



Comment on objections 94

Trent Wilson

9 Pages

COMMENTS ON OBJECTIONS

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The purpose of this Comment on Objections is to:

- Express support for the many objections to abolishing Higgins;
- Provide an alternate solution for southeastern Melbourne that would minimise changes required elsewhere while vastly improving the boundaries of the southeastern suburbs;
- In the event Higgins remains abolished, express support for objections relating to the proposed Melbourne & Macnamara boundary and the objectors' proposed alternatives;
- Object to 3 of the alternative Macnamara boundaries that were proposed

Objection to the abolition of Higgins, support for abolition of Hotham

Like the vast majority of objections, I also object to the abolition of Higgins, however I do not object based on the seat's legacy, history or perceived importance.

I agree with the proposals of OB10, OB86 and OB387, and indeed a large number of the Suggestions prior to the publication of the draft – including my own – that the neighbouring seat of **Hotham** should be abolished.

Importantly, being the immediately neighbouring seat gaining a significant amount of Higgins in the AEC draft, means that changing the abolished seat from Higgins to Hotham at this late stage can contain the flow-on effects to only the immediately surrounding southeastern suburbs, without requiring a redo of the entire map.

Abolishing Higgins has created, for the most part, considerably weaker boundaries across what was probably already one of the least cohesive parts of the electoral map; whereas abolishing Hotham – a seat that already feels like “leftovers” from the surrounding seats – actually provides an opportunity to greatly improve the surrounding seats' boundaries which I will outline below.

Community of Interest

While I do agree that Higgins does not have one of the stronger communities of interest, combining dense-inner city areas dominated by renters in the west with lower density suburban areas in the east and an affluent core in the centre, these are easily fixable via a swap with neighbouring Macnamara which has similarly poor boundaries.

Hotham, by contrast, has arguably the worst community of interest in the state and feels like a seat of “leftovers”, where Bentleigh East and wound up in the same seat as Noble Park.

Importantly, the draft proposal does not resolve the community of interest problems in Macnamara, and it actually makes Hotham's community of interest even worse than it currently is by adding affluent Malvern East – from a 5th LGA – to the same seat as Noble Park and Springvale. There is no shared community of interest whatsoever between suburbs Stonnington & Greater Dandenong.

Abolishing Hotham, by contrast, allows for all the surrounding seats to improve their communities of interest.

LGA unification

I do not agree with some of the objections that state that Stonnington should remain united, because I have long advocated for the Chapel St corridor based on the former 'City of Prahran' to be united with St Kilda in Macnamara forming a federal seat that roughly combines the state seats of Albert Park & Prahran.

However, I do believe that **most** of Stonnington (excluding the Chapel St corridor) should be united, and shares a very similar community of interest with the City of Glen Eira, and therefore the majority two LGAs should be united in the same seat. My Suggestion (S53) goes into more detail about this and outlines both the demographic similarities and strong transport links.

The draft proposal splits the City of Stonnington into 5 different electorates, while the electorate of Hotham would now include 5 different LGAs (up from 4 currently). This makes both much worse off than they currently are.

Abolishing Hotham, by contrast, creates an opportunity to greatly improve the alignment between LGAs and federal electorates throughout all of Melbourne's inner & middle southeastern suburbs.

Opportunities to improve surrounding seats

It is clear that abolishing Higgins as a starting point results in very poor boundaries to all the surrounding seats, arguably making a part of Melbourne that already has the least cohesive communities of interest even worse.

Abolishing Hotham, using the boundaries I suggest later in this document, would result in:

- A Higgins based solely on Stonnington (minus Chapel St) and Glen Eira
- A Macnamara based on Port Phillip and the demographically similar Chapel St precinct
- A Kooyong that contains the entirety of Boroondara
- A Chisholm that is almost entirely based on Monash
- An Isaacs that contains more of Kingston
- A Bruce that unites more of Greater Dandenong in the one seat
- Importantly, it would not require a significant (or any) crossing of the Yarra River in metropolitan Melbourne, and the seat of Melbourne could remain north of the river.

Beyond these seats, changes required to the AEC draft would be minimal and could most likely be assessed on their own merits in a more localised way, based on submitted objections.

