

WENTWORTH: TURNBULL'S DARKNESS AT NOON?

Summary

Although containing the wealthiest suburbs of Australia and also one of only two seats held continuously by the Coalition since Federation, Wentworth has now become a true marginal. At each of the seven redistributions held since 1955 it has been forced to add more territory. The 2006 redistribution added Labor voting Kings Cross and part of Darlinghurst to Wentworth which already included all of Paddington. On its southern end it contains the suburbs of Bondi, Bondi Junction, Bronte, Clovelly and Randwick North.

Wentworth is now on a margin of 2.6% which makes it the ninth most marginal coalition seat and the second most marginal in NSW. Moreover, the likely impact of the next Federal redistribution would reduce the current margin to zero. That is, Wentworth is becoming a Labor seat due to boundary changes.

However, Peter King, the disendorsed Liberal MP who ran as an independent in 2004 did artificially reduce the Liberal margin in Wentworth. For reasons explained elsewhere in this paper my estimate, taking into account the King campaign of 2004, the ability of Turnbull to build a personal vote and the effect of Labor targeting Wentworth is that Turnbull's true margin is 4.5%. Put another way, I think that if the Sydney swing to the ALP is less than 4.5%, then Turnbull will probably survive.

My calculations are as follows:

Swing required to ALP:	+ 2.6%
Peter King effect:	+ 1.5%
ALP postal vote campaign:	- 0.6%
Potential Turnbull personal vote:	+1.0%
Grand Total:	+4.5%

However, Wentworth will be a very difficult electorate to service. On the new boundaries it will contain some of Sydney's wealthiest suburbs as well as some of its poorest. It will surpass the electorate of Sydney as Sydney's gayest with a high 'Green' vote.

Questions to be addressed

These are:

1. What has been the effect of changing boundaries in Wentworth?
2. Did Peter King's campaign for Wentworth artificially reduce the Liberal margin?
3. Are there any special factors in play in Wentworth?

4. Is Wentworth really a marginal?

The changing face of Wentworth

Since WW2 the eastern suburbs of Sydney have produced the lowest enrolment growth of any region in Australia. In 1949 NSW had 47 Divisions of which five were wholly contained in the eastern suburbs of Sydney. Today, NSW has 49 Divisions and only two; Wentworth and Kingsford Smith are in the eastern suburbs. Each of the seven redistributions held in NSW since 1949 (1955; 1969; 1977; 1984; 1991; 2000; 2006) have resulted in Wentworth taking in more territory.

The 2006 Federal Redistribution for New South Wales cut the Liberal margin in Wentworth by 3% to 52.5%. Wentworth is now the 9th most marginal Coalition seat in Australia. (Prior to the 2004 election there were 41 Coalition seats with margins below Wentworth. After that election there were still 20 Coalition seats with lesser margins). Eight of the top ten Liberal marginals including Parramatta, (now as a result of the redistribution a marginal Coalition seat requiring a swing to the ALP of 0.9% to be lost) were only gained from Labor at the 2004 election. Aside from Wentworth, the remaining seat, Makin, first won by Trish Draper in 1996 is held by a margin of 1%. She is retiring at the next election

Wentworth has been along with Kooyong (Vic) continuously held by the Conservative parties since Federation. (The only other seat held by the same party since Federation is Newcastle (ALP).)

However, since 1980 Wentworth's electoral margin has steadily declined. At the 1980 election (see Table 1) the Coalition scored 49.6% 2PP in NSW. The margin in Wentworth was 63.9% or 14% higher than the State average. Post the 2006 redistribution Wentworth's margin is just 0.6% above the NSW 2PP for the Coalition.

Yet many commentators have dismissed the notion that Wentworth is really at risk of being lost by the Coalition. They point to the Malcolm Turnbull name and money, his potential to build a personal vote and the brutal overthrow in 2004 of the first term MP Peter King who then ran against Turnbull as an Independent. On the other hand the same commentators often see a different seat to what Wentworth is today. That is they assume that Wentworth is still dominated by the wealthy suburbs of Vaucluse, Bellevue Hill, Double Bay, Darling Point and so on.

The purpose of this paper is to make an assessment of Turnbull's chances of retaining Wentworth both in the short and longer term. The paper analyses the results of the last 10 elections in Wentworth, including redistribution effects and examines the potential of Turnbull building a personal vote with reference to the 2004 contest.

