Submission for the Hepburn Shire Council Structural Review, February 2023 from Daniel McDiarmid, Louise Johnson and David Bartak

Background

The current structure of Hepburn Shire Council is divided into five wards with a total of seven councillors and approximately 2,600 voters per Councillor:

> • Two wards with two councillors each

> • Three wards with one councillor each.

Geographically, Hepburn Shire is of a similar size to many in Victoria such as Surf Coast, Macedon Ranges and Mount Alexander. However, Hepburn Shire has less permanent population. The size of the population also swells with significant numbers of visitors who draw on the resources of the region.

We understand that the *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act) introduced several changes, including that all rural shire councils must now be either:

- Unsubdivided,
- Subdivided with single-councillor wards or
- Multi-councillor wards with an equal number of councillors per ward.

Comments on the above parameters for change are provided below.

Success of any option adopted depends on the quality of the councillors elected for the Shire and the quality of staff employed including executive staff providing advice and preparing Council papers for consideration. Governance practices and the quality of policies and strategic work are also key. While there are pros and cons with each of the options, on balance, Option 1 (outlined below) is preferred. An issue for Hepburn Shire with current boundaries is that is it small with financial constraints and limitations in relation to community expectations and needs of permanent and visitor populations.

Option 1 (preferred option, see attached map)

The Shire Council is split into three wards with three or two Councillors per ward.

> Pros

- There is potential to break down the perceived parochialism of the current structure with five wards represented by seven councillors
- Opportunity to attract councillors with big picture thinking, beyond the interests of a smaller single councillor ward
- Retention of a local employment opportunity at Hepburn Shire Council
- Opportunity retained for locals who are passionate about issues affecting their region to stand for Council
- Travel to attend community events is still realistic within the ward for councillors
- Reduced number of voters per councillor from 2,600 approx. to 1,800 approx. if there are three councillors per ward. Three councillors per ward would be an increase in the total number of councillors with at increased cost, but provide better representation and scope for increased diversity

Cons

- Constrained financial position associated with the small Shire of Hepburn retained
- Greater number for councillors with increased costs if there are three councillors per ward, even number of councillors if there are two councillors per ward
- Larger wards may disadvantage smaller towns
- There may be perceptions of distance from local issues with larger wards.

Option 2 (not preferred)

Subdivided with single-councillor wards.

Pro

- Maintains structure like current model distribution
- May maintain quota of approximately 2,500 voters per councillor if there are seven councillors
- Greater geographical spread of councillors.

Cons

- May be subject to parochialism
- May not attract councillors concerned about the interests of the whole Shire
- Councillors with vision confined to their ward alone may be elected
- May not foster cohesion on issues of concern to the whole Hepburn Shire community.

Option 3 (not preferred, see attached map)

The Hepburn Shire Council is one ward with seven or five councillors.

Pros

- May attract councillors with "big picture" thinking
- Force a focus on whole of Shire agenda
- May maintain quota of approximately 2,500 voters per councillor if there are seven councillors
- Could reduce some costs if a five councillor only model adopted
- A seven-councillor model provides scope for greater diversity of background, interests and thinking to foster better decision-making
- May reduce perceived parochialism associated with the current model.

Cons

- Small communities distanced from decision-making.
- Chances of large populations dominating decisions.
- Major influence for decisions could be seeded to interest groups or individuals who can organise effective political campaigns. These may include commercial, cultural or religious groupings who unduly influence decisions.
- May favour those with the financial means to campaign heavily across the Shire that do not necessarily have the community interests at heart.
- Voting system may be subject to manipulation by candidates or create confusion within the community.

Other considerations

Given the relatively small permanent population of Hepburn Shire and larger geographical area with all its associated financial constraints, consideration in the longer term could be given to a reconfiguration of Shire boundaries.

Options include merging sections of Hepburn Shire Council with Macedon Ranges Shire, Mt Alexander Shire or the City of Greater Ballarat. Comments about potential options are outlined below. However, the size of the rearranged electorate could provide barriers in relation to councillor travel for Council meetings or community events. There are also issues associated with how to protect the unique interests of each area within Hepburn Shire.