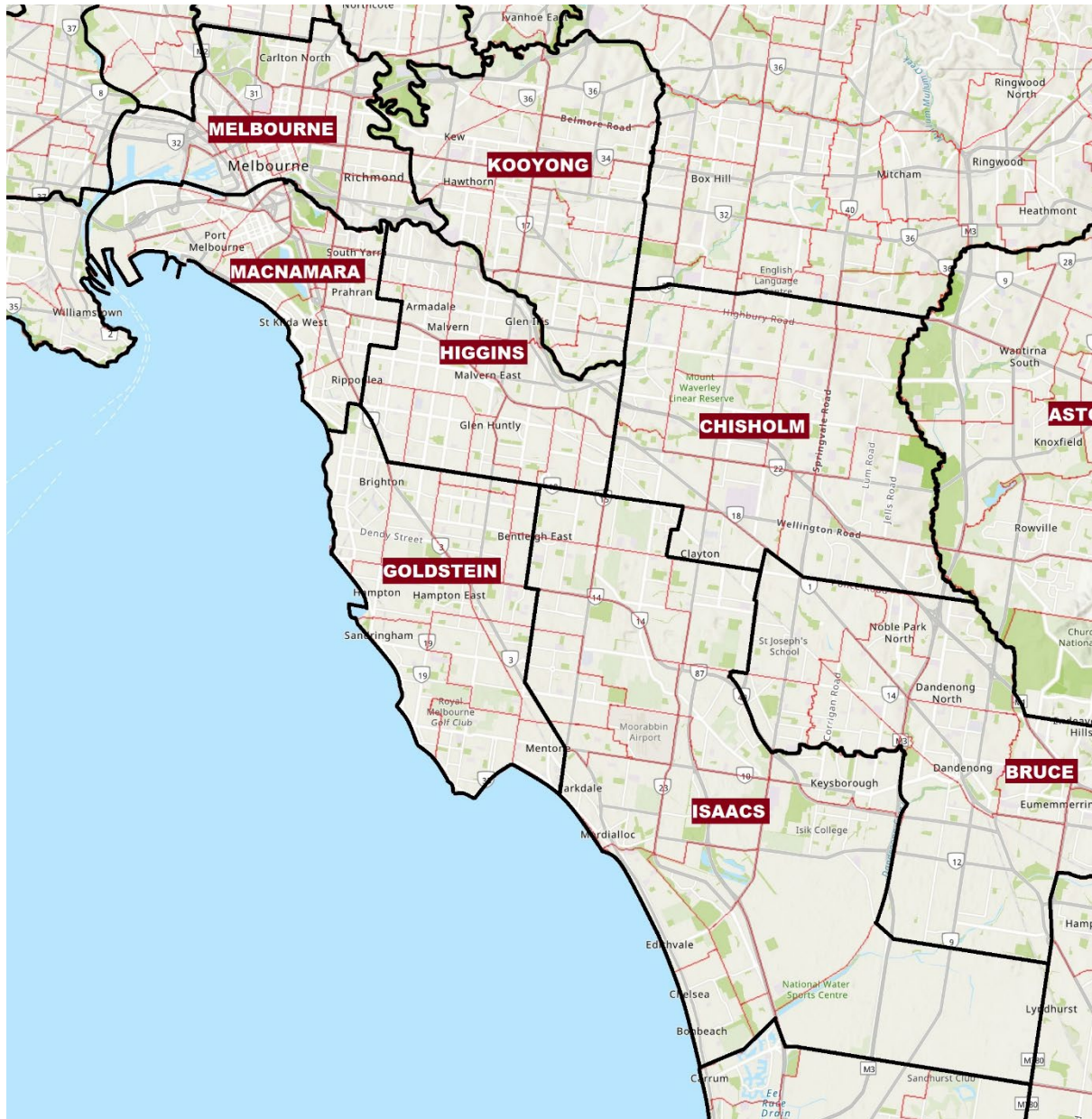
Name of Electorate

While I place far less importance on this factor than I do the boundaries and communities of interest, it should be noted that Hotham – as a Colonial name – is far more suitable for abolition than Higgins. That said, I would not support simply renaming the proposed Hotham to Higgins but keeping the draft boundaries much the same. It is the boundaries across the whole southeastern suburbs that I most object to.

My proposed boundaries

I will not go into detail about the numbers here, but note that the below proposal has been calculated using the revised ABS numbers and all seats are within the required range of quota.

Here is a map showing how the inner-middle southeastern suburban seats would look, under my proposed boundaries using the revised ABS numbers, with Hotham abolished:



All seats shown are within range of quota based on the revised ABS numbers.

Note that I have left the Deakin / Menzies boundaries blank as I did not work through them in detail, due to not being familiar enough with that part of Melbourne to know where the best boundaries would sit.

However, based on the AEC's draft boundaries – particularly the northern boundary of Chisholm and eastern boundary of Kooyong – the draft boundaries of both Deakin & Menzies, could no doubt remain largely intact, only requiring minor adjustments to remain within range of quota.

