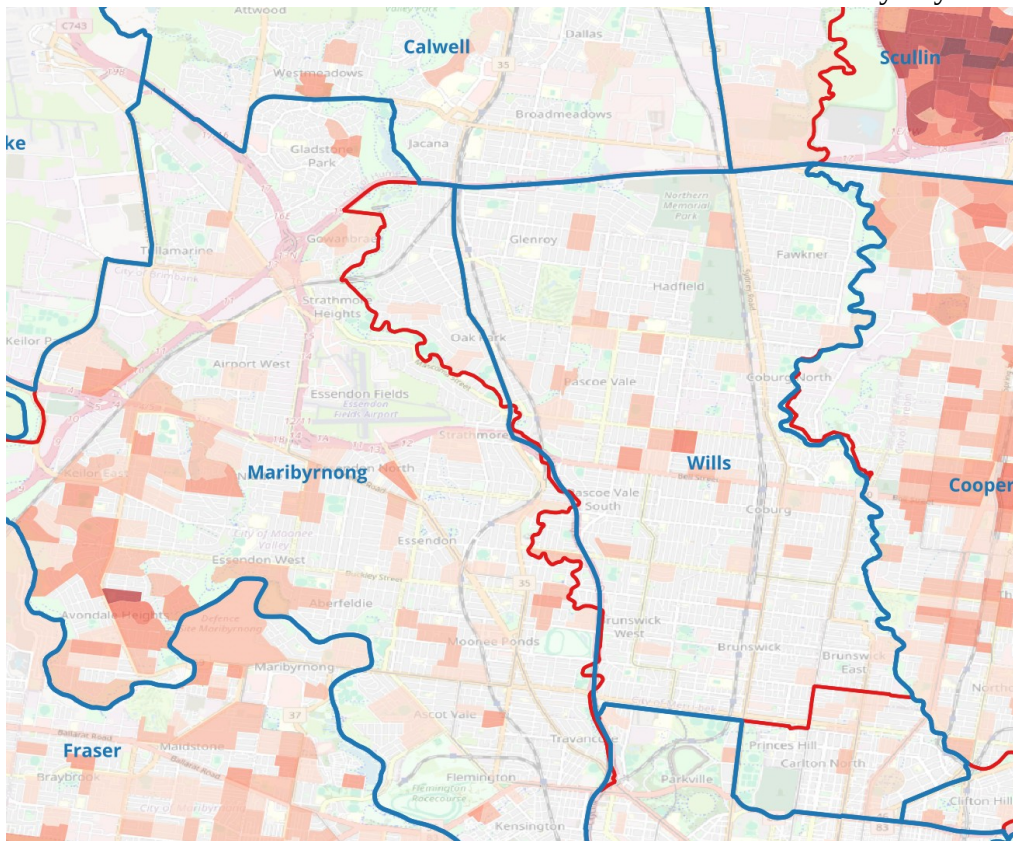


Figure 9: Macedonians within Maribyrnong, Wills and wider areas

Perhaps, because Macedonia was a write-in option, census respondents took the easy path and picked Greek? No. The proposed transfer area has noticeably fewer Greeks than elsewhere in Wills.