Option 4 (see attached map)

The Hepburn Shire Council is abolished and divided with:

- A Creswick and Clunes ward connected to Greater Ballarat
- Another ward centred on Daylesford and Trentham joined to Macedon Ranges Shire Council.

Pros

- This configuration may give 'critical economic mass' for the delivery of services that is currently lacking in a small population-based municipality
- A larger Council may be in a better position to attract staff of a high calibre
- One ward with the population centres of Daylesford and Trentham with three Councillors in the Macedon Ranges Shire Council may break down the perceived parochialism of the current structure
- Greater opportunities for professional development for staff and potential for staff retention
- Reduced voters per councillor from 2,600 approx. to 1,760 approx. assuming three councillors for the ward in Greater Ballarat.

Cons

- Potential reduced access to councillors
- Creswick and Clunes may be disadvantaged in joining with Ballarat
- There would be a reliance on strong candidates for the Daylesford/Trentham ward to ensure the interests of the region are looked after
- Source of employment in local area probably diminished for residents to work on Council, with longer travel requirements
- Some potential Council candidates may not be prepared to travel longer distances to meet within Macedon Ranges Shire, given Macedon Ranges Shire Council meetings are currently held in Gisborne.
- For a ward centred on Daylesford and Trentham. the votes per councillor would increase from approximately 2,600 to 3,600 assuming three councillors for this ward in Macedon Ranges Shire Council
- Does not completely align with State or Federal electoral boundaries.

Option 5 (see attached map)

The Hepburn Shire Council is abolished and divided:

- Creswick and Clunes areas are connected to Greater Ballarat.
- Daylesford and Trentham areas with 2 wards join to Mount Alexander Shire.

Pros

- This configuration may give 'critical economic mass' for the delivery of services that is currently lacking in a small population-based municipality
- A larger council may be in a better position to attract staff of a high calibre
- Two wards with the population centres of Daylesford and Trentham with two councillors per ward in the Mount Alexander Shire may break down the perceived parochialism of the current structure
- Greater opportunities for professional development for staff and potential for staff retention
- Voters per councillor would be approximately 2,500 assuming two councillors for two wards in Mount Alexander Shire.

Cons

- Perception of reduced access to councillors.
- Creswick and Clunes may be disadvantaged in joining with Ballarat
- There would be a reliance on strong candidates for the Daylesford/Trentham wards to ensure the interests of the region are not subsumed in the larger municipality
- Source of employment in local area probably diminished for residents to work on Council, with longer travel requirements
- Some potential Council candidates may not be prepared to travel longer distances to meetings currently held in Castlemaine
- Does not completely align with State or Federal electoral boundaries.

Legend

- ▢ Council Boundary
- ▢ Locality Boundary

Please note: Where a locality overlaps Hepburn Shire Council and a neighbouring council, the total voters shown includes only those voters found within Hepburn Shire.

Option 1

Hepburn Shire Council
TOTAL VOTERS: 16,283
Voter numbers as at December 2022

0   7.5   15 km

Ward A

Ward B

Ward C

These boundaries are for demonstration only and are flexible for application.

Voter numbers by locality (map)

Option 3

Hepburn Shire Council
TOTAL VOTERS: 16,283
Voter numbers as at December 2022

Legend

- ☐ Council Boundary
- ☐ Locality Boundary

Please note: Where a locality overlaps Hepburn Shire Council and a neighbouring council, the total voters shown includes only those voters found within Hepburn Shire.