Goldstein

The boundaries shown above are very similar to those proposed by the AEC, including taking the same part of Bentleigh East (west of East Boundary Road).

The only real changes are losing the area north of North Road, which I believe makes a very strong boundary, and those areas are better united with the remainder of Caulfield in my proposed Higgins. To offset this, it gains the more affluent bayside part of Mentone which demographically is similar to the City of Bayside.

Isaacs

This seat now becomes strongly focused on the City of Kingston, taking in suburbs like Clayton South and Oakleigh South. It gains the remainder of Bentleigh East (east of East Boundary Road) from the former Hotham, and having grown up around that area myself, I can attest that East Boundary Road is a significant divider: west of that thoroughfare is more closely identified with Bentleigh proper (in Goldstein); east of that thoroughfare is more closely aligned with Moorabbin & Oakleigh South (in Isaacs).

Chisholm

This seat becomes firmly based on the City of Monash, and has very strong transport links on both the Pakenham/Cranbourne and Glen Waverley train lines. The SRL will further improve these transport links too, when it creates a direct connection between Clayton and Glen Waverley.

Note that its northern border may need tweaking to accommodate revised Menzies & Deakin boundaries, but it should be minor and there are countless possibilities. For simplicity I just used Burwood Highway.

Kooyong

These boundaries become greatly improved, gaining the remainder of Booroondara from Higgins, and losing its sections of the City of Whitehorse. If the Deakin & Menzies boundaries require it numerically, it would have capacity to regain some of the Whitehorse territory.

Melbourne

This can remain entirely north of the river now, which I believe it should. If it is required to move south of the river due to other changes in the north, it could take just the remainder of the Docklands SA2 from Macnamara, as this would not only unite both the suburb and SA2, but that small strip of Docklands has much better access via a footbridge to the seat of Melbourne than it does to the remainder of Macnamara, where it is cut off by 3 major roads / highways.

Importantly, the changes I have made to the southeastern suburbs *do not numerically require a crossing of the Yarra within metropolitan Melbourne.*

While yes, there is a discrepancy between the average electors per seat north of the river vs south of the river, this is not a legal requirement and does not necessarily need to be a consideration of the committee. The most important consideration is that each individual seat remains within the required range of quota, and I believe that strong communities of interest and logical boundaries should take precedence over a more general north vs south balance.

Bruce

In this draft, Bruce becomes much more focused on uniting the City of Greater Dandenong which I believe has a strong community of interest.

I acknowledge two things:

1. In the future, this seat will likely have to expand further east; and
2. The boundaries of Bruce may result in less than ideal boundaries for Holt & La Trobe, around the Narre Warren, Berwick, Cranbourne, Clyde North & Pakenham areas

However, these are the areas experiencing some of the most rapid growth, with the most unpredictable growth rates, and as a result are most likely to numerically require the most significant changes at the next redistribution regardless of what the boundaries are. Additionally, the communities of interest in this area are more rapidly evolving, meaning what works from a community of interest perspective now may also not in the next 4-5 years.

So if there was any part of Melbourne where an unfortunate necessity of “less ideal” boundaries should occur, it is where the boundaries are least likely to remain stable by the next redistribution.

By contrast, the current AEC draft has resulted in very poor boundaries across the entire southeastern suburbs, including in areas that have very little comparative growth and established communities of interest, and therefore are likely to stick for longer. I believe it makes much more sense to harness the opportunity to finally improve these boundaries.

Higgins

Higgins & Macnamara, I believe, are the most improved seats as a result of my proposal above. Please see my Suggestion S53 for a more detailed analysis of the demographic similarities and strong transport links, because while numerically that suggestion was based on incorrect numbers (my new proposal works with the revised numbers), the arguments about transport & demographics remain relevant.

To summarise what I wrote in S53, the Chapel Street corridor has a vastly different demographic profile to the remainder of Stonnington, it is far more similar to the demographics of the City of Port Phillip, with which it shares very strong transport links via the Sandringham Line.

Stonnington, east of Williams Road, shares much more in common with Glen Eira, both demographically and both being along the Pakenham/Cranbourne & Frankston lines.

It makes sense to unite all of Glen Eira north of North Road with the City of Stonnington east of Williams Road and creates a very strong community of interest. This unites all of the former City of Caulfield with all of the former City of Malvern, both of which are very similar, as well as uniting the largest parts of the Jewish community from across the current Higgins, Macnamara & Goldstein into a single seat. More on that later.

