



**THE FEDERAL
REDISTRIBUTION
NEW SOUTH WALES**

Objection 600

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3 pages

Chairman
New South Wales Redistribution Committee
Australian Electoral Commission

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Subject: Objection to the draft plans to abolish the federal seat of North Sydney in the proposed 2024 NSW redistribution

Dear Committee members

I am Christopher McLelland. I live in the Kirribilli neighbourhood in the North Sydney electorate and have done so for thirty five years.

The reason my wife and I chose to live in this area is because of its unique urban character and accessibility. Its great appeal to us as a long-term home lay in the immediacy of its facilities, with almost all essentials for living – food, health, community and cultural – available within walking distance or short trip by public transport.

We set up and operated the Australian arm of an international architectural practice employing up to 25 staff in the local area.

Due to the conducive nature of the neighbourhood, we have been deeply involved in community and local Council issues via community reference groups for many years. Because of my architectural background, these have been largely planning related.

Quality of the Electorate

Much of the character of our Electorate can be attributed to its geographic location, contained to the north and south by harbour and waterways. Adjoining neighbourhoods to the east and west allow flexibility for boundaries to be logically adjusted to accommodate demographic changes for the purposes of the electoral roll.

The Federal electorate of North Sydney broadly equates to the combined LGAs of North Sydney, Willoughby, Lane Cove and Hunters Hill. Contributing to the cohesion of the community is that these Councils share many of the same issues, policies and values and regularly work together cooperatively on projects of common interest.

This cohesion and sense of identity in our electorate is exemplified by North Sydney being one of the first to have elected an independent MP to Federal Government (Ted Mack, 1990-1996) whose deep connection to the electorate at all levels of Government meant the community's own interests were represented rather than a partisan ideology presented to them.

Once again, our electorate has selected its own candidate to represent our community's interests and reflect our values. This has been demonstrably successful.

Abolition of North Sydney and its dispersal between three very disparate electorates (1 Labor, 1 Coalition and currently 1 Independent) would effectively disenfranchise our community as a whole and risk fracturing this cohesion.

My earlier childhood was spent on the Upper North Shore (in the area now covered by Bradfield) and my teenage years and early adult life was on the northern beaches (Warringah). Each of these electorates has a distinctly different ambience and lifestyle from North Sydney. Neither of these suburban environments has a particular affinity to the City, other than as a commute to work or for cultural excursions. In fact, to many, Warringah is seen as an escape from it. Neither electorate could be seen in any sense to be urban or peri urban environments.

Objection to proposed redistribution

I therefore submit that the decision to abolish the federal electoral division of North Sydney would be a serious mistake because it fails to take into account:

1. How the electorate has evolved to be the cohesive, connected yet diverse society that it is today and likely to develop in future.
2. The trajectory envisaged by State Government of its future growth from its already dense population base. Rezoning to encourage intensified residential development throughout this electorate is already legislated.
3. The intrinsically unique urban character of the electorate: ranging from high rise residential towers to dense interrelated villages. This offers a wide range of residential alternatives and environments within a condensed area.
4. The disparate and incompatible ethos of the surrounding electorates into which North Sydney is intended to be subsumed. To the adjacent electorates, the inner north tends to be seen as a means of access to other destinations, rather being a destination in itself.
5. The visible evidence of the considerable amount of residential medium to high density development recently constructed or in progress. This evidence must take precedence over loosely based and outdated demographic projections.
6. The expansive potential of the area envisioned by State planners. Judging by State expenditure on infrastructure between Chatswood and Sydney's CBD.
7. The changing demographic profile. The so called "ageing demographic" is not depleting the electorate of inhabitants but rather allowing it to be replenished with younger generations. The AEC projections that the population of North Sydney is expected to decline over the next 5 years is contradicted by the physical reality.
8. The fact that North Sydney is the third largest business centre in the country, with small, medium and large businesses. It deserves its own representative, given that there is little community of interest with any of the other electorates into which North Sydney is proposed to be fragmented.

Suggested alternative redistribution

I would argue the community's expressed ideals would remain more consistently represented if the Division was **retained** with the electoral boundaries adjusted to meet AEC's electoral quota criteria. This redefinition must, however, be based on realistic demographic projections reflecting the actual physical evidence of what is happening and consistent with the State's population growth objectives and legislation.

The St Leonards/Crows Nest/North Sydney CBD spine is the most likely focal axis for the electorate. This would minimise the need for major disruption due to changes to future electoral boundaries. It would also provide greater stability in who voters elect to represent them in the event of future boundary realignments.

The most obvious direction of any expansion from existing boundaries, should it be required, would be northward into Bradfield, which already has a significantly smaller population and a lesser ability to absorb intense (high rise) residential development into its community without major community disruption and reaction.

It would also avoid the contrived boundary condition to justify the carve up, where the St Leonards / Crows Nest transport and concentrated development node is randomly cut in two. There is no coherent rationale in such a separation.

There is also negligible shared community of interest between the major business centre of North Sydney and tourism oriented Manly and other beachside suburbs. The currently proposed dismemberment of a cohesive electorate lacks logic. It is merely a numbers game that would unavoidably cut across multiple areas of previously shared interest. For the part of the electorate to be tacked onto Warringah, to boost that electorate's flagging numbers would create a dysfunctional, forced marriage.

I am aware the AEC endeavours to be non-partisan when taking decisions on electoral matters but it is a pity that, in this instance, the redistribution clearly favours the two major parties who, together, hold 20 Sydney seats at the expense of one of the five Independents whose demonstrated commitment is to represent the needs and sentiments of their respective constituents. It is important, I believe, that the AEC remains and appears to remain the impartial institution I have always considered it to be.

I would appreciate you giving the matters I've raised serious consideration.

Yours faithfully

Christopher McLelland