



Suggestion 56

The Nationals - Victoria

5 pages

THE NATIONALS

for Regional Victoria

**Submission to the 2023-24
Federal Redistribution
Committee**

*Ballarat, Bendigo, Gippsland, Indi,
Mallee, Monash, Nicholls and
Wannon*

Introduction

The Nationals – Victoria welcome the opportunity to submit our suggestions for the consideration of the Redistribution Committee (the Committee).

The National Party, historically known as the Country Party, stands as the second oldest political party in Australia, playing an active role in Federal politics since 1920. For over a century, we have been committed to representing regional Australians.

Our Party recognises the differences between regional and urban Australians. While both demographics often face similar challenges, they are inherently different in their priorities and political interests. Our suggestions are based on an understanding of communities of interest, shared commonalities, convenient means of communication and travel, and the deliberate avoidance of artificial boundaries.

We believe our suggestions to the Committee will ensure regional Australians continue to receive representation that reflects regional concerns and needs within the political landscape.

The Task of The Committee

The Committee is required to abolish one division and reduce Victoria's electoral divisions from 39 to 38. With this reduced number of divisions, the projected quota for each Victoria electorate is 127,238 people, with an allowable 3.5 per cent tolerance (meaning a maximum of 131,691 electors or a minimum of 122,785 electors).

The Committee is also required by the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* (the Act) to give due consideration to:

- community of interests within the electoral division, including economic, social and regional interests
- means of communication and travel within the electoral division
- the physical features and area of the electoral division, and
- the boundaries of existing electoral divisions in Victoria, with this factor being subordinate to the above considerations

Regional Communities of Interest

As suggested in our previous submissions for redistributions of Victoria, it is not in any community's interests to have divisions that radiate out from Melbourne's dense outer suburbs and into regional areas. When divisions are created in this manner, electors share very little in terms of a community of interest or other shared commonalities.

In The Nationals' view, the Committee must recognise that Melbourne's suburban electors have more in common with other suburban Melbournians than with any regional elector. We suggest the Committee take the separation of regional areas from metropolitan areas seriously and to actively avoid drawing peri-urban divisions that have such competing communities of interest.

Regional divisions have a distinct composition, consisting of population clusters spread across a large area. In contrast to their urban counterparts, individuals in regional areas often share a collective

identity that underpins their lifestyle. This sense of belonging is further reinforced by local affiliations, such as a football/netball league or the schools within each town.

Regional Victoria has sufficient electors

As a party focused on representing the interests of regional Victorians, The Nationals only make suggestions for regional divisions. The divisions we consider regional and would like to offer suggestions on are:

- Ballarat
- Bendigo
- Gippsland
- Indi
- Mallee
- Monash
- Nicholls
- Wannon

The below tables show the number of electors currently projected to be within each of the listed divisions in 2028.

<i>Regional divisions</i>	<i>Projected number of electors</i>
<i>Ballarat</i>	121,873
<i>Bendigo</i>	122,771
<i>Gippsland</i>	126,776
<i>Indi</i>	128,444
<i>Mallee</i>	131,342
<i>Monash</i>	123,796
<i>Nicholls</i>	124,233
<i>Wannon</i>	125,633
<i>TOTAL</i>	1,004,868

<i>Non-regional divisions</i>	<i>Projected number of electors</i>
<i>Casey</i>	124,041
<i>Corangamite</i>	127,763
<i>Hawke</i>	119,315
<i>La Trobe</i>	122,917
<i>McEwen</i>	122,185
<i>Corio</i>	123,102
<i>Lalor</i>	127,852
<i>Gorton</i>	129,116
<i>Flinders</i>	124,658
<i>Gellibrand</i>	123,999
<i>Fraser</i>	123,858
<i>Maribyrnong</i>	120,461
<i>Calwell</i>	125,369
<i>Wills</i>	120,751
<i>Scullin</i>	121,016
<i>Jagajaga</i>	124,073
<i>Menzies</i>	123,466
<i>Deakin</i>	123,966
<i>Aston</i>	120,615
<i>Bruce</i>	124,753

<i>Isaacs</i>	123,385
<i>Dunkley</i>	122,613
<i>Holt</i>	122,766
<i>Hotham</i>	128,957
<i>Chisolm</i>	121,345
<i>Kooyong</i>	124,455
<i>Cooper</i>	121,431
<i>Goldstein</i>	121,366
<i>Higgins</i>	119,660
<i>Macnamara</i>	124,756
<i>Melbourne</i>	126,170
<i>TOTAL</i>	3,830,180

The projected data shows 1,004,868 electors across the eight regional seats listed and 3,830,180 electors remaining in non-regional divisions.

The eight current regional divisions have a projection of 1,004,868 electors. The average number of electors per regional division is 125,608.

The rest of Victoria therefore consists of 3,830,180 non-regional electors which when divided by the 30 remaining divisions, post the redistribution, provides an average number of projected electors as 127,672.

Both the average electors for the regional divisions (125,608) and the average of non-regional divisions (127,672) are comfortably within the tolerance of the allowed quota.

The Nationals therefore argue that for the purposes of this redistribution (given that there are sufficient electors within the regional divisions) that the committee recognise that there is limited scope for substantial changes in regional Victoria.

The Nationals further posit that there are sufficient numbers of electors in the non-regional divisions to allow for 30 divisions (one less than currently) to be created in and around Melbourne.

Only small changes are required in Regional Victoria

As seen in the table above, all but two of the divisions in Regional Victoria are projected to remain within quota and we urge the Committee to minimise any changes to regional divisions that are projected to be within quota.

While we propose no changes are needed for most regional divisions, we do recognise the need for minor adjustments in Ballarat and to a lesser extent Bendigo.

Ballarat is approximately 912 electors outside of the lower end of the -3.5% quota (122,785) and we believe the small number of electors needed can be taken from the western region of the current division of Hawke. There are various communities in Hawke which the Committee may make part of Ballarat, which share a regional identity and interests. We trust the Committee to make the decision where they see fit, considering they keep communities of interest together.

Bendigo is currently 14 electors from meeting the lower end quota. For this reason, we are also advocating for minimal changes to the division. We are of the view that can be increased by including a small number of regional communities who align with the interests from the current division of McEwen. Given the very few numbers Bendigo needs to reach the required quota we strongly urge the Committee to not unnecessarily amend the boundary between Mallee or Nicholls, and to gain these electors from McEwen which will likely need substantial changes given the growth of peri-urban Melbourne. Communities along the Calder Freeway are likely to have the strongest community of interest with the current Division of Bendigo.

We suggest the Committee make no changes to most current regional divisions and consider adjusting Bendigo and Ballarat to include small portions of the current divisions of McEwen and Hawke, respectively. This minor adjustment will ensure both divisions are within the +/-3.5% quota while preserving the regional identities of both electorates. This ensures all criteria are met while minimising the negative impacts of a redistribution.

Conclusion

Our suggestion aims to minimise substantial changes to divisions and electors while keeping within the permissible quota. The Nationals firmly believe that this Victorian redistribution does not need to alter most regional divisions. We acknowledge the need for minor adjustments in Bendigo and Ballarat to reach the required quota and we recommend the Committee consider extracting a small number of electors from the current divisions of Hawke and McEwen. Apart from these necessary adjustments, we advocate for maintaining the existing boundaries of other regional divisions without amendments.