

Submission on City of Yarra Electoral boundaries due 2 August 2023

By: Jackie M Fristacky AM

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To: Electoral Representation Advisory Panel on Yarra

c/o Victorian Electoral Commission

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Attention Panel Members:

- The Honourable Frank Vincent AO KC (Chair)
- Ms Liz Williams PSM
- Acting Deputy Electoral Commissioner Ms Máiréad Doyle

This submission is lodged in an individual capacity as a former Councillor of the City of Yarra for close to 19 years. During my 5 terms on Council, I experienced two prior electoral reviews, engaging with my community on these through personal newsletters and meetings to ensure awareness of the reviews and to seek feedback on names and ward boundaries. Indeed, I led much of the process for Council's response to the VEC.

As regards the current electoral review, I have discussed this with other members of the Nicholls Ward community, presented submissions on the matter to Council with another key community member, and addressed the subject at Council's meeting on 18 July 2023.

This submission mostly covers the current Nicholls Ward which I represented, plus the naming of other wards. It also points out a misleading element of the boundary review report, seeking that this be clarified.

A. Ward boundaries

Proposed Carlton North Ward

Having carefully considered alternative splits of population for Nicholls Ward, it is concluded that the boundaries as regards the proposed Carlton North Ward are appropriate.

Noted is that Carlton North at 9,800 population would be one of the larger of the Yarra wards. However, it is appreciated that this is warranted on the basis that with its more extensively preserved heritage built form, the area's population can be expected to increase less than more central wards.

Proposed Fitzroy North Ward

Regarding the proposed Fitzroy North Ward, at 8,783 population this would be one of the smaller wards.

On this population imbalance, it is submitted that the boundaries for the Fitzroy North Ward should be redrawn to include the following two areas of Fitzroy North:

- the triangular area bounded by Queens Parade, Alexandra Parade and Smith Street (former Gasworks).

This would place the Fitzroy High School Wurun Senior Campus located within this triangular area being part of the proposed Fitzroy North Ward, rather than in the Yarra Bend Ward. The School's community of interest is strongly linked to the Fitzroy North Area in which Fitzroy High School itself is located. The Gasworks site has been approved to accommodate 6 basketball courts and commercial - residential development including 20% affordable and social housing.

The site is not a good fit in the proposed Fitzroy Ward, separated from Fitzroy by the substantial barrier of Alexandra Parade. Moreover with the expected further expansion of population in Fitzroy, together with the proposed Fitzroy Ward of 9,375 exceeding the proposed Fitzroy North Ward of 8,783 electors, there is no disadvantage in the gasometer site being part of the latter ward in lieu of in Fitzroy.

- the triangular area bounded by the north eastern end of Queens Parade, from where it intersects with Heidelberg Road to where Hoddle Street curves north west to link with Queens Parade.

This part of Fitzroy North is largely commercial including Mc Donald's, a reception/catering business, a Nursing Home/Aged Care Centre with medical/ paramedical practices, and other commercial premises being or about to be redeveloped.

This area is very much part of Fitzroy North rather than the proposed Yarra Bend Ward, from which it is separated by 3 major roads, parkland and a railway line. The extra voting population, largely absentee landlords and a few able nursing home residents, would be minimal given the nature of the uses in this triangular section.

Both small triangular areas are a more coherent fit within a Fitzroy North Ward.

It should further be noted by the VEC that the City of Yarra at its Council meeting on 18 July resolved as a matter of principle that: *"naming wards based on suburbs without the ward boundaries matching the actual suburb is confusing for residents and should be avoided"*, a point relevant to the next section on naming of wards but also pertinent to which ward an area is allocated.

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| To ensure greater coherence of communities of interest in ward electorates, the VEC is asked to redraw the boundaries so that both of the above North Fitzroy triangular sections are within the proposed Fitzroy North Ward. |
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B. Naming of Wards

Noted is that the City of Yarra in its submission to the VEC approved at its 18 July 2023 Council meeting, left open the matter of names for the proposed new wards.

This was pending the Council awaiting the outcome of advice from the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation identifying possible ward names to enable a subsequent Council submission on preferred names to be put to the Electoral Review Panel.