Scale: 0 — 7.5 — 15 km

Localities and voter numbers shown on map:

- Waubra 0
- Evansford 7
- Mount Bockworth 7
- Stony Creek 4
- Clunes 1847
- Tourello 27
- Mount Cameron 0
- Creswick North 35
- Creswick 35
- Bald Hills 13
- Sulky 93
- Smeatonhgam 35
- Broomfield 182
- Allendale 153
- Lawrence 9
- Ullina 23
- Glengower 17
- Campbelltown 20
- Cabbage Tree 16
- Creswick 2690
- Springmount 128
- Kingston 166
- Smeaton 214
- Wattle Flat 41
- Dean 105
- Newlyn 106
- Newlyn North 172
- Mount Prospect 34
- Blampied 214
- Kooroocheang 30
- Werona 20
- Clydesdale 98
- Strangways 17
- Bullarook 4
- Mollongghip 63
- Rocklyn 70
- Langdons Hill 23
- Sailors Falls 79
- Eganstown 160
- Rassll 21
- Shepherds Flat 77
- Franklinford 80
- Yandoit 228
- Tarlla 9
- Korweinguboora 0
- Leonards Hill 38
- Musk Vale 182
- Hepburn Springs 489
- Hepburn 7633
- Eveated Plains 31
- Mount Franklin 90
- Guildford 44
- Daylesford 2986
- Coomoora 275
- Dry Diggings 48
- Porcupine Ridge 165
- Bullarto South 33
- Musk 182
- Wheatsheaf 289
- Glenlyon 534
- Drummond North 213
- Taradale 4
- Bullarto 113
- Lyonville 224
- Little Hampton 89
- Denver 173
- Drummond 273
- Newbury 101
- Spring Hill 99
- Malmsbury 3
- Blackwood 53
- North Blackwood 53
- Trentham 1380
- Fern Hill 31
- Tylden 21
- Tylden South 7
- Trentham East 70

Voter numbers by locality (map)

Hepburn Shire Council
TOTAL VOTERS: 16,283
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Legend
- Council Boundary
- Locality Boundary

Please note: Where a locality overlaps Hepburn Shire Council and a neighbouring council, the total voters shown includes only those voters found within Hepburn Shire.

Option 4

0   7.5   15 km

Ward to Greater Ballarat

Ward to Ballarat

The boundaries are for demonstration and so are flexible for application.

The boundaries are flexible for application.

