



Suggestion 22

Geoff Arnott

4 pages

Geoff Arnott Cert4 A&WPT, Dip FLM, BEc. BEd., Grad Dip BA, MBus has worked as a secondary teacher and, for over 30 years in various roles at Swinburne University. He lectured in History and Politics as well as taught economics and management skills in vocational programs. He also served as a Department Manager in charge of health, recreation and community service programs and as a Deputy Head of School. He left Swinburne in 2003 where he established an education consultancy business; GDA and Associates. He is a prolific author with 28 books published in economics, politics, history and community services. Geoff is an active community service volunteer and in 2005 was presented with a 20-year service award by the City of Maroondah and in 2015 a Commonwealth Deakin community service award.

Submission to the Australian Electoral Commission

This submission proposes that Wonga Park with a population of 3843 residents¹, now in the electorate of Menzies should be included in the Electorate of Deakin. Wonga Park and neighbouring suburbs in the Deakin electorate have the same historical background. There is considerable interdependence and synergies between Wonga Park in these nearby suburbs and this has obvious implications in terms of Parliamentary representation and support.

Wonga Park occupies 2,119 hectares and is bounded by the Yarra River in the north, Lower Homestead Road, Homestead Road and Brushy Park Road in the east, Holloway Road in the south and Jumping Creek in the west. Most of the residents of the area live close to Croydon Hills, Croydon North and Croydon in the Deakin electorate. These areas, similar to Wonga Park, comprise large areas of open space and rural living environments as well as significant bushland areas comprising a diverse range of native flora and fauna.

Wonga Park shares a common history with these neighbouring areas from the Deakin electorate. The first township in the area was Brushy Creek which achieved township status in the 1860s. It was just south of present-day Wonga Park and is now known as Croydon North. In the 1890s the Croydon eight-hour Pioneer Village Settlement was created which later became Wonga Park with land mainly used for farming and orchards. This later led to farming and orchards alongside in Croydon Hills and Brushy Creek. There needed to be a new name as the Eight-Hour Pioneer Village Settlement was no longer appropriate to describe what was an emerging township especially with other land now being sold in areas outside the one square mile 'boundary' of the village as well as in Croydon Hills and Brushy Creek.

¹ 2021 census

A proposal was made in 1907 to name the town North Croydon but this was rejected by the Shire of Lilydale as Brushy Creek was to be known in future as North Croydon. The name chosen was “Wonga Park” as it acknowledged the importance of Simon Wonga, the famous Ngurungaeta of the Wurundjeri people and headman of the Kulin nation. His father, Billibellary, also a Ngurungaeta, was one of the Wurundjeri leaders who met John Batman in 1835. Simon Wonga’s cousin William Barak, another future Ngurungaeta were present when the “Batman Treaty” was signed. William Barak was born in Brushy Creek and is commemorated with a memorial plaque in Hughes Park, Croydon North. Wonga Park and Croydon North have the unique distinction of honouring two of the most outstanding leaders of the Kulin nation both of whom were instrumental in founding Coranderrk in Healesville for the Wurundjeri people and other first Nation’s people.

Orchards once stretched all the way from Wonga Park, Croydon Hills, Croydon North and Croydon. In Wonga Park from the interwar years up into recent years around twenty-nine families thrashed out a living as orchardists. Wonga Park, Croydon Hills and Croydon North developed a strong sense of interdependence and community connectedness with families known to one another as the feeling was, that they were living in one district location irrespective of their address. Consumer goods and services were mainly provided by the shopping Centre in Main Street Croydon, the Croydon station provided access to and from the Croydon railway station as well as inwards and outwards freight. Croydon also provided hospital and medical services. Shops often opened in the evening in Croydon as orchardists and farmers were unable to purchase goods during daylight hours as they were too busy working on their properties. Cool stores were established in Croydon and Ringwood to service the orchards throughout the district. There were also blacksmiths in Croydon to service the needs of orchardists and farmers from Wonga Park and the other nearby places in what is now within the Deakin electorate.