In my experience it has invariably taken time to elicit a response from the Wurundjeri Corporation given its processes covering consultation with constituencies.

Should there be no or delayed input by the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation that does not meet the ERAP timelines, or the Corporation provides names for only some Wards, this submission covers alternative appropriate names for new wards.

1. Alternative to proposed Carlton North Ward: Curtain Ward

Part of the proposed Carlton North Ward includes the section of North Fitzroy bounded by Nicholson, Reid, and Brunswick Streets and Alexandra Parade. The proposal also understandably encompasses the area of Princes Hill west of Lygon Street. It is sensible to include Princes Hill with Carlton North as the areas are closely connected sharing parkland, their key shopping precinct in Rathdowne Village, library and other local facilities.

Yet the Carlton North name would be a misnomer and confusing for residents of Princes Hill and Fitzroy North. That name may even be resented by people in these other two areas of the ward who are sensitive about their distinctiveness. Also many longstanding residents refer to the area as North Carlton rather than the newer reversed postal name.

Some residents from that part of North Fitzroy intended to be incorporated in the proposed Carlton North Ward, have said that if not for my communications with them, they would likely have attended the Fitzroy North Ward to vote rather than a Carlton North electoral booth as their inclusion as North Fitzroy residents in a Carlton North Ward, would be most unexpected. If the Carlton North name were to encompass this part of Fitzroy North, other residents from the area could be expected to attend a voting booth outside their allocated ward. If so, they might well miss out on important electoral material handed out at their voting booth relevant to their voting ward.

Apart from any outcome from the consultation with the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung proffering a suitable indigenous name, there are several alternative names for this ward.

One option is "***Rathdowne***", using the name of the major north-south central connector promenade through the ward, which includes a bus route along Rathdowne Street through Rathdowne Village. These features are well used by

the proposed ward's 3 distinct areas. However, the name's origin reflecting the name of an Irish barony situated south of Dublin, Rathdowne has less appeal than using the name of a more local entity.

An alternative is "**Nicholson**", the former name for a prior smaller ward covering the area at the time of the March 2002 Council elections. This also encompassed North Carlton, Princes Hill and a smaller part of North Fitzroy. This name was chosen named after William Nicholson (1816-1865), a retail grocer of Nicholson & Co, elected as a Melbourne City Councillor (1948-1852) and Mayor (1850-51), who later served as Premier (1859-60).

The Nicholson Land Act opening up areas of Crown Land, was named for him, but was so severely amended in other respects from his intent that he resigned on principle.

This name would also reflect Nicholson Street as a prominent commercial - residential north-south arterial road for both ward suburbs. The Street contains the internationally recognised tram route 96 serving both Carlton North and Fitzroy North sections of the ward, Melbourne's first fully accessible tram route.

Nicholson as a former ward name, prior to the earlier VEC review which amalgamated wards, is also broadly consistent with the VEC principle of "*Retaining existing (former) ward names if these are still relevant to the area covered by the ward.*"

While the name Nicholson Ward in lieu of Carlton North, might be seen as overly similar to the below suggested name of Nicholls Ward for the proposed Fitzroy North Ward, there are arguments to re-use Nicholson for Yarra's most eastern ward and the name Nicholson is apt for all 3 areas of that ward.

Another alternative would be to name the ward more broadly "**Carltona**" as an adaptation of the word Carlton in recognition of the time Carlton was united and associated with the Carlton Football Club (CFC). But this Club is located, as is the suburb Carlton, in the Melbourne City Council area adjacent to Yarra's boundary rather than in the Ward. So a name for the Ward linked to Carlton is less appropriate.

The preferred name for the new Ward is "**Curtain**", named for John Curtain an elected Melbourne City Councillor (1870-1887). He represented Victoria Ward created in 1870 to accommodate the rapidly growing population in Carlton's North. Curtain was thus the first dedicated Council representative for the area.

Apart from serving as a Councillor until 1887, Curtain was also a JP, co-proprietor of the Melbourne Herald and held interests in property, brewing and vineyards. The name Curtain would reflect the ward's political history.

Curtain Square, once a major local bluestone quarry, is named in his honour, being a charming local park beloved and used by residents of the three areas of the proposed ward.