Our starting point is 1980. The collective impact of the four redistributions since then has been a weakening of Wentworth's margin by 6.35% due to its need to collect new territory.

Table 1 below reflects the gradual impact on Wentworth's margin caused by each of the four redistributions 1984-2006. The table also charts the Liberal 2PP vote and swing(excluding redistribution effects) in Wentworth at each election since 1980, compares this with the 2PP Coalition vote in NSW and finally provides the cumulative 2PP difference between the Liberal's Wentworth and NSW results.

For example, in 1980 the Coalition vote in NSW was 49.6%. In 2004 this vote was 51.9%, an increase of 2.3% on 1980. If the only effect on Wentworth was that caused by redistributions then we'd reduce the 1980 margin by 6.3% but also add 2.3% to the 1980 number to reflect the difference between the Coalition vote in NSW between 2004 and 1980. That should mean 63.6% less 6.3% plus 2.3% to produce a margin of 59.6%. However, excluding redistributions, Wentworth has swung 4.83% against the Liberals since 1980 and lags 7.13% below the NSW Coalition vote.

This would suggest that there has been a significant demographic movement against the Liberals in Wentworth. Against this is the fact that most of the difference (5.29%) between the Liberal 2PP in Wentworth and NSW has occurred at the last two elections, 2001 and 2004. Given that at both the 2001 and 2004 elections the sitting Liberal MP's lost preselection it can be reasonably inferred that the turmoil within the Liberal Party in Wentworth contributed to its poor result relative to the rest of the State.

To what extent demographic and other factors have affected the Liberal result in Wentworth will be covered in the next section.

But we should be sure that the Liberal Party's hold on Wentworth is certain to be significantly weakened with each future redistribution. It's likely that the new boundaries will only apply in NSW to the next two elections (2007 and 2010). After then NSW, which lost 0.6 of its entitlement between February, 2003 and November, 2005(from 49.92 to 49.32) will probably lose an MP to QLD, thereby triggering a new redistribution in NSW. Wentworth's Liberal margin would then be weakened by at least 2.5% through losing Randwick to Kingsford Smith and gaining Surry Hills from Sydney.

The 2004 Coalition result in NSW was its second best of the past ten elections and 2.9% above its average vote for the period. The last election should

properly be regarded as representing a high water mark of the Coalition's vote.

Unless Turnbull can buck the trend we can expect Wentworth to become a seat usually won by the ALP.

Peter King's campaign and its effect on the 2004 Wentworth vote

In 2004, in his first term as MP for Wentworth, King then aged 52, a barrister, author, Rhodes Scholar and former President of the NSW Liberals was defeated for preselection by barrister, author, Rhodes Scholar and Federal Treasurer of the Liberal Party, Malcolm Turnbull then aged 50. King had defeated a former Minister, Andrew Thompson for preselection in 2001, a ballot which Turnbull did not contest. However, Turnbull had once before contested Liberal preselection for Wentworth, way back in 1981. He had always lived in the electorate and it seems never considered any other option but Wentworth once he decided to make his run.

King then ran as an independent, got a very respectable 18% of the primary vote with 39% of that vote leaking to the ALP candidate. Whereas the 2PP swing to the Liberals in NSW was +0.2%, in Wentworth the swing was -2.4%. These numbers appear to justify the claim that King's campaign artificially reduced the 'true' Liberal vote in Wentworth.

However, unusually for a first time MP, King enjoyed a personal vote, in part derived from his former long service as an Alderman of Woollahra Council of which he had been Mayor in 1990-1. He aimed to win with the aid of ALP preferences and campaigned for ALP voters to vote strategically in a seat never won by the ALP since 1901. In the event, the ALP primary vote in Wentworth in 2004 fell by 3.2% but not by enough to enable King to finish second.

Taking into account the above my estimate is that Peter King's campaign did weaken Turnbull but probably not more than 1.5%.

Are there any special factors in play in Wentworth?

There are several things which will impact on Wentworth in 2007. These include:

(a) The decision by the ALP to for the first time ever to treat Wentworth as a marginal.