Ward to Macedon Ranges

Hepburn Shire Council
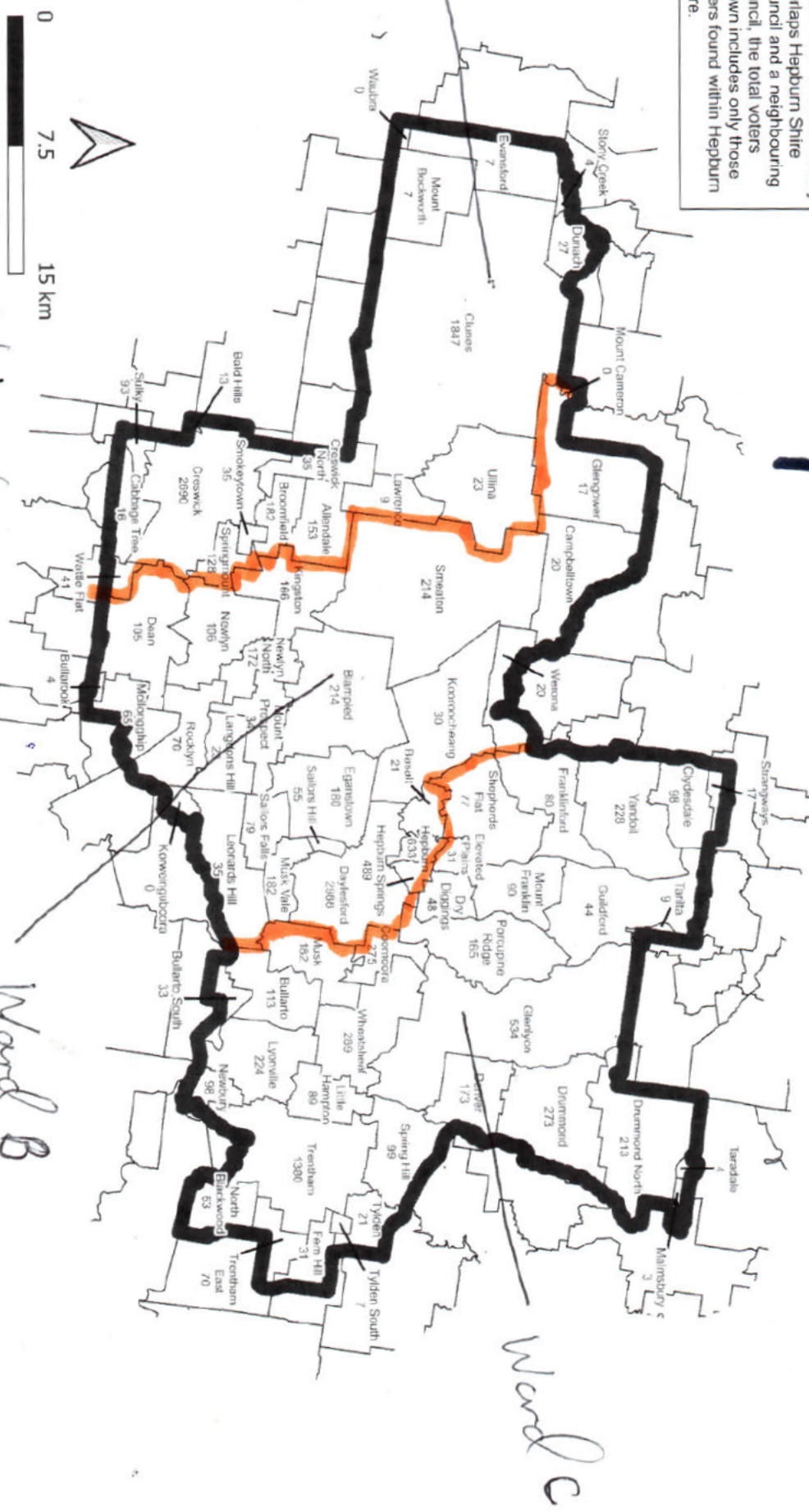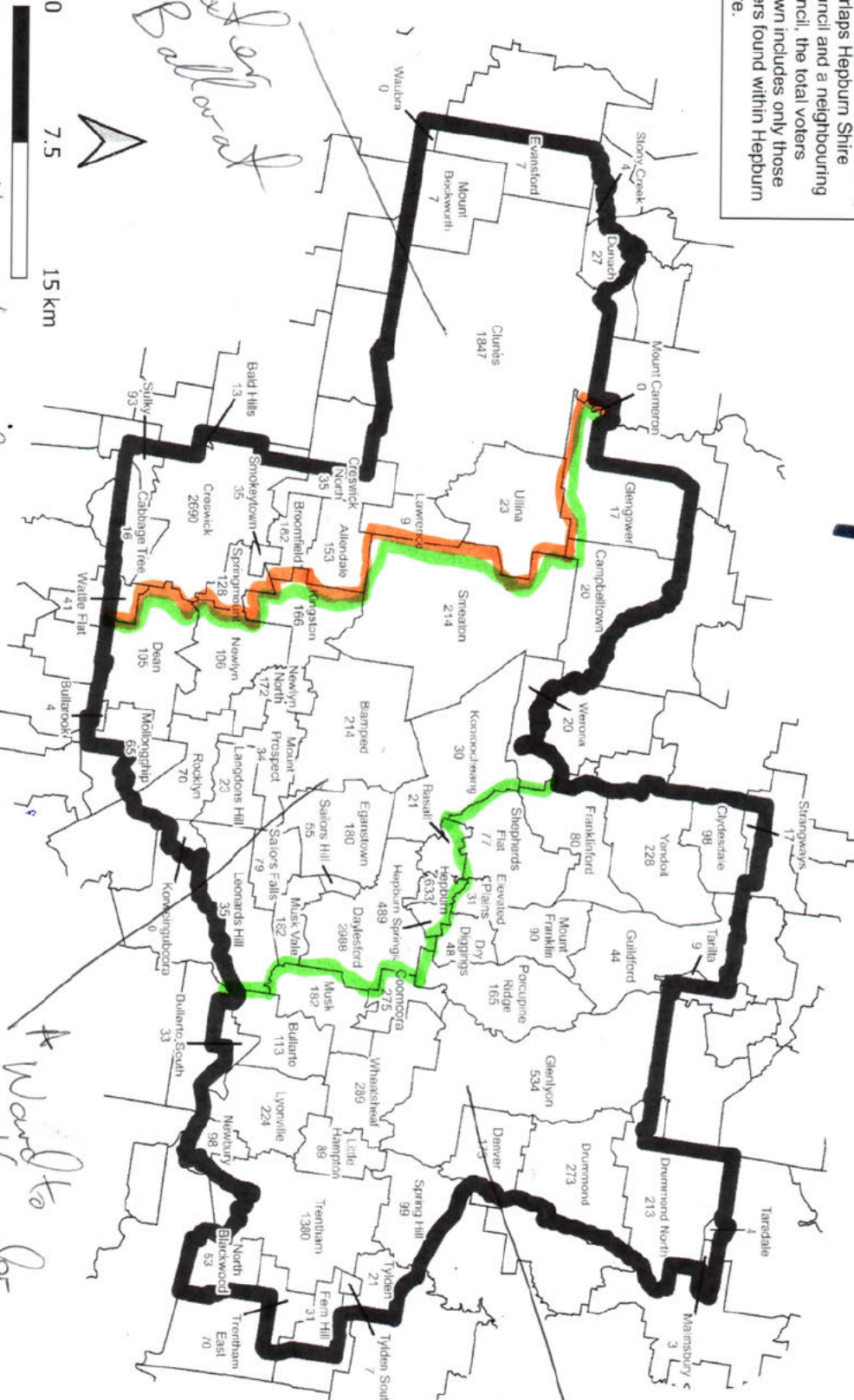
TOTAL VOTERS: 16,283
Voter numbers as at December 2022

