



## *Keeping a distance: home truths about 'local' MPs*

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### **Body**

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Can you call yourself a local member if you don't live locally?

At least 16 members of parliament - including two cabinet ministers and two members of the shadow cabinet - do not reside in the electorate they represent. That's nearly one in eight of the lower house politicians recontesting the 2022 election.

While accusations of "blow-in" candidates, parachuted into safe seats, have been making headlines, the growing problem of politicians living outside the community is a source of frustration for voters.

Ten of the 16 - Mark Dreyfus, Jason Clare, Andrew Leigh, Ged Kearney, Tim Watts, Libby Coker, Mike Freeland, **Anne Aly**, Andrew Giles and Maria Vamvakinou - are from the Labor Party. Five - Stuart Robert, Alan Tudge, Jason Wood, David Coleman and Russell Broadbent - are Liberals. The other is Greens leader Adam Bandt.

There is no requirement for politicians to live within their seats, although it's not a good look when they decide to live in a wealthier suburb. By living in another electorate, it also means MPs can't vote to re-elect themselves on May 21.

ABC election analyst Antony Green said the reason for the lack of rules dated back to the dawn of Australian democracy.

"In the days when transport was difficult and members weren't paid, you used to elect somebody from the city to be your representative," Green said. "That's the origin of parliamentary representation. That's why there are no rules; it's just you're enrolled in an electorate."

It became more common for members to be expected to live in their electorates around World War I with the arrival of the Country Party, Green said.

Analysis by The Australian found some politicians live just over the border line and are victims of boundary redistribution. One prominent example of this is former prime minister John Howard, who remained in Wollstonecraft after a redistribution in 1977 saw the northern Sydney suburb excised from his seat of Bennelong.

## Keeping a distance: home truths about 'local' MPs

Another is Employment Minister Stuart Robert, who has held the safe Liberal seat of Fadden on the Gold Coast since 2007. For the past 13 years he has resided in Nerang, a suburb within Scott Baccholz's neighbouring safe Liberal seat of Wright, which was created in a redistribution for the 2010 election. It's 3.7km from the boundary, and a 20-minute drive to his electorate office in Labrador. "Minister Robert lives in the suburb of Nerang which is partially in Fadden," a spokesman for Robert said.

Other politicians choose to live tens of kilometres from the taxpayers they have been elected to represent.

Labor backbencher Mike Freeland lives the furthest away from his electorate. The 69-year-old's primary residence is in the inner-western Sydney suburb of Newtown, 30km from his southwest seat of Macarthur. Newtown falls within Labor frontbencher Tanya Plibersek's safe seat of Sydney. Freeland also owns a house in Wombarra, 19km from his seat in Cunningham, another safe Labor seat, from which Sharon Bird is retiring.

"Mike has lived and worked in the Macarthur region for most of the last four decades," a spokesman said. "Mike originally moved to the Macarthur region in the 1980s where he raised his family and began working at Campbelltown Hospital. He has cared for local residents ever since, and continues to volunteer at the hospital to this day."

Liberal backbencher Russell Broadbent, the member for Monash, is a close second. He bunkers down in Pakenham, 24km away in the marginal Liberal seat of La Trobe. It was originally in the electorate he holds on a margin of 6.9 per cent but is now a 37-minute drive from his Warragul office in eastern Victoria.

La Trobe is represented by Jason Wood, the Assistant Minister for Customs, Community Safety and Multicultural Affairs. It takes in the outer eastern suburbs of Melbourne, including the growing new housing estates along the Princes Freeway. Mr Wood lives 11km next door in Casey, the seat of outgoing Liberal Tony Smith, in the tourist town of Mount Dandenong.

One seat over is Alan Tudge, the pseudo-sidelined Employment Minister, in Aston. The Australian understands he lived in his outer-eastern suburban Melbourne seat until it was redistributed. A Coalition spokesman refused repeated requests to elaborate on where, and in which electorate, he now resides.

The boundary dominoes continue in Sydney.

David Coleman is the local Liberal member in Banks, and serves as the Assistant Minister to the Prime Minister for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention. He lives 9km across the Georges River in Cronulla, the safe Liberal seat held by Prime Minister Scott Morrison. Mr Coleman sold his house in Lugarno two years ago for family reasons, and moved back to the seat he lost to Mr Morrison in a controversial 2007 preselection battle.

However, there is a federal politician living in Mr Coleman's seat - from the other side of politics. Jason Clare, the Labor frontbencher from Blaxland, is 20 minutes outside his low socio-economic southwest Sydney seat in Padstow Heights, where the median house price is \$1.3m.

ACT Labor frontbencher Andrew Leigh lives in Hackett, a 30-minute drive from his Gunghalin office in Fenner. He has been in Hackett since he was first elected to parliament in 2010. At that time, the suburb was in the middle of his seat. It was redistributed out in 2018, when the new seat of Bean was created for the 2019 election.

A majority of the MPs who live outside their area hail from Victoria.

Labor MP Libby Coker, the member for the marginal southern Victorian seat of Corangamite, lives between two houses both outside her seat. Coker's primary house is 11km south in Airley's Inlet, within the safe Liberal seat held by Trade Minister Dan Tehan. She also owns a home 5km north in Newtown, Geelong, which is in her northern neighbour Labor deputy Richard Marles's safe Labor seat of Corio.

Mark Dreyfus commutes 40 minutes from leafy Malvern in the Liberal-held seat of Higgins to his Mordialloc office in the solidly working-class seat of Isaacs. It's the same family home he's had for nearly 35 years, well before he entered parliament in 2007.

## Keeping a distance: home truths about 'local' MPs

Maria Vamvakinou resides in inner Northcote, more than 10km from her battler seat of Calwell, which includes suburbs such as Broadmeadows. She lives in Cooper, the electorate of fellow Labor MP Ged Kearney.

Ms Kearney, is also outside her area, lodging 1.8km away in the trendy suburb of Brunswick within Wills, Labor backbencher Peter Khalil's safe seat.

Tim Watts is in Footscray, a 2.5km stroll from his safe Labor seat of Gellibrand. Thanks to an unfavourable redistribution, his home and his electorate office are now in Fraser, another safe Labor seat held by Daniel Mulino on a margin of 18.1 per cent, which was created for the 2019 election.

Labor's Andrew Giles has a \$2.85m Clifton Hill home 10.5km outside his seat of Scullin. It's in the green seat of Melbourne, held by Adam Bandt on a margin of over 20 per cent.

Bandt doesn't hang his hat in his own heartland, but only by a few hundred metres. The Greens leader lives in Flemington, which falls in Bill Shorten's safe Labor seat of Maribyrnong. He was in Melbourne well before he was elected, until the 2019 boundary redistribution.

"Flemington was in the Melbourne electorate since about 1922 and when I won in 2010, but it later got removed by the AEC, and I'm now about 400m from the boundary," Bandt said.

"I've fought to get Flemington and Kensington reunited with Melbourne, especially because it would bring back together the people and families in Melbourne's big public housing tower blocks."

Labor backbencher **Anne Aly** lives in the Perth electorate of Pearce, the marginal seat of the outgoing Christian Porter. Aly's seat of Cowan is one of the most marginal in the country, at 0.9 per cent. She lives in Madeley, 840 metres from the border line.

## Notes

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