



Objection 418

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5 pages

I provide this objection as the sitting MP for Bruce raising a specific local issue, and some consequential issues for further consideration by the Commission.

Overview of the proposed Division of Bruce

Much of the broad logic makes sense, including the need for Bruce to grow south and pick up greenfield growth, proposed to be in Cranbourne North. On close examination though the draft proposal would create Bruce as a peculiar Division, splitting communities of interest, with multiple inconsistencies at the eastern and western ends. There are unnecessary jumps of natural and administrative boundaries and refinements could also better consider the medium-term direction of growth and minimise change for electors. Reducing unnecessary change and aligning communities of interest is especially impactful in multicultural communities, which in my long experience are more likely to seek to access their MP and have greater barriers to understanding changes.

The proposed Division of Bruce would include numerous small parts which all have their unique character and charm, but which have no relationship to or commonality with each other: e.g. a small part of Mulgrave and the City of Monash; e.g. multicultural Dandenong strangely chopped up as Isaacs jumps the railway line which is and has been a hard boundary for decades; e.g. Doveton and more established areas of Casey; e.g. the greenfield growth area of Cranbourne North; e.g. older slow-growth Berwick township; and e.g. rural Harkaway and a bit of Beaconsfield in the Shire of Cardinia.

Bruce as proposed unnecessarily crosses 4 Local Government areas. It appears to have been used to mop up various problems with neighbouring seats and manage numerical requirements here and there, with little finesse or regard to local circumstances.

In particular, the decision to have the Division of Isaacs (seemingly randomly) jump the Dandenong Railway line is unnecessary and should be adjusted.

There are multiple ways in which this, along with other issues raised by contributors in relation to the Division of Bruce, could be resolved.

Numerous submissions to this and the previous redistributions have argued against leaving a sliver of Mulgrave and the City of Monash in Bruce.

The Division is also proposed to grow east into La Trobe – into ‘old Berwick’ township, and Beaconsfield in the Shire of Cardinia – which is neither necessary nor sensible.

The Division of Bruce has experienced as much and more change than other Victorian Divisions over the last two redistributions, having been the funnel in effect for growth and balancing other seats in south-east Melbourne.

The relative stability for electors in this redistribution is welcome, however this is unlikely to last beyond this redistribution and further significant changes are likely in south-east Melbourne again affecting Bruce significantly in the future. One of the principles to observe in striking boundaries is minimising unnecessary change for electors and this should take account of immediate and medium-term horizons.

The Commission’s logic of transferring “a high growth area” of Cranbourne North into Bruce makes sense, now and in the long term. This broad logic of the Commission’s approach can be built on, consistent with the requirements of the Act and in line with numerous suggestions and comments.

Resolving Dandenong West

The draft proposal would see Isaacs randomly jump the Dandenong Railway line at Dandenong West. This should be reversed. The sitting Member for Isaacs concurs with this view.

Putting a strip of Dandenong into Isaacs is presumably just a device to manage numbers, however it is unnecessary and there are better ways to meet the mathematical requirements without creating such a disruptive and irregular outcome.

The Dandenong Railway line has been the boundary for many decades, reflecting multiple natural communities of interest. The Railway in that area is a very hard and natural boundary.

Dandenong West (and those handful of streets in Noble Park to the east of Eastlink) should simply remain in the Division of Bruce. This is consistent with the Commission's longstanding recognition and acceptance of this boundary.

(As an aside, while not a statutory consideration, moving this strip into Isaacs would waste significant Commonwealth funds as the Bruce electorate office is located in that part of Dandenong. If Isaacs jumps the railway line into a small strip of Dandenong, then rules would require the Bruce electorate office to be relocated – away from a major transport hub which has real accessibility benefits for electors in disadvantaged communities. This would also be a very wasteful expense (upwards of \$1 million of taxpayer funds that should not have to be spent) and avoiding this outcome would be very sensible if the statutory criteria provide for a better alternative – as they do.)

Such a minor adjustment in isolation to resolve the Dandenong West issue would push Bruce slightly over the maximum permitted number of electors. There are multiple ways the Commission could address this.

