



Comment on objections 66

Ben Mullin

7 pages

RE: Comments on objections to the proposed redistribution

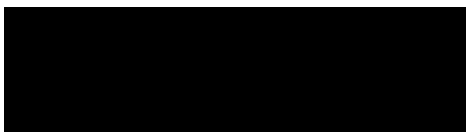
Dear Members of the Augmented Electoral Commission,

I've considered the objections made to the draft redistribution and have made comments as attached.

Comments herein refer to division boundaries or names of: ASTON, CASEY, CHISHOLM, DEAKIN, GELLIBRAND, HIGGINS, HOTHAM, KOOYONG, MACNAMARA, MARIBYRNONG, MELBOURNE, MENZIES and WILLS.

Please let me know if there's any further detail I can provide.

Sincerely,

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Ben Mullin,
Resident of Oakleigh

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Comments on objections

Of the common objections, I endorse those generally raised around **Higgins/Hotham** and **Melbourne/Macnamara**.

I have made every effort to fairly reflect the consensus of views, however owing to the sheer volume of submissions, apologise in advance of any omission.

Population projection data

Both major party submissions (OB398 and OB487) note that the initial round of suggestions was based on incorrect data from the ABS.

I agree that this has confounded the process. When the Labor and Liberal parties made initial submissions to remove **Casey** and **Maribyrnong**, these attracted heightened comments on their suggestions, which likely had some course in steering the committee away from these ideas (per Table I, both of these were initially investigated for abolition – even once the data had been corrected.)

Had either party submitted to abolish **Higgins**, it likely would have attracted similar scrutiny. Per the Liberal objection that they would have suggested the abolition of **Hotham** on this new population data, it would have also faced the prospect of being highly scrutinised (and I suspect come with far less public backlash.)

This would have informed the committee's work. The decision to abolish **Higgins** was less prominent within the initial round of suggestions and as such, had limited opportunity for critique. Indeed the provision of corrected ABS data has even seen two authors since lodge objections against positions they had suggested based on the old dataset – now arguing that **Higgins** instead be retained (S35/OB235) and **Hotham** be abolished (CS23/OB298.)

This has also coloured the objections phase. As demonstrated by the Liberal Party objection, some contributors appear to have felt compelled to work within the framework that **Higgins** is abolished. These may not have been ordinarily be so accepting if this had been posited in the suggestion phase with the correct ABS figures.

While the draft boundaries would ordinarily be less subject to change, the error in ABS projections should allow for revision of which Division to abolish and an additional/extended objection period in this circumstance. The augmented commission should not acquiesce to the abolition of a Division without a fair consideration of the objections as if they had been put forward in the initial comment on suggestions phase.

As per my initial objection, I have demonstrated that this can be carried out constructively by confining the alterations to Eastern/South-Eastern Melbourne only, thereby minimising the scope and time required that an extension might ordinarily take. The existing good work of the committee in the rest of Melbourne and Regional Victoria can be retained.

Common objections

I've summarised a number of common issues raised on which I wish to comment:

- Retention of the Division of **Higgins** and that **Hotham** be abolished instead
- Transfer between **Maribyrnong/Wills**
- A proposed transfer of Balywn and/or Balwyn North into **Menzies**
- The border between **Aston** and **Deakin**
- The border between **Melbourne** and **Macnamara**

While I respect the spirit of all objections, these need to account for the wider implications of any such transfers/reversals. Equally, I recognise that calculating and summarising numerically-sound alternatives takes time, so still appreciate those who have offered a rough outline/direction of travel for where the drafts can be improved.

Community campaigns

I note the public campaign by Dr. Katie Allen to rally support to reverse the abolition of **Higgins** (which I support, on different grounds.) I suspect similar campaigns may have been mobilised for **Maribyrnong/Wills** and a transfer of Balwyn North to **Menzies**, noting as well these align with Labor and Liberal party submissions respectively. Naturally, these have wider partisan implications.

Competitive implications are not listed as a consideration of the commission, and I would encourage them to be especially wary of submissions that follow a similar pattern with an apparent motivation. These should always be judged on the merits of individual arguments rather than the volume of standardised submissions received. The commission should proceed in its work on **Higgins**, **Maribyrnong/Wills** and **Menzies** within this context.

Common Objections

Higgins/Hotham

Template submissions aside, there were a number of well-written unique objections that had merit in raising issues such as:

- That Stonnington as a relatively small metropolitan LGA in both area and population should be not be split 5 times. And probably not even 3 or 4 times. (e.g. OB280, OB463)
- That the existing boundary with **Kooyong** is firm, and the draft boundary crossing is poorly supported by transport links (e.g. OB149, OB165)
- That any transfer between **Higgins/Kooyong** should see Glen Iris/Ashburton north of the Monash transferred to **Kooyong** only (e.g. OB107)
- That **Chisholm** becomes excessively elongated and represents a poorly cohesive community when stretched from Malvern to Glen Waverley (e.g. OB281, OB382)
- That **Hotham** remains disparate and could be used instead to supplement elector shortfalls elsewhere (e.g. OB10, OB122)

While some objections partially fix these – notably East Malvern, the resultant maps would still breach Stonnington’s boundary in several places. **Hotham** would be still be highly varied.

As such, I recommend the committee examine objections and strongly consider alternatives that start with **Hotham** abolished instead. The objections phase has seen this emerge as a preferred alternative for abolition. As it neighbours **Higgins**, this also minimises the extent of re-work.

There were some objections that considered a retention of **Higgins** with the area west of Williams Road still split between **Melbourne** and/or **Macnamara**. While different from my suggestion, this could be an approach to take if seeking to minimise alteration from the draft – though this would present a more significant split of Stonnington.