The small section of Fitzroy North designated for the proposed new Carlton North Ward also contains Curtain Lane off York Street.

Importantly, the name would also help highlight that Curtain Square and Curtain Street are named for local entity John Curtain, NOT as is sometimes assumed, to honour 20th century politician and Prime Minister John Curtin, despite the

difference in spelling. Born in Creswick Victoria (1885), John Curtin was not directly associated with the Carlton North or Yarra area.

“Curtain” is an apt and highly relevant name for the new ward in lieu of a Carlton North Ward; it reflects a prominent local entity, the origins of the ward and ward features.

For the several reasons set out, the historical name Curtin is sought in lieu of the misnomer Carlton North. Moreover, one apt word is preferable to the two words of Carlton North.

2. Alternative to proposed Fitzroy North Ward: Nicholls

Fitzroy North as a ward would do well to retain the name **“Nicholls”**, named after Pastor Doug Nicholls (1906-1988), because of his work as a pastor for the area. It also recognises his association with the Fitzroy Football Club (FFC) based at the Brunswick Street Oval/Edinburgh Gardens where he became a star player for Fitzroy in the 1930s. He was the first and only Indigenous player in League football at the time. Doug Nicholls also became the first Indigenous player selected to represent the State in interstate football, playing for Victoria four times.

The oval where Nicholls played as for the FFC in 54 matches remains in that ward. It is a legendary part of Yarra’s heritage as per the history plaque at the FFC Grandstand in the Edinburgh Gardens located in the ward.

Serving in the CMF 1941, Nicholls was discharged in 1942 on being recalled to quell tensions between servicemen and Aboriginal families in Fitzroy.

Retaining his name for the Ward would honour Nicholls for his lifetime achievements as a prominent footballer at the Club based in North Fitzroy, as an aboriginal leader, campaigning for reconciliation, as a statesman, and for the later recognition of him as Sir Douglas Ralph Nicholls. The name Nicholls should not be dropped for that part of the ward holding the FFC with which Doug Nicholls was associated.

The name Nicholls Ward would be strongly supported by people in the North Fitzroy community. This was pointed out by a prominent North Fitzroy community leader in submissions to Council at its formal Council meeting on 18 July 2023.

Nicholls as a current ward name, is also consistent with the VEC principle of “Retaining existing ward names if these are still relevant to the area covered by the ward” and Aboriginal name with Doug Nicholls, a Yorta Yorta man born at the Cummeragunja Aboriginal mission but linked to Yarra in his formative years.

Further, the one word Nicholls is preferable to the two words, Fitzroy North. Moreover many residents call the area North Fitzroy rather than Fitzroy North. The name Nicholls would overcome some local distaste for this reversal.

For the many reasons covered, the name **Nicholls** is highly apt for the proposed ward covering Fitzroy North.

Accordingly, it is submitted that the VEC recommend this name for that ward.

3. Alternative to proposed Richmond Ward: Melba

Regarding Richmond, the name "**Melba**" would apply well give its association with Nellie Mitchell/ Melba living in Richmond where her father was a builder and the child Nellie Mitchell making her debut singing at the Richmond Town Hall at a tender age (see biography "I am Melba" by Ann Blainey).

A name recognising such a prominent woman associated with the area should be a priority.

This name as a current ward name, is also consistent with the VEC principle of "Retaining existing ward names if these are still relevant to the area covered by the ward." This principle also applies to Items 5 and 6 below.

The preferred name outcome should of course also depend on input from the Richmond community.

4. Yarra Bend Ward

"Yarra Bend Ward" would seem apt for the locality in the north eastern part of Yarra straddling the Merri Creek and Yarra River, which includes the local golf course and park, both called Yarra Bend.

Much of this Ward was previously called Merri Ward, taking the name of the local creek. However, as this name is similar to the new name for the Moreland Council, the Merri-bek City Council, from Monday 26 September 2022, the name Merri Ward may lead people to think the ward location to be in the Merri-bek municipality rather than in Yarra.

Again the preferred name outcome should take into consideration any input from the Yarra Bend community, a principle which applies to the following as well.