Numerically, to ensure Higgins was still within the range of quota, I had to keep a small part of Prahran in Higgins. The part chosen is the northeast corner, bounded by Malvern Rd, Williams Rd, High St and Orrong Road. This section borders Toorak & Armadale, is lower density than the remainder of Prahran, and its nearest stations are Armadale & Hawksburn, so it makes sense to remain in Higgins.

North Road would also form a much stronger boundary than Glen Huntly Road currently does.

Macnamara

As per above, the City of Port Phillip is very closely aligned with the Chapel St corridor in terms of demographics, housing profile and transport links, whereas the areas around Caulfield share very little in common, either demographically or via transport links, with the northern end of the City of Port Phillip.

The Glen Eira part of St Kilda East – which actually belongs to the “Caulfield – North” SA2 – would be transferred to Higgins with Caulfield as its Census profile aligns it more similarly with that area, and it also includes by far the majority of the Jewish community in 3183 at 56% (by contrast, Balaclava, Ripponlea and the Port Phillip part of St Kilda East are only 11-12% Jewish).

The Jewish Community

This has always been contentious, and I note there were comments on my suggestion that indicated how there are many Jewish institutions still in Port Phillip, and how the smaller Jewish population that is there are more culturally aligned with those in Caulfield North than those in Caulfield South are.

However, every redistribution is going to split communities to a certain extent. There is no way to unite 100% of a community, and my proposal would only leave around 1200 Jewish voters from the St Kilda East & Balaclava area in Macnamara,.

Political implications for the Jewish Community

I will first acknowledge that I know the committee cannot factor in political outcomes or partisanship. However, this section has two purposes:

- Demonstrate the challenge for a local MP representing a seat that has two significant different, often explicitly conflicting communities of interest; and
- Preempt any potential comments from the Jewish community opposing my proposal, on the misconception that they believe it might increase their chance of being represented by a Greens MP

In the context of the increasingly hostile divisions around the war in Gaza, these are especially important to consider at this time.

Currently, any local MP has to finely balance two very differing views on the situation: east of Hotham St in particular is clearly one of the most staunchly pro-Israel parts of the country, if not the most. By contrast, large parts of the west of the seat – especially St Kilda proper, west of Chapel St – is demographically, culturally and politically far more similar to the inner-northern suburbs, whose views starkly contrast those east of Hotham. We have already seen the current MP’s office be vandalised, and as a St Kilda resident myself, it has emerged as a bit of a battleground between the two different views.

As a result, and this has been the case for a long time but is especially amplified at the moment, MPs have a juggling act between appeasing the voters on both sides of the Hotham St divide. Elections for Macnamara have too often become almost solely focused on ‘winning the Jewish vote’ despite 88% of the electorate not being Jewish.

Importantly, there is a misconception I believe that replacing the most anti-Greens part of the electorate with by far the most pro-Greens part of Higgins, would flip Macnamara to the Greens and result in large sections of the Jewish community being represented by a party whose views on Israel & Palestine are at odds with their own.

I will explain why this is not the case.

Firstly, my proposal would move almost the entire Jewish community out of Macnamara, and into a seat that becomes a traditional Labor vs Liberal contest. This almost entirely eliminates their risk of Greens representation, and the areas it would be united with also have a very large Jewish population – much more so than the remainder of Macnamara – and generally more similar views culturally, politically and specifically relating to Israel-Palestine, which also means their MP can better represent those views.

Secondly, I acknowledged above that around 1200 Jewish voters in Balaclava, St Kilda East & Ripponlea would remain in Macnamara. However, my proposed boundaries which replace the most Liberal-friendly area with one of the inner-south's least Liberal-friendly areas, would actually increase the chances of Macnamara becoming a Labor vs Greens contest, which Labor are most likely to win off Liberal preferences. So it also actually reduces these voters' chance of being represented by the Greens.

On current boundaries, even a 1% swing against Labor – even if it is to the Liberal Party – would result in a Greens win, without the Greens even increasing their vote. To demonstrate, here are the 3PP results from 2022:

LIB – 33.68% (after finishing third on primary votes)

ALP – 33.48%

GRN – 32.84%

This means, even an 0.7% swing from Labor to Liberal, would drop Labor to third place, and the Greens would comfortably beat the Liberals, most likely by double-digits, off Labor preferences.

The AEC's draft boundaries to not significantly change this equation. So theoretically, Jewish voters swinging from Labor to Liberal due to their stronger stance on Israel, could ironically elect a Greens MP on current boundaries.

