



Suggestion 19

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Greetings.

I couldn't find any link on the redistribution website for people to lodge suggestions, hence this e-mail.

I hope you find this useful.

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Yours,

Tim Colebatch

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE REDISTRIBUTION OF VICTORIA'S FEDERAL ELECTORATES 2017

Tim Colebatch

I make these suggestions as a journalist, semi-retired, who has covered redistributions and electoral issues in Victoria and nationally for more than 40 years. I have no axe to grind for any political party. In the course of my career I have acquired a bit of expertise in this area - in particular, a better understanding of why redistributions succeed or fail – that I hope might be useful in defining the issues.

I don't have the detailed data, software expertise or time to come up with a precise map of where I think the new boundaries should be drawn. My suggestions are broadbrush, imprecise in detail but, I hope, clear in direction.

My proposals are mainly about the boundaries of electorates. But since you ask about electorate names, I have two brief suggestions, and we could start there.

First, the AEC nationally seems to have locked itself into a process of inexorably discarding regional names (other than those applied at Federation) in favour of naming electorates after dead politicians. If I understand correctly, it is doing this at the behest of the Parliamentary electoral committee. I doubt that most Australians share that preference, and as they are the masters of the politicians, I suggest you ask their views instead.

I suggest the AEC survey public opinion on this issue, either through focus groups or in an opinion poll, before renaming any more Federal electorates, in Victoria or elsewhere.

First, you could ask people whether they can identify the location of a handful – say, three or four – electorates named after former eminences (eg Fraser, Deakin and O'Connor), and then a similar number of electorates, past or present, named after geographical features (eg Wannon, New England, Kalgoorlie). I suspect it will tell you that very few people have any idea where the electorates named after dead people are.

Second, you could ask ordinary Australians whether they prefer to have electorates named after former political and social leaders, or whether they would rather have electorates for their geographical region, as they are in Britain, New Zealand and most other countries. This is a democracy. I think people ought to have the final say.

My other point is a specific suggestion. If any electorate is to be renamed, I would nominate McMillan. Angus McMillan was a pioneer of European settlement of Gippsland. But he led the way to this by massacring the original owners of the land. McMillan led or took part in illegal armed gangs which shot Aboriginals indiscriminately, in the kind of "ethnic cleansing" that is now a war crime. It is an outrage that in 2017, this murderer has a Federal electorate named after him.

The seat of LaTrobe used to cover much of this area. Why not use the name there, where it arguably belongs, and rename the existing LaTrobe electorate "The Dandenongs"?

On the issue of boundaries, we should start by reviewing the 2010 redistribution. In 2010 I made an objection at a late stage to point out that it was not necessary to abolish Murray, as the draft report proposed, and to urge the commission to redraw the outer metropolitan electorates in a way that would spread the expected growth on the urban fringe into as many seats as possible, by designing outer suburban electorates radially, like a pie chart.

The first part of my objection was accepted. The second, unfortunately, was not. What happened as a result?

Three and a half years after the redistribution, in May 2014, 14 of the 37 electorates were already outside the AEC's benchmark of being within 3.5 per cent of the average enrolment. Seven were more than 3.5 per cent above the average, seven more than 3.5 per cent below it. McEwen was already 13.5 per cent above the average, with 115,372 voters on its rolls, while Aston was 7.2 per cent below average, with just 94,275.

That was an extraordinarily large disparity. As the redistribution did not take effect until the 2013 election, that was just the start of it – and it has got much worse since.

By the end of September 2017, less than four years after the redistribution took effect, 9 of the 37 electorates, one in four, were already more than 10 per cent or more above or below the average enrolment. Some 15 of the 37 were already 8 per cent above or below average, and that is likely to be 17 out of 37 within the next year.

McEwen now has 140,685 on its rolls, almost half as many again as Bruce (95,387), Aston (95,387), Chisholm (97,808) or Menzies (98,873).

What made it worse was that these outcomes have turned out to be politically skewed.

Of the eight electorates with the most oversized enrolments, six are Labor or Green seats (McEwen, Lalor, Holt, Gorton, Wills and Melbourne), and two are Coalition seats (McMillan and Flinders). Of the nine electorates with the most undersized enrolments, seven are Coalition seats (Aston, Chisholm, Menzies, Wannon, Mallee, Deakin and Kooyong), and only two are Labor (Bruce and Hotham).

It is arguable that the distortion created by the 2010 redistribution affected the result of the 2016 election. In Victoria, the 19 seats won by Labor and the Greens contained on average 110,306 voters, whereas the 17 won by the Coalition averaged only 103,790.

I am certainly not suggesting that the commissioners intended to create this bias. But that was the effect of the redistribution. When that happens, it can sow doubts in the minds of the losing sides about the commission's impartiality. Please, be more careful this time.

The inequality of outcomes was exacerbated by the redistribution being carried out so long before it was needed, and by Melbourne's extraordinarily strong population growth since. But, with the greatest respect, it was a poor redistribution – and I've seen a lot of them. The commissioners of 2010 made bad choices, and ignored the warnings of those of us who know what can go wrong.