These could work with other objections that demonstrate the poor cohesiveness of the draft **Hotham**, with its western half completely different from suburbs further east within Greater Dandenong. My own objection took this only to Bentleigh East/Hughesdale, west of Warrigal Road, but I support objections that cited Oakleigh and surrounds a reasonable extension – as these pair well with the rest of the Skyrail corridor presently within **Higgins**.

Maribyrnong/Wills

While there were well over a hundred objections to the **Maribyrnong-Wills** transfer, the Labor Party submission (OB487) looks to be the only one that considered the wider implications of reversing this.

I think the committee's original draft for this area looks very reasonable. I remarked in my own objection that Alexandra Parade is a clear boundary; the suburbs being added to **Wills** feel like a natural extension of gentrified Brunswick.

Conversely, OB487's idea of transferring North Melbourne and Parkville out of **Melbourne** seems a weaker alternative. **Melbourne** represents the very densest areas around the city centre – hence my approval of the electorate crossing the Yarra and taking in similar areas to the south. These will often represent a younger demographic that skews heavily towards students, working professionals and renters. This is fundamental to how community evolves, as it is very different living in an area where so many people are transient as opposed to one where people typically put down roots for a long time.

A quick check of the 2021 census data for housing shows North Melbourne/Parkville at around ~3% detached housing ("separate house.") By Kensington/Flemington this jumps to ~20% and the wider **Maribyrnong** electorate, 55%. Conversely, **Melbourne** electorate is around ~2%. Age and housing ownership data tells a similar tale – per table below (I've included another typical suburb from each.)

North Melbourne and Parkville are demonstrably core parts of the **Melbourne** electorate.

As such, reversing the transfer on the draft between **Wills** and **Maribyrnong** would appear impractical. While I acknowledge the effort and earnestness of some submissions, it is highly likely that a reversal of this would cause a significant community split elsewhere, and generate a greater response were an alternative similar to that put forward by OB487 implemented. I believe there are no better alternatives for bringing **Maribyrnong** up to quota than what the committee has drafted.

	Maribyrnong				Melbourne			
	Kensington	Flemington	Essendon	Maribyrnong electorate	North Melbourne	Parkville	Fitzroy	Melbourne electorate
Median Age	35	34	39	39	31	26	35	30
Own outright	18.1	15.3	32.4	33.5	13.0	18.2	18.0	13.6
Mortgage	30.6	22.6	29.7	31.4	19.9	14.3	20.1	16.1
Renters	49.1	59.4	35.6	32.4	64.0	64.1	58.8	67.2
Separate House	17.1	20.1	47.2	55.4	3.9	2.2	3.2	2.2
Semi-detached	53.4	19.6	19.6	23.7	25.5	36.1	36.5	11.4
Flat/Apartment	29.3	59.4	33.0	20.6	69.9	61.5	59.4	85.8

Menzies – Balwyn North

This was highlighted by several objections.

I agree that demographically there are similarities between the northern edge of Balwyn and Doncaster.

However, I contend that Doncaster Road serves as a strong means of communication/transport. The route 48 tram travels from the city and terminates within Balwyn a significant distance from the edge of Doncaster. Of the 8 bus routes from Doncaster Park & Ride, only one runs along Doncaster Road through Balwyn, with both of the Smartbus routes turning onto the Eastern Freeway.

Means of communication should consider public transport. Demonstrably, the Eastern Freeway/Koonung Creek serves as a barrier between these two suburbs. This also serves as the LGA boundary. The idea of both of Boroondara's firm LGA boundaries in the north and south being breached should not be entertained.

Even from the perspective of non-PT road, this would be based on just Doncaster Road. There are no other direct road connections into Balwyn North that run north/south, and east/west only connects indirectly to Mont Albert North through minor local roads. The draft boundary that extends **Menzies** south along continuous lengths of Elgar Road, Station St/Tram Road, Middleborough Road and Blackburn Road is superior.

I would consider such a transfer of Balwyn sub-optimal on these grounds. There are better alternatives for **Kooyong's** existing growth – namely into any of Glen Iris, Ashburton, Ashwood or Surrey Hills. Similarly, it is better to keep **Menzies** and **Deakin** confined to Manningham, Maroondah and Whitehorse LGAs as far as possible.

Aston/Deakin

The movement of Heathmont into **Aston** seemed to attract a slight majority of objections against this. I personally believe the committee's draft boundary is reasonable and can be retained.

The population figures for **Aston** do not support a reversal of this in isolation, and no alternative proposals to resolve the numerical demands were put forward.

The commission could consider a rotation between **Deakin/Aston/Casey** if it did decide to accommodate this request. Belgrave into **Aston** was a popular initial suggestion (on incorrect ABS data.) **Deakin** could then return to Dandenong Creek, and **Casey** extends into eastern Maroondah. Alternatively, there may be scope for **Casey** to move towards Emerald-Gembrook and provide capacity for any desired alteration of boundaries to the south.

Melbourne/Macnamara

There appeared to be a general approval of the decision to cross the Yarra with **Melbourne**.

With the exception of a few objections (e.g. OB439/486, where tabulated data seems to indicate a stark cross-river divide contrary to written comments?), there appeared to be a consensus that **Melbourne** should do this at Southbank instead, and swap its draft South Yarra share either to a reinstated **Higgins** or to **Macnamara**.

Gellibrand - "Tucker"

I endorse OB487 and the Labor party's advocacy of the retirement of the name **Gellibrand** in favour of Margaret Tucker.

If the commission is still reticent to change the name at this stage of the process, it might assist advocates if it could be clarified whether this decision has been made on the grounds that either:

- There is insufficient merit to retire the name **Gellibrand**, within the context that previous redistributions (appropriately) retired the names Batman and McMillan representing this same era of oppressive colonialism.
- The name Tucker is not going to be accepted for any electorate.