My proposal – in addition to greatly improving the community of interest, strong boundaries, transport links, demographics, and more compact shape, all of which I think should be a higher priority anyway – would also have the added benefit of:

- Moving the vast majority of Jewish voters out of a seat the Greens have a very high chance of winning, and into a traditional Labor vs Liberal seat;
- Probably turn Macnamara into an ALP vs GRN contest, which even benefits the small number of Jewish voters who would remain in Macnamara

As I said, **this is not aimed at the commission** as I know that it cannot factor in political outcomes, but is more to preempt any potential objections from within the Jewish community which may not realise the potential political implications of Caulfield remaining in Macnamara.

Comments on other Objections:

I disagree with **OB437** which proposes for Macnamara to become more suburban and focused on Glen Eira and Higgins to extend to the bay in the north of the seat. This would place St Kilda with suburbs such as Carnegie and Murrumbeena, while Higgins would stretch from Malvern East to Port Melbourne. This would just replicate the exact same issues that currently exist with both seats.

I disagree with **OB503** which places St Kilda in Goldstein. While both are along the bay, there is a stark contrast – politically, culturally, demographically, in terms of density & housing as well as public transport access – between St Kilda and suburbs like Sandringham, Hampton & Brighton. Again, St Kilda as the seat of Port Phillip and the southern destination of Chapel Street fits far better with the remainder of Port Phillip and Chapel St than it does with the affluent, more suburban bayside suburbs south of Elwood.

I disagree with **OB152** which keeps most of Chapel St in Melbourne, gives Macnamara less of Windsor and moves Macnamara down to more of Caulfield & Brighton. I object to this for similar reasons as above: It puts suburban areas like Ormond with Port Melbourne while in Higgins you have South Yarra now in the same seat as Bentleigh East – which is even less fitting (more car dependent, not on a train line) than South Yarra already is with Murrumbeena & Carnegie.

For all 3 of the above, I strongly believe that the boundaries more similar to what I am proposing would be far stronger and create much better communities of interest, based not on political outcomes (other than the Jewish scenario outlined above) but on actual demographic & housing data from the 2021 Census, as well as logical transport links.

If Higgins remains abolished

In the event that Higgins does remain abolished, which of course remains the most likely – albeit undesirable – outcome, then I support either of the below two sets of boundaries for Macnamara, Melbourne & Kooyong from the Objections:

OB149, OB398, OB416 and OB457 – This roughly has the Melbourne & Macnamara boundary running along Williamstown Road, City Road and the M1 to Toorak Road, where it continues to Williams Road and heads north.

This unites all of Prahran & Windsor as well as the southern half of South Yarra in Macnamara; while putting the higher density areas around Docklands, Southbank, St Kilda Road and northern South Yarra in Melbourne. The only questionable part of this, is using Toorak Rd as a boundary east of Punt Road, because it is a major activity centre.

Or:

OB53, OB174, OB482, OB499, OB504 – This has a similar boundary but the Toorak Rd boundary only extends to Punt Road before travelling north, uniting all of South Yarra except the “South Yarra – West” SA2 around St Kilda Road with Prahran & Windsor in Macnamara.

However, I would still prefer a solution in which Caulfield is removed from Macnamara and placed with other Glen Eira suburbs such as Carnegie, Glen Huntly & Murrumbeena rather than high density suburbs like St Kilda & South Melbourne.

Summary

In conclusion, these are my key points:

- Hotham is a far better candidate to abolish than Higgins for many reasons, the most important of which being the opportunities it presents to greatly improve all the surrounding seats in the southeastern suburbs, and being right next to Higgins means changing the abolished seat would have minimal impact on the broader map;
- The map I propose:
 - Meets the numerical requirements of the revised ABS numbers;
 - Avoids a Yarra crossing within metro Melbourne;
 - Minimises changes to the broader map outside the immediate area covered;
 - Greatly strengthens communities of interest;
 - Greatly strengthens transport links;
 - Greatly strengthens recognisable and significant boundaries;
 - Greatly strengthens alignment with LGAs, minimising how many LGAs per seat as well as how many seats some LGAs are split between
- It is finally time to remove the Caulfield “tail” from Macnamara and replace it with the Chapel Street corridor. For all the reasons I previously mentioned in S53, as well as the benefits to the Jewish community that I outlined which are especially important in a time of increased division and hostility in the community;
- If Higgins does remain abolished, and Caulfield unfortunately does have to stay in Macnamara, then I support the 9 proposals which outline two different methods of Melbourne & Macnamara essentially swapping the Chapel St area for the Southbank & Fisherman’s Bend area. I do not support the alternative proposals in OB152, OB437 and OB503.