At the 2004 election Turnbull got 2PP 67.7% of the more than 5000 postal votes caste in Wentworth. At that election the ALP targeted seats such as Parramatta, Eden Monaro and Richmond and kept the 2PP Coalition postal votes in those seats to respectively, 56.5%; 55.8% and 58.7%. (Incidentally, in

Bennelong, another untargeted seat in 2004, Howard scored 64.7% of postals). Had the ALP devoted the resources in Wentworth in 2004 to keep the Liberals to say 10% below what they got on postal votes then the margin in Wentworth would have been reduced by 0.6%.

At this stage I'll call the effect of Labor treating Wentworth as a true marginal as worth 0.6%, measurable entirely by the likely reduction of the Liberal's advantage on postal votes. But the overall effect is potentially greater than this. In particular, Labor needs to significantly improve its miserable primary vote in Wentworth which in 2004 was only 26.5%, a fall of 6.6% from the 33.1% obtained in 1998. Some of the fall in the ALP primary vote can be attributed to the rise of the Green vote (in 2001 it doubled in Wentworth to 9.8% and rose again in 2004 to 11.2%), which then flowed back to Labor. But the ALP needs a primary vote of at least 40% in Wentworth.

The selection by the ALP of the Mayor of Waverley, George Newhouse who is also a prominent solicitor with strong links within the Jewish community will significantly improve Labor's primary vote in the Bondi/Bondi Junction and Waverley areas which Labor narrowly won in 2004.

(b) The ability of Turnbull to build a personal vote

As a first term MP, Turnbull can build a personal vote. Although (see below) the demographic diversity of Wentworth will make it difficult for him to build a vote higher than 1%.

Moreover, by accepting a position in Cabinet early this year, I think that Turnbull has reduced his chances of building a personal following. In general terms the public is influenced in its voting behaviour by party allegiance, then by assessment of the Leaders, then by policies and only then by personal regard for a particular candidate.

All that said, I'm prepared to estimate a personal vote for Turnbull of 1% with that vote unrelated to the probable reduction caused by Peter King's Candidacy in 2004.

(c) The demographic diversity of Wentworth

At the 2001 Census of the then 50 NSW Divisions, Wentworth ranked fourth (below Sydney, North Sydney and Richmond) for the highest proportion (45.3%) of persons who had changed address in the previous five years. The recent redistribution which added Kings Cross to Wentworth can only have added to the turnover rate for residents in Wentworth. I think it's reasonable that a high turnover rate of residents makes it more difficult for a MP to build up a personal following.

Secondly, the new boundaries also mean that Wentworth now vies with Sydney in having the highest number of gays. Whilst Turnbull has courted the

community it's hard to imagine the Coalition coming up with a more attractive range of policies than the Alp concerning gay rights.

Thirdly, the Green votes in Wentworth (2004 Election 11.2%) is higher than the State average. So far it seems to me that as Environment Minister, Turnbull has failed to cut through in presenting the Government's case on Kyoto and he has so far not engaged on the issue of nuclear power. That's been a debate he has more left to the Prime Minister and Treasurer.

(d) The Jewish community *

Wentworth contains around 20,000 members of the Jewish community which means that more than one in eight voters in Wentworth are Jewish. Bondi is the suburb with the highest number of Jews (5,300).

Since his election in 2004 Turnbull has worked hard with this Community and it must be said his support has grown within this Community. At the Objections phase of the 2006 Federal Redistribution Turnbull was able to attract a remarkable array of submissions from this Community, including, in a stunning coup, from the Jewish Board of Deputies in support of a rather spurious case for the retention of North Randwick within Wentworth. Whilst the Augmented Electoral Commission in the end accepted the argument it did so in a way that upheld the inclusion of Kings Cross, Woolloomooloo and parts of Darlinghurst and East Sydney.

As the person who at the time was responsible for putting together the Alp's appeal for Wentworth I have to admit that I was both impressed by Turnbull's ability to solicit support within the Jewish community but also disappointed that the various representatives chose to 'buy in' to an argument affecting the second most marginal Coalition held seat in NSW.

* see 'Demographic Profile of the Sydney Jewish Community' (2003) by Dr Gary Eckstein

Is Wentworth really a marginal?