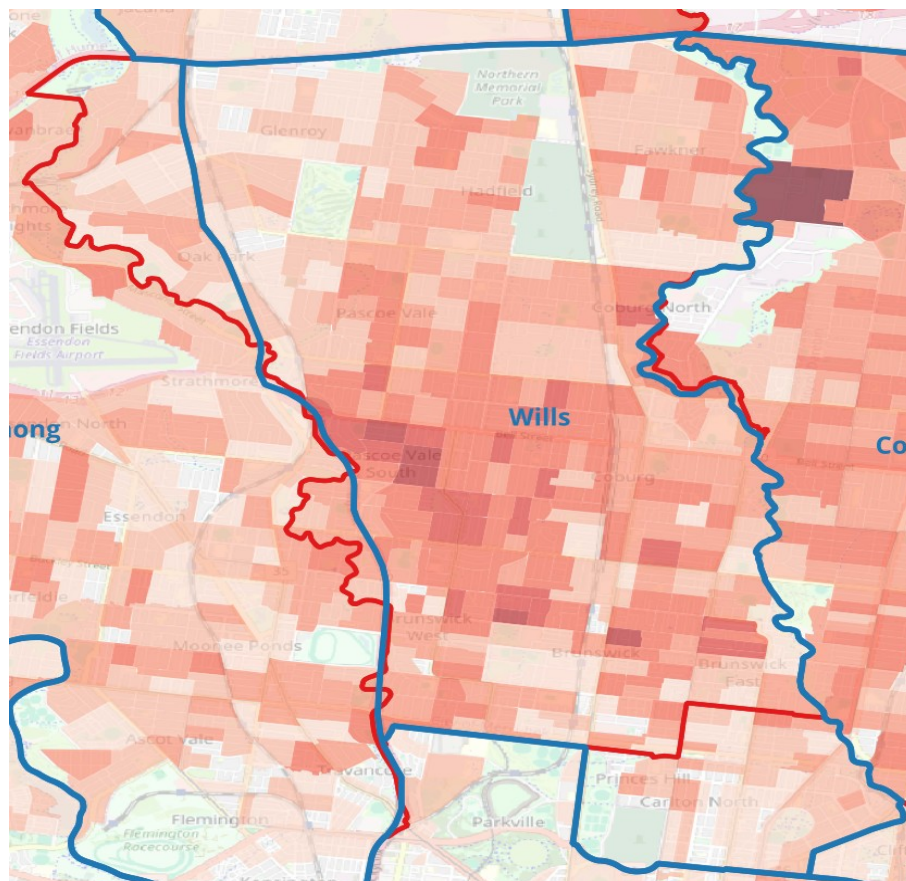


Figure 10: Greeks within Wills

With electors purportedly against the Wills/Maribyrnong border being changed, how can the electorate be moved to being within quota? On the south side of Wills, there was another astroturfed campaign against the proposed changes to that boundary, with many weak arguments¹ being put forward. Repeated reuse of phrasing was seen again. And yet again no solution was offered.

Interestingly enough, Victorian Labor puts forward an alternative (OB487) to the commissioners' proposal which coincidentally addresses these two sets of astroturfed objections. No other objector seems to have anticipated this groundswell of similar objections, nor has anyone else suggested such a fine solution to restoring Wills' boundaries and placating all those objectors. One notes to achieve this Victorian Labor has deviated substantially not only from their original submission to the commissioners, but also from the commissioners' proposal for Maribyrnong. On a completely unrelated note, the commissioners' proposed changes to Wills seem to negatively affect the projected vote of the sitting Victorian Labor MP – but, as I noted, that MP's now perilous position is completely unrelated and certainly not something that would launch a large orchestrated campaign to dissuade the commissioners; that would be unseemly.

I counted several dozen objections to the Wills/Maribyrnong border and didn't even look at the number on the Wills/Melbourne border. I haven't looked further afield. It appears that there's at least one attempt to game the process, and I urge the commissioners attentive to other attempts of this nature and to be very wary of rewarding this behaviour.

[Population values sourced from published ABS data from 2021 census]

PS: It is with a heavy heart that I must inform the commissioners that the rich tapestry of the community, woven over tens of seconds, must be torn apart, leaving the threads of their identity scattered across other electorates with potentially divergent priorities (thanks to OB46 and hundreds of others - you people are unthinking monsters). The proposed boundaries suggested (OB485) by the W-Class Tram Political Action Committee are not legally acceptable, in such that they do not create a contiguous area. I'm sure that the Victorian Government, in realising the horror of such an outcome has commenced planning an immediate building program to create a network of tunnels to link up the necessary communities of interest (in a legally acceptable manner) to fully realise the grand vision that surely must be implemented in the proposal. I eagerly await housing demolitions, insofar as deemed necessary by the ABS, to bring the electorate into quota. Naturally a jobs-creating roads program would also be needed to create clear boundaries for all the pleasingly shaped curves of the new electorate, in the form of 12-lane freeways to ensure sufficiently strong boundaries. Perhaps the commissioners could recommend a timeline and budget to the appropriate governmental authorities to expedite this process.

¹ I found the objector who didn't want to commute from one electorate filled with anti-Semites to another that contains their synagogue a particularly confused example of a weak argument (OB445).