Apart from the bizarre redrawing of Melbourne Ports in the final report, the two key mistakes were that outer suburban population growth was crammed into too few electorates, and the middle suburban electorates were made too small. I urge the commissioners of 2017 to take great care not to repeat those errors this time.

The increase in the number of Victorian seats this time makes your task easier. Clearly the new seat must be in the north/west suburbs. One could make a case for also abolishing a seat in the eastern suburbs and creating two in the west; but it seems to me premature at this time. I see no need to abolish any electorates, although some (especially Melbourne Ports!) will need substantial boundary shifts.

I would start by dividing the electorates into three groups: country, south/east Melbourne, and north/west Melbourne (following convention, and using the Yarra as the boundary line). I have done so using the August 2017 enrolments. At first sight, they suggest that the job should be pretty straightforward:

	seats	enrolment	average	quota#
Country+	9	969,697	107,744	9.07
South/East Metro+	17	1,800,387	105,905	16.84
North/West Metro^	12	1,293,591	107,799	12.10

+ McMillan is included as a SE metropolitan seat, as that is the end at which it will have to be adjusted.

Dividing the 4,063,675 enrolled voters at August 31 into 38 seats.

^ adding the new seat to the 11 already north or west of the Yarra.

So far, so good: it looks like no big changes are needed. But will that hold if population growth continues at anything like its recent pace?

Your timetable envisages the final report being brought down in July 2018, so the three and a half year test requires us to look at potential enrolments in January 2022: 4 years and 5 months from August 2017. I suspect that Victoria's population growth will slow a bit over that time, and will be distributed differently in some ways - but in absolute numbers, it is likely to be broadly similar to the growth we saw in the period just ended.

You will no doubt seek expert advice. Here, I have simply taken the absolute growth in the previous 4.5 years, and assumed the same in the future; it seems as good an assumption as any. On that basis, these are the projections for January 2022:

Country	9	1,055,795	117,311	8.90
South/East Metro	17	1,967,648	115,744	16.58
North/West Metro	12	1,486,097	123,841	12.52

OK, we do have a problem. Our goal should be that the three regions enjoy broad equality of representation at that time. The country should have another 10,000 or so voters, which is easily done. But to bring the two sides of Melbourne to parity, about 50,000 voters need to be shifted from the electorates of the north/west into those of the south-east.

The boundaries will have to cross the Yarra. It's not hard. Motorists and commuters do it every day. In some sections, the river really does divide Melbourne into very different

communities of interest; in others, less so. We need to think imaginatively about which electorates should go where.

I suggest that Melbourne Ports should actually cover the Port of Melbourne, and the residential areas adjoining it, notably Docklands. The Yarra does not form a significant social boundary between Docklands and Southbank (or the CBD, although that clearly should be in the seat of Melbourne).

I think you should also weigh up the desirability of including Eltham and surrounding suburbs in Menzies, making it a radial electorate heading out of to the north-east.

The country electorates seem to me to present no serious problems. Mallee is the most difficult seat; it needs up to 15,000 more voters if it is to be of average size in 2022. I would bring the whole shire of Loddon into it, take other fringe areas from Bendigo and Murray, and take the northern parts of the shires of Pyrenees and Central Goldfields from Wannon, maybe even including Maryborough.

Wannon too needs another 15,000 or so more voters, and the only sensible way of getting them is to extend the seat east, to include Colac.

Corio and Corangamite, taken together, on these projections would be 15,000 to 20,000 voters over the average enrolments in 2022. The loss of Colac and surrounding areas would bring them roughly into line, with whatever boundary tweaks are needed in southern Geelong to roughly equalise their numbers.

Ballarat would also be about 10,000 voters above average in 2022. There's not much left at the western end of the electorate that could sensibly be moved out, but one option could be to put its part of the shire of Golden Plains into Wannon.

Bendigo should be about right once it has shed its outer fringes to build up Mallee.

Indi, perhaps surprisingly, looks like being close to the average enrolment in 2022 on its current boundaries. Murray would be about 5000 voters short, and it seems to me that Seymour fits better in that electorate than in an outer Melbourne one. There may be a community of interest case for moving Violet Town from Murray into Indi.

Gippsland too would be about 5000 short. If it includes Traralgon and Morwell, the "community of interest" clause is a strong argument for it also to include Moe, and in exchange, perhaps move the area south of the Grand Ridge Road into McMillan. Failing that, I would leave it as it is.

The Melbourne electorates present two core issues, and lots of detailed ones. The core issues are:

- to design outer suburban electorates so that we never again have one, or several, that take such a disproportionate share of voter enrolments as McEwen, Lalor, Holt, Gorton and McMillan have acquired in this term. These five seats now represent 637,261 voters, whereas the five seats of Menzies, Deakin, Chisholm, Bruce and Aston represent only 488,492.
- to design electorates that cross the Yarra without breaching the principle of uniting communities of interest, so we can broadly equalise voter enrolments.

Melbourne has been designed so that its suburbs expand outwards primarily along five and a half corridors: Werribee, Melton, Craigieburn, Yan Yean and Pakenham/Cranbourne. These are not the only areas of rapid population growth on the urban fringe, (Tarneit/Truganina also stands out, as does the inner city), but they are the main ones.

