



Comment on objections 42

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To whom it may concern,

I thank the AEC Redistribution Committee for the opportunity to comment on objections regarding the proposed boundary redistribution for Macnamara.

I represent a collective of young Jewish people living in South Yarra and Prahran, and we felt strongly commenting on arguments made by groups on the Jewish community as a “community of interest”.

On behalf of my community in South Yarra I hold several concerns over objections raised in regards to the comments on the Jewish community and its potential impacts if the proposed boundary is to go ahead. Equally, as a leader in the community, having been the Federal Coordinator for the Hashomer Hatzair youth movement for three years from 2017-2019 located in the heart of Macnamara in East St Kilda, I wish to comment on some of the baseless and troubling stereotypes and generalisations made by some groups’ objections to the proposal.

Firstly, and with reference to the objection raised by Victorian Labor as cited below, I find it an indictment on the diversity of the community that to ‘divide’ the community over the proposed new boundaries would mean its “political representation would suffer as a consequence”. The suggestion that the community (that is, the group of Jewish people and institutions residing in Jewish-majority suburbs such as Caulfield, St Kilda East, Elsternwick, Balaclava, St Kilda and Ripponlea) is a cultural, religious and social monolith that requires a singular political representative on the federal level is a shocking and frankly disturbing attitude.

(ii) The Jewish community

A community of interest of substantial size is the Jewish community which has been predominantly located in Melbourne Ports and Macnamara. It has been for several decades centred around greater Caulfield, St Kilda East, Elsternwick, Balaclava, St Kilda and Ripponlea and the Local Government Areas of Port Phillip and Glen Eira. Many Jewish families now living in Caulfield grew up in St Kilda, East St Kilda and Elwood, or first settled there when they came to Australia, and retain strong ties to these areas. If the proposed alteration proceeds, the Jewish community – a community with important political and social interests – will be divided across two electorates and its political representation will suffer as a consequence.

Secondly, I would like to raise a concern regarding the objection submitted by Zionism Victoria, namely that I find it deeply irregular that a community organisation with no open, democratic election of representatives directly from the Jewish community should be expressing such strong views on something so important to the federal Australian democratic process. In its submission, Zionism Victoria claims that, “*Our affiliates cover the full gamut of the Melbourne Jewish community – its schools, synagogues, youth movements, and other political, social, educational, sports and religious organisations. We represent these Zionist and Jewish organisations within the Jewish and wider communities*”. While the scope of the organisations that Zionism Victoria represents is broad under the umbrella of Zionist and Jewish community organisations in Melbourne, the organisation itself does not represent every view of the Jewish community that resides in the suburbs concerning the redistribution. It concerns me greatly that this type of organisation is claiming to represent “*the full gamut of the Melbourne Jewish community*” especially considering the topic of redistribution should concern only the specific communities involved.

The two objections mentioned above and several other submissions have argued that the mainstream Jewish community that is currently centred predominately in Macnamara across that electorate and Higgins would be significantly harmed by a change in boundary to the social, religious and cultural stability of the community. This sentiment is a simplified, neglectful and inaccurate representation of a community that is diverse in identity and geography. To suggest, for example, that places like kosher bakeries, butchers and eateries, as well as synagogues and community centres would be in a different electorate to the people of the community reveals an antiquated view of the community that many young Jews, including those represented by this submission, disagree strongly with. We are passionate about the Jewish community and its institutions and groups that exist outside of the immediate Caulfield 'bubble', and to be part of the Macnamara electorate as a Jewish household in South Yarra holds a lot of value for me, culturally and socially.

Young Jews in this northern part of the proposed electorate are connected to the area through a shared appreciation for close-knit local communities and areas, such as Chapel St, Toorak Rd and High St. Many young people in this area find Chapel St a home for socialising, shopping, dining and entertainment, and to incorporate South Yarra and Prahran into Macnamara would mean that we would be a formal part of this wonderful, lively central zone.

In summary, I believe strongly that boundaries for something as important as Federal electorates should be based on changing numbers of electors in a way that is logical and straightforward. While I acknowledge that the mainstream Jewish community is reasonable in some of their concerns regarding a sense of political connection that comes from a majority of those people living in the same electorate, I find no basis for arguments that the community requires a singular representative in the Lower House, or that dividing some of the central locations of Jewish business between Macnamara and Higgins would bring significant distress to members of the community. I hope the Committee will go ahead with the proposed boundary, and I look forward to hearing the results.

Kind regards,

Maddy Blay