One example, informed by numerous contributors' arguments, could be to:

- 1. Retain the Dandenong Railway line as the Bruce / Isaacs boundary*
- 2. Consolidate the small part of Mulgrave from Bruce into Hotham*
- 3. Further adjust Noble Park to balance numerical requirements with Isaacs*

To illustrate that possibility, the proposed Bruce contains a sliver of the suburb of Mulgrave, and hence the City of Monash. Restoring Police Road as the logical boundary of Bruce, as it was before 2021, would again consolidate the entire locality of Mulgrave in Hotham and avoid Bruce crossing into a small strip of the City of Monash. Splitting the Mulgrave locality and Monash municipality has proved irritating and confusing for electors, Council and MPs. I note many suggestions and comments support the consolidation of Mulgrave in Hotham including S2, S14, S15, S18, S19, S28, S33, S43, S53, S57, CS13, CS60 and others (most directly and some indirectly).

Wherever possible, the Commission should listen to the lived experience in relation to detail like this, giving weight to locality and administrative boundaries which mean more to communities and electors than drawing neat shapes and straight lines. If the Commission chooses to make this minor adjustment it would be more sensible for local residents and also respect administrative boundaries and communities of interest.

With regards to Noble Park, the handful of streets to the east of Eastlink should remain in Bruce along with Dandenong West. The Commission has already proposed that Isaacs cross the railway line and absorb most of Noble Park from Hotham. Crossing the railway line at Noble Park makes sense in a way that it does not in Dandenong, with SkyRail at Noble Park having removed the barrier that the railway line previously formed.

The Commission will be best placed to resolve the precise final boundary in Noble Park dependent on any other adjustments to Isaacs and Hotham.

If the Commission chose to resolve the Dandenong West issue in that way, then minor consequential adjustments may be needed to Bruce for numerical reasons such as:

- Shifting one or two SA1s from Noble Park North from Bruce into Hotham around Jacksons Road/Police Road corner; e.g. SA1 21204131606, or down to Whitehaven Crescent or Eagle Drive below. Noble Park North is already shared between Bruce and Hotham and either of these minor tweaks are logical on the map.

Alternatively, or as well, further review of the interface with La Trobe and consequential issues at the east and south-east of Bruce.

Observations on the interface between Bruce and La Trobe, Holt

The Commission references *three* submissions that suggested growing Bruce into Berwick, however these were based on the initial incorrect population projections and that view was not widely shared.

A significantly greater number of contributors proposed that the boundary between Bruce and La Trobe either remain unchanged, or even that much of Berwick and / or Narre Warren North should be shifted *from Bruce into La Trobe*.

For example, the Liberal Party proposed to consolidate more of Berwick from Bruce into La Trobe. Many other suggestions also expressed similar intent to consolidate more of Narre Warren North and / or Berwick from Bruce into La Trobe (e.g. S9, S15, S18, S19, S21, S23, S32, S33, S35, S41, S43, S57, S60, S63).

It is highly likely that in the next redistribution, La Trobe and Holt would then shrink again. In that event Bruce inevitably absorbs significantly more of the City of Casey. This would need to include higher-growth greenfield areas in Cranbourne North and Clyde North as these could not mathematically all stay in La Trobe and Holt. Indeed, the Commission notes (p58) the logic of adding “a high growth area” of Cranbourne North into Bruce.

Many contributors identified the logical path for Bruce to grow into Casey is therefore south-east via Hampton Park and / or Narre Warren South. Indeed, the Liberal Party and many other suggestions and comments proposed that Bruce grow south into Holt at Hampton Park.

Similarly, it is basically inevitable that La Trobe will need to shed Emerald (and possibly the rest of the slow-growing hills of Cardinia) to the Casey electorate. Again, many contributors proposed this, including the Liberal Party in its comments.

That could frankly start now, but even if it is deferred to the next redistribution, when that does happen, La Trobe will require established slow-growth areas to balance the ongoing rapid greenfield growth in Officer, Pakenham and Clyde North.

