

Statistics can easily be turned around

Re: “Amalgamation statistics don’t tell the whole story,” letter, Sept. 3.

Irony, statistics, lies, misquoted numbers, amalgamation. What’s the commonality? The letter-writer’s argument — using voting statistics to disprove claims of popular support for amalgamation — can, ironically, also be used to his discredit.

Low voter turnout in the last civic election is a fact: Only 35 per cent of the Greater Victoria populace bothered to vote. Another fact: more than 75 per cent of those who voted indicated a willingness to enter into a wider conversation about regional amalgamation.

The letter-writer then makes an assumption in deducing that 19 per cent of the Greater Victoria populace were in favour. Such an outcome assumes that the 65 per cent who didn’t vote, voted against amalgamation. If that sounds silly, it is. It’s faulty because it is predicated on a huge unknown: the actual number of non-voters for or against amalgamation is simply not knowable.

Predicating statistical analysis on unknown values for precise outcomes is like using a mathematical best guess to erect a skyscraper. Let’s stick to what is known. Based on the electoral returns of regional voters, 75 per cent of capital region voters favour a critical analysis of amalgamation. Fact.

Mark Twain knew statistics can “prove” anything. Actress Lauren Stamile goes further, saying: “Math is a language used to describe statistics, but really it’s about collecting information and putting it in an order that makes sense.” Thus, critical analysis is the more effective weapon toward fact-finding.

Let’s discuss amalgamation seriously.

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Victoria