The core mistake made in 2010 was to cram too many growth areas into too few electorates. We need four or five, electorates radiating out north and west of the Yarra, not three. Having an additional seat allows you to correct that this time.

Lalor (better named as Werribee) looks difficult. Its northern boundary should be pushed further south, but on the data I have, it's not obvious how to do that without separating communities of interest. And while Seabrook, Laverton and Williams Landing could go into Gellibrand, that wouldn't make much difference in planning for future growth.

It maybe that the only alternative is, instead, to put Truganina and Tarneit into Gorton, or the new electorate, and to make up the numbers, put some of Altona back in Lalor.

But Gorton presents similar problems: where will its future growth be? It can't have both the Truganina/Tarneit corridor and Melton without blowing out its future enrolment. Maybe the new electorate (Kororoit?) could take in Truganina/Tarneit, and the established suburbs to their east. The Ballarat railway line could serve as its northern boundary (except in Melton South).

Gorton (perhaps renamed Melton) would still have Melton and Rockbank, which should fill up its enrolments pretty quickly. It could make up its numbers initially by adding existing suburbs to the east from Maribyrnong.

Gellibrand could push north into Maribyrnong, taking in all of Footscray, and Maribyrnong then head up through Keilor towards the Calder Highway.

Calwell (Tullamarine) should be redesigned as another radial electorate, heading up to Sunbury and along the north-west axis of the Calder Highway, perhaps taking in Gisborne, as far north as the Great Dividing Range.

McEwen (Merri), much trimmed, could be a radial electorate centred on Craigieburn, covering the growth to the north, along the Hume Highway and Merri Creek, roughly between Moonee Ponds Creek and Epping Road. The Seymour area, as mentioned, should go to Murray, leaving Broadford as its northern point.

Scullin (Plenty) would cover the rapidly-growing corridor along Yan Yean Road and the Plenty River out to Whittlesea and the Great Divide, including South Morang, Mernda etc.

As mentioned, the boundaries this time will need to cross the Yarra in more than one place, to avoid repeating the mistake of 2010, and ensure even enrolment numbers in the south-east (mostly Liberal) seats and those in the north-west (mostly Labor). I suggest that the eastern half of the shire of Nillumbik be added to Menzies, along with perhaps Yarra Glen.

I am making these suggestions in ignorance of the actual and the forecast distribution of voters. I have also assumed that the boundaries of Jagajaga can be tweaked to fit with all

this. It may be that my proposals turn out to be impractical. But I think they are worth looking at.

What matters is that, one way or other, you design the electorates so that the bulk of future growth is spread among as many electorates as possible, rather than corralled into a handful of seats, as in 2010. Please, please, do not repeat that mistake.

If we are to retain the existing electorates of the middle and outer eastern suburbs, they will obviously have to push further east and south to relieve the pressure on Holt, McMillan and Flinders (and even LaTrobe). I have no particular insights to offer on how to make that work, except to urge that the Pakenham corridor and the Cranbourne corridor remain in separate seats, as at present.

The second area where it makes sense to cross the Yarra is in the city centre: specifically, around the port. Ideally, the boundary of Melbourne Ports should cross the Yarra at Spencer Street, and continue up Spencer Street to the western railway line, and then along the rail line to the Maribyrnong.

That would bring Docklands into Melbourne Ports, where it belongs. It would allow you to remove Caulfield from Melbourne Ports, where it certainly does not belong. It's not adequate in itself to solve the looming imbalance in prospective enrolments between a 12-seat NW and a 17-seat SE, but it's the most obvious step towards such a solution.

Docklands and Southbank would then be united in Melbourne Ports, while the CBD would stay in Melbourne. Among other things, this would divide the rapid future growth in inner city enrolments between the two seats.

The rest of Melbourne Ports should be given more sensible boundaries, as the commission originally proposed in 2010: taking in all of South Yarra and Prahran, with Williams Road as the dividing line. East St Kilda and Caulfield should be in Higgins or Goldstein, where they belong, rather than being added to an inner urban electorate like Melbourne Ports to suit the local member.

The criterion of "community of interest" set out in the legislation does not specify that boundaries should be drawn to suit particular ethnic minorities. That is gerrymandering, and with the exception of this one case, we don't do things like that here.

It may be that the expert forecasts for 2022 are for more rapid growth in Melbourne than I have assumed, and particularly to the west. If so, then the commission should bite the bullet and move to a 13/16 split, creating a new electorate in the outer north (similar to the old Bourke?), abolishing one of Menzies/Chisholm/Deakin/Aston/Bruce/Hotham – and rather than moving Melbourne Ports and Menzies across the Yarra, move Melbourne across the river into Southbank, and Jagajaga into Warrandyte.

Finally, I urge you to use the full 10 per cent variation either way to allow as far as you can for future population growth. Electorates in established suburbs likely to see little growth should be set at around 120,000, and those in areas of rapid growth, more like 100,000. They will even out by the time this redistribution is at its half-way mark.