5. Alternative for proposed Collingwood Ward

Regarding Collingwood, an earlier Ward name for this was "**Carringbush**", the name derived from novelist Frank Hardy's book "Power without Glory" based on this area of inner Melbourne. The book was an account of corruption related to SP bookmaking and the personal cost of the power such corruption brings.

Yarra's public library in Collingwood is called the Carringbush Library. Carringbush as a former Ward and local name, is apt in lieu of the proposed Collingwood Ward name.

6. Alternative to proposed Fitzroy Ward

An earlier Ward name for the Fitzroy area was McKillop, named after Mary McKillop, born in Fitzroy in 1842, who became an Australian religious sister, beautified as **St Mary of the Cross** in January 1995 by [Pope John Paul II](#).

Resuming the name McKillop for the Fitzroy Ward in remembrance of a famed Australian female born in Fitzroy and the first Australian to be recognised as a Saint, should be strongly supported.

C. Error in ERAP Preliminary Report for correction (as below)

The below statement in the Preliminary Report (Page 11) should be corrected as suggested.

“However, the council contains heavily gentrified areas, ~~such as Carlton North and parts of Fitzroy~~ where median house prices are well above the metropolitan average and common employment categories for residents of the council are professionals and managers. These factors underpin the higher than median incomes of the population.”

It is understood the above statement in the ERAP Preliminary Report, related to City of Yarra submissions. Data on income levels in Yarra suburbs should be examined to ensure statements are evidence based.

The statement singling out Carlton North as heavily gentrified and implying it has more professionals, managers and higher incomes than other parts of Yarra, is misleading. The statement is seemingly based on an assumption that the escalation of house prices in Carlton North means higher median incomes. Yet data on income presented to Council, in fact, showed higher or parallel median household incomes in other areas of Yarra eg in Alphington, Cremorne, Richmond Hill (higher), Burnley, Collingwood and Richmond (parallel), compared with Carlton North.

While prices have escalated, many residents in Carlton North (migrants, hospital and university staff) purchased their homes many decades ago when the area was undesirable and prices were low.

There has been less turnover in Carlton North than in other areas as longstanding residents have remained attracted to their aged homes in the area despite modest incomes, high rates and high maintenance costs. Many are retirees on public pensions or self-funded retirees on moderate pensions, being employed in periods preceding compulsory superannuation.

Many residents are widows and older women who had low incomes when women only received 75% of the male wage, and had substantial gaps in employment due to child rearing, with these factors all adversely impacting their retirement incomes.

Given the area’s proximity to several universities and hospitals, there are also a high proportion of renters in North Carlton including nurses and students in share households.

All suburbs of Yarra are partially heavily gentrified some from the 1960's/70's, but especially more recent purchasers in other parts of Yarra where there has been higher turnover with new higher income residents having purchased at far higher prices than the more longstanding residents of Carlton North!

D. In conclusion

The VEC is asked to consider the above matters in recommending an outcome for its electoral review of the City of Yarra.

- a) On ward boundaries, the proposed Fitzroy North area be amended to include:
 - the small southern triangular area of North Fitzroy bounded by Queens Parade, Alexandra Parade and Smith Street; and
 - the northeastern triangular part of North Fitzroy bounded by Queens Parade, Heidelberg Road and Hoddle Street.

- b) Regarding ward names, should there be no or delayed input by the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation that does not meet the ERAP timelines, or if names suggested by the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, do not cover all nine wards or are considered less appropriate, consider the following ward names:
 - the name **Curtain** Ward be put forward for the Princes Hill, Carlton North, Fitzroy North segments of the current Nicholls Ward in lieu of a Carlton North Ward;
 - the former name **Nicholls Ward** be put forward as retained for the Fitzroy North area of the current Nicholls Ward;
 - the former Ward name **Melba** Ward be considered for Richmond;
 - the former Ward name **Carringbush** be considered for Collingwood;
 - the former Ward name **McKillop** be considered for Fitzroy.

- c) ensure there is an evidence base for statements made singling out individual suburbs in any descriptions.

I thank you for the opportunity to present this submission and look forward to speaking to it at the Panel's Public Hearing on the City of Yarra electoral review scheduled for Wednesday 9 August.



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