Wonga Park today still has very few shops and no supermarket and relies on shopping centres in Croydon Hills, Croydon North and especially in Croydon. It also relies on the train service from Croydon station which connects with buses to and from Wonga Park. Recent initiatives such as the building of a high-rise car park at Croydon station to accommodate extra car parking therefore has equal relevance to train travellers to and from Wonga Park as it does for people living near to the station within the Deakin electorate.

The Maroondah Hospital in East Ringwood provides emergency medicine, general and specialist medicine, general and specialist surgery, critical care services, ambulatory and allied health services acute, surgical and maternity care. It has since expanded enormously for the growing population of the eastern suburbs. Dependence on community support services for Wonga Park residents from areas mainly serviced from within the Deakin electorate has implications for consistent Federal Parliamentary

representation and support. Given that these support services are mainly provided from areas from within the Deakin electorate, as opposed to other more distant areas from within the Menzies electorate, it would make sense to include Wonga Park in the Deakin electorate.

Sporting groups in Wonga Park participate in regional competitions within the Deakin electorate rather than in Menzies and this also has relevance for consistent Parliamentary representation and support. For instance, the Netball Club competes in the Melbourne East Netball Association which includes Ringwood with practice courts used at Yarra Road Primary School in Croydon Hills. The Wonga Park Cricket Club initially joined the Croydon and District cricket competition and then became a founding member of the Ringwood District Cricket Association. Today it competes against teams from Ringwood East, Ringwood, Ringwood, Montrose, Kilsyth, Croydon, Wantirna and North Croydon. Most of these suburbs are within the Deakin electorate.

The interdependence between Wonga Park, Croydon Hills and Croydon North is shown by emergency management strategies based around the total area. Given the extensive open space, the amount of bushland areas and the number of flora reserves there is the ongoing threat from bush fires. While Croydon's MFB fire station, based on the corner of Mount Dandenong Road and Dorset Road, deals with the more urbanised Croydon area the Wonga Park CFA is responsible for fire fighting in the more rural bushland areas in North Croydon and Croydon Hills. Croydon in its northern reaches poses significant fire risks as it is near to bushland and forested areas to the west and north and grasslands in the northeast. The Wonga Park CFA has also provided considerable input into fire prevention strategies to Flora Reserve Committees of Management in Croydon Hills and Croydon North. An example is Hochkins Ridge Flora Reserve in Hollaway Road, Croydon North which is one of the most significant nature reserves in Victoria in terms of the number of rare orchids and for its floristic diversity which far exceeds that of other nature reserves of a similar size.

The Wonga Park CFA received additional firefighting capacity when the North Croydon Bush Fire Brigade was deregistered with the one fire truck and equipment moved from North Croydon to Wonga Park on 7th February, 1958. The Wonga Park Fire Brigade is now an integral part of the Wonga Park, Croydon Hills and Croydon North Community. Evidence that it serves one community is the Christmas drive around these three areas as well as the number of volunteer firefighters who live in nearby locations in Wonga Park, Croydon Hills and Croydon North.

The Maroondah SES Unit, based in Lincoln Road, Croydon provides additional support for the Wonga Park CFA in fighting fires in the local district and in emergency situations such as storm damage and flooding. The Croydon Unit is housed in a purpose-built building which includes a three-berth garage bay, an administration area, stores, offices, communications room, and operations and training centre.

I therefore recommend to the Australian Electoral Commission that serious consideration should be to include Wonga Park in the Deakin Electorate. This is based on its historical background and ongoing development consistent with that of Croydon Hills and Croydon North. There is interdependence and connectivity between the various communities which can be traced back to earlier times. All of those areas are similar in terms of their focus on open space and the preservation of remaining bushland as well as fire prevention strategies balanced by the conservation of significant bushland.

Wonga Park is provided with a diverse range of services in the form of shopping centres, rail and bus services as well as hospitals and competitive sporting precincts from within the Deakin electorate and this now needs to be recognised in terms of its Parliamentary representation.

Geoff Arnott

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Author of A History of Wonga Park and Surrounds; Dream Time to Communities

[REDACTED]