In essence, this all means that La Trobe will almost certainly need Berwick – a slower growing area – to balance the fastest growing greenfield areas.

It makes little sense therefore in this redistribution to push Bruce east into established slow-growth Berwick and a sliver of Beaconsfield in Cardinia Shire, which has been in La Trobe for decades, noting the likelihood this will be reversed.

Many suggestions and comments have instead suggested Bruce should grow south, which accords with the Commission's logic of Bruce growing into Cranbourne North. This would of course reflect communities of interest and could rebalance elector numbers, noting the draft proposal has significant headroom for additional electors in Holt as compared to Bruce (the highest in Victoria) and La Trobe.

NB: Specific changes have not been proposed as there are a few ways the Commission may choose to resolve the Dandenong West issue, achieve the above intent and reduce the peculiarity of the proposed Division of Bruce. Key issues and possibilities, drawing on contributors' ideas, are illustrated below.

1. ***Review Bruce's proposed eastern interface with La Trobe***

Leave border as is? Leaving the border unchanged minimises change for electors now and in the future. It also reflects the reality that the 'old Berwick' township in La Trobe has a very distinct character and is intermeshed with Beaconsfield, rather than Narre Warren or Fountain Gate, or the Parkhill and Timbarra Estates in Berwick.

AND, shift some of Bruce into La Trobe in this area? As well, the Commission may find it preferable to shift the rural parts of Harkaway, and parts of Narre Warren North or Berwick back from Bruce into La Trobe. As noted above, the Liberal Party, along with many other contributors, proposed shifting part of Bruce back into La Trobe in this area.

Whilst I personally love the Narre Warren North community it is also a fact that these areas have more in common with La Trobe's character and Berwick township than the rest of Bruce. All have generally been in La Trobe in past decades. The extent of any such shift of electors from Harkaway, Narre Warren North and / or Berwick back into La Trobe would be determined by numerical requirements depending on the related adjustments below.

OR, a smaller change? Alternatively, depending on the view taken by the Commission on the two related issues below, while imperfect, a smaller extent of change in this area would still better position for the future.

2. ***Accept and build on the Commission's logic that Bruce grows south / south-east***

As the Commission proposes at Cranbourne North, Bruce must grow south as the Division needs greenfield growth areas now and in the future.

Dependent on how the above issues are resolved, a logical augmentation now would be to add a small section of Clyde North from La Trobe into Bruce adjacent to Cranbourne North. This may need to be accompanied by a small transfer of established areas from Holt which could come from either Hampton Park and / or Narre Warren South as numerous submitters proposed.

I express no specific proposal, and just share a couple of local observations in light of the reasoned arguments in numerous suggestion and comments, should the Commission be persuaded of the merits of this sort of logical change:

- Hampton Park has much in common with Hallam demographically and physically, and both suburbs share the Hallam Railway station and employment area. Indeed, the Liberal Party proposed (in its comments on suggestions) shifting part of Hampton Park into Bruce.
- All of the urban areas of Narre Warren and over half of Narre Warren South are already in Bruce with strong commonalities with the rest of Narre Warren South currently in Holt.

3. **Adjustments in Clyde North**

Clyde North is a fast-growing suburb hence the Commission would need to identify the optimal scenario dependent on resolution of the above issues.

Clyde North is a gigantic suburb with fast growth and will never be placed in a single seat in the foreseeable future. (Indeed, it is so big that it may even be split into multiple localities in the future, as when fully built out it will be well over 50,000 people.)

Clyde North does not yet have a coherent community of interest or natural boundaries, and contributors have proposed various boundaries that would traverse Clyde North.

The Commission could choose Main Roads, SA1s, parks or power transmission lines – it doesn't really matter in this redistribution where the boundaries are drawn in Clyde North between Bruce, Holt and La Trobe. Even if they look a little peculiar for a while to balance numbers, this area will continue to change.

In summary, in resolving the Dandenong West problem and addressing the various interrelated issues identified, the Commission could logically choose to review the east and south-eastern interfaces of Bruce in line with the reasoned and well-informed suggestions of many contributors.