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My conclusion is that if in the 2007 election the swing to the ALP in NSW is kept under 4.5% then Turnbull will probably survive. How likely is that? Of the last 10 Federal elections the average 2PP for the ALP in NSW has been 51% which is 2.9% above the 48.1% the ALP polled in 2004. A 4.5% swing to Labor in NSW would translate to a 2PP vote of 52.6% achieved at

Shane Easson

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the 1983, 84 and 93 elections. Moreover, even if the true margin in Wentworth is 4.5% then on a uniform swing to the ALP Wentworth would still be 16th and the final seat Labor would need to win for it to have a bare majority of 76 seats in the 150 member House of Representatives.

Three final points: Prior to the 1983 election the ALP needed to win 13 seats to change the Government. It got 24 seats. In 1996, the Coalition needed 10 seats to win Government. He won 29 extra seats. If the swing is on, enough for a change of Government it's unlikely to stop at the minimum needed. Secondly, if Wentworth is broken up into three parts—a Vaucluse to Rose Bay end; a Bondi- Clovelly end and a Paddington/Kings Cross component the Liberal's majority is entirely contained in the Vaucluse-Rose Bay where in 2004 Turnbull obtained 70% of the 2PP vote. He lost the other two ends of his seat.

Secondly, today Wentworth is a classic marginal. The next Federal redistribution for NSW (probable after the 2010 election) is almost certain to cut Wentworth's margin by around 2.5% making it a seat usually won by the ALP. If Turnbull saw the prize of Wentworth as a vehicle to become Prime Minister he is likely to be sadly mistaken.

Shane Easson
1st June 2007

TABLE 1: Wentworth 1980-present

YEAR	WENTWORTH	NSW (2PP%)	Difference (Cumulative)*
1980	63.6	49.6	
1983	59.7 (-3.9)	45.9 (-3.7)	-0.2 (-0.2)
1984	57.6 (-2.1) REDISTRIBUTION		
1984	56.2 (-1.4)	47.1 (+1.2)	-2.6 (-2.8)
1987	58.0 (+1.7)	49.7 (+2.6)	-0.9 (-3.7)
1990	57.2 (-0.8)	47.9 (-1.8)	+1.0 (-2.7)
1991	54.9 (-2.3) REDISTRIBUTION		
1993	55.46 (+0.6)	45.6 (-2.3)	+2.9 (+0.2)
1996	57.83 (+2.37)	52.6 (+7.0)	-4.63 (-4.43)
1998	56.32 (-1.51)	48.5 (-4.1)	-2.59 (-1.84)
2000	57.37 (+1.05) REDISTRIBUTION		
2001	57.86 (+0.49)	51.7 (+3.2)	-2.71 (-4.55)
2004	55.48 (-2.38)	51.9 (+0.2)	-2.58 (-7.13)
2006	52.48 (-3.0) REDISTRIBUTION		
TOTALS	-4.83	+2.3	-7.13 *

* Difference is that between the 2PP swing in Wentworth and the Federal Coalition vote in NSW. N.B. The combined effect of the 1984, 1991, 2000 and 2006 redistributions was a drop in the Liberal's margin in Wentworth of -6.35% 2PP.

Table 2: Post 2006 Federal Redistribution: Most marginal Coalition Divisions

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<u>DIVISION</u>	<u>Swing to lose%</u>	<u>Held since</u>
1. Kingston	0.1	2004
2. Bonner	0.6	2004
3. Wakefield	0.7	2004
4. Parramatta	0.9	2006*
5. Makin	1.0	1996
6. Braddon	1.2	2004
7. Hasluck	1.9	2004
8. Stirling	2.1	2004
9. Wentworth	2.5	1901
10. Bass	2.7	2004
11. Solomon	2.9	2001
12. Lindsay	2.9	1996
13. Moreton	2.9	1996
14. Eden Monaro	3.3	1996
15. Bennelong	4.3	1949
16. Dobell	4.9	2001
17. McMillan	5.0	2004
18. Deakin	5.0	1984
19. Corangamite	5.4	1931
20. Boothby	5.4	1949
21. Page	5.6	1996
22. Blair	5.8	1998

* Parramatta, although won by the ALP in 2004 has become as a result of the redistribution a marginal Liberal seat. Macquarie is not shown as it is now a marginal ALP held seat. (0.5%).