Opti 5

Legend

- Council Boundary
- Locality Boundary

Please note: Where a locality overlaps Hepburn Shire Council and a neighbouring council, the total voters shown includes only those voters found within Hepburn Shire.

0   7.5   15 km

Ward 'F' to Greater Ballarat

These boundaries are our four demonstration and some flexible to application.

A Ward to Mount Alexander

B Ward to Mount Alexander

C Ward to Mount Alexander

Map locality labels and voter numbers:

- Waubra 0
- Evansford 7
- Story Creek 4
- Mount Beckworth 7
- Dunach 27
- Clunes 1847
- Mount Cameron 0
- Glengower 17
- Ullina 23
- Campbelltown 20
- Werona 20
- Baird Hills 13
- Sulky 93
- Creswick North 35
- Smokeytown 35
- Creswick 2690
- Cabbage Tree 16
- Broomfield 182
- Allendale 153
- Lawrence 9
- Springmount 128
- Kingston 166
- Smeaton 214
- Wattle Flat 41
- Newlyn 106
- Newlyn North 172
- Dean 105
- Mount Prospect 34
- Blampied 214
- Kooroocheang 30
- Shepherds Flat 77
- Franklinford 80
- Clydesdale 98
- Strangways 17
- Yandoit 228
- Bullarook 4
- Langdons Hill 23
- Rocklyn 70
- Eganstown 180
- Rassull 21
- Hepburn Springs 489
- Hepburn 2633
- Elevated Plains 31
- Dry Diggings 48
- Mount Franklin 90
- Porcupine Ridge 165
- Guildford 44
- Tarilta 9
- Mollongghip 65
- Sailors Hill 55
- Sailors Falls 79
- Musk Vale 182
- Musk 182
- Daylesford 2988
- Coomoora 275
- Bullarto 113
- Wheatsheaf 289
- Glenlyon 534
- Drummond 273
- Drummond North 213
- Kongalingaboora 0
- Leonards Hill 35
- Lyonville 224
- Little Hampton 89
- Denver 0
- Spring Hill 99
- Taradale 4
- Bullarto South 33
- Newbury 98
- Trentham 1380
- Tylden 21
- Tylden South 7
- Malmsbury 3
- North Blackwood 53
- Fern Hill 31
- Trentham East 70