



Objection 384

Adam Bandt MP

3 pages



ADAM BANDT MP

FEDERAL MEMBER FOR MELBOURNE
LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN GREENS

I wish to submit the following public suggestion for consideration of the Redistribution Committee. As the Federal Member for Melbourne since 2010, I have a deep understanding of the communities and electors in my seat.

I note that this submission is also made in support of the Australian Greens Victoria submission.

Whilst I naturally would have preferred that my and the Greens' original proposal be adopted, I accept that the AEC this time has the task of abolishing a seat and thus making significant changes to the boundaries of many electorates, and given that the AEC has adopted a course of action proposed by none of the political parties and can thus be considered to be truly independent, overall I believe that the boundaries proposed by the Redistribution Committee create appropriate and definable communities of interest in the division of Melbourne.

While it is unusual for a seat to cross such a significant geographic feature as the Yarra River, if the AEC is to confirm the proposed abolition of the seat of Higgins, then bringing as proposed South Yarra and Prahran into the Federal electorate of Melbourne provides a number of opportunities to unite compelling communities of interest.

Public housing

On current boundaries, twenty-two of Victoria's forty-four high-rise public housing estates are located within the electorate of Melbourne. The proposed redistribution will add an additional five towers between the suburbs of South Yarra and Prahran.

Public housing residents are, by definition, low income and will often have common needs with respect to the Federal government, particularly in regards to accessing Services Australia, immigration and housing support.

Many of the high-rise estates of inner-city Melbourne will also see groups from similar ethnic groups, some of whom are recent arrivals to Australia, living within the estates. Families from the Horn of Africa are connected across the estates. The addition of the South Yarra and Prahran estates into the electorate of Melbourne will further unite a community of interest of residents with a Vietnamese background across the Richmond public housing estates and the South Yarra Estates. While across Victoria, on average 2.25% of the population has a Vietnamese background, within the South Yarra estate proposed to be moved into the electorate of Melbourne 7.76% of residents have a Vietnamese background.

The September 2023 announcement by then Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews to demolish 44 public housing towers in inner-city Melbourne further strengthens the argument of a 'community of interest' across residents in high-rise public housing towers. This plan has been widely criticised by public housing residents who stand to lose their home, as well as urban planning experts.



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My office has already spent many hours supporting communities navigate the uncertainty and complex bureaucracy involved in understanding what this significant policy announcement will mean for them and their families as they campaign against the proposed change. Uniting twenty seven of the 44 towers proposed to be demolished within the Division of Melbourne will allow me and my team to provide high-quality support to these at-risk communities during a period of immense change and complex policy implementation.

LGBTIQA+ Community

The suburbs of Fitzroy and Collingwood, within the current boundaries of the Division of Melbourne, have long been considered key to the LGBTIQA+ community in Melbourne. The proposed boundaries drawn by the Redistribution Committee will unite two of the other key geographic areas of queer Melbourne, South Yarra and Prahran, under the one Federal Division.

With significant issues still facing the LGBTIQA+ community, including upcoming legislation expected in the Federal Parliament regarding freedom from discrimination, bringing together many of the major advocacy and stakeholder groups and significant members community under the Division of Melbourne presents an opportunity to provide increased support to this key community of interest.

Demographic similarities between communities north and south of the Yarra

Over recent years the demographic profile of Richmond, currently within the boundaries of the Division of Melbourne, increasingly matches the profile of South Yarra and Prahran, which the Committee has recommended bringing into Melbourne.

Some notable similarities include: the percentage of renters (over 50% for all suburbs, cf. Victorian average of 28.5%), the percentage of the population living in a flat or apartment (44% in Richmond and 73% in South Yarra, cf. Victorian average of 12.1%) and the percentage of 'professionals' (over 43% for each suburb, cf. Victorian average of 25%).

While these suburbs are separated by the Yarra River, their demographic similarities make a compelling argument to unite them within the one Federal Division given the proposal to abolish Higgins.

Alexandra Parade as a natural division

The Committee's proposed redrawing of boundaries with new suburbs added south of the Yarra require a shrinking of the current boundaries to remain within projected population quotas. I have



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been proud of, and would of course continue to be proud, to represent the people of Brunswick East, Fitzroy North, Princes Hill, Clifton Hill and Carlton North. However, the Committee has again made a sensible proposal in using Alexandra Parade as a border of the Division of Melbourne.

Alexandra Parade, the extension of the Eastern Freeway, is a natural division, with between six and eight lanes of traffic. Significantly, there is a big difference in housing density on either side of Alexandra Parade. South of Alexandra Parade, in the suburbs proposed to remain in the Division of Melbourne, 57.14% of the population live in a flat or apartment, and 42% in an apartment of than four storeys. In contrast, north of Alexandra Parade, only 22% of the population live in a flat or apartment, and 6% in an apartment of more than 4 storeys. Alexandra Parade is a natural boundary between the high density and high-rise living south of Alexandra Parade and the suburban nature of housing further north.

I also note that while the inclusion of the South Yarra and Prahran towers bring in more high-rise public housing estates to the electorate, none of the suburbs north of Alexandra Parade within the Division of Melbourne contain high-rise public housing estates. Therefore the proposed shift to Alexandra Parade as the northern boundary of my electorate will unequivocally contribute to increasing the public housing community of interest.

Conclusion

While the Redistribution Committee has recommended significant changes to the seat I currently represent, for the reasons listed above, if Higgins is to be abolished, the proposed boundaries for Melbourne will create important new communities of interest. (Should the AEC not proceed with its initial proposal, then I may of course make further submissions about the appropriate boundaries for Melbourne.)

Having represented the areas proposed to be excised from the division for many years, I of course would be proud and willing to represent them, but I do consider they also share strong 'community of interest' connections with the suburbs in the divisions that the AEC is proposing to redistribute them to.

On the whole, given the legislative requirements on the AEC, whilst it was not the model I and the Greens proposed for Melbourne, should the AEC proceed with the abolition of Higgins - an independent position no political party proposed - I consider that the AEC has made an independent and appropriate determination of boundaries, including with respect to their consequential impact on Melbourne.

Yours faithfully,
Adam Bandt