

**Electoral structure review - Buloke Shire Council - Response Submission
Bernadette Hogan - Birchip - 05 April 2023, 03:58 pm**

5 April 2023

Electoral Representation Advisory Panel
C/- Victorian Electoral Commission

Submitted - VEC Online Portal

Response Submission in Support of Buloke Shire Council - Proposed Model 2

Further to my previous submission and in light of the Commission's Preliminary Report I would like to again express my support for the Proposed Model 2, being a subdivided council of three wards with two Councilors representing each ward.

In recent weeks when attending a number of Community events and engagements across the Buloke Shire, in my role both as Councilor and as a private ratepayer, I have sought to engage many Buloke Shire residents in discussion as to their thoughts on Proposed Model 1 and 2. I have found very strong support for proposed model 2, retaining 3 wards with 2 councilors in each ward. Numerous residents in the towns of Sea Lake, Wycheproof, Culgoa, Charlton and Birchip together with residents in the surrounding farming areas have expressed significant concern as to the quality of representation across the Shire, and particularly in the Northern areas, if the unsubdivided model was adopted. The ability to ensure there are good opportunities to elect local advocates who know their communities well and who are accountable to them was seen as very important. Concerns were expressed as to the recent issues which have taken place in the Moira Shire and how it seemed that the unsubdivided model had contributed, in part, to those very alarming outcomes. The overriding sentiment of all those I spoke to was definitely - "If it's not broken, don't fix it".

The Mallee Ward, which is geographically the largest ward by area, and comprises the townships of Sea Lake, Nandaly, Culgoa, Berriwillock and Nullawil has been well represented by two Councilors. The Lower Avoca Ward, encompassing the townships of Wycheproof and Charlton has been well represented by two Councilors. Those to whom I have been speaking in recent weeks across the Shire can't see a problem with only having two councilors to represent each ward and would welcome the ratepayer funds saved on not having to provide the extra Councilor allowance. I do not agree that an even number of 6 councilors would contribute to an in-effective decision-making process. It is the role of all councilors to represent the wider Buloke Shire while also advocating for their local areas - I would hope that negotiations between councilors would always be conducted respectfully and in good faith to ensure that the best outcomes for the Shire are achieved. I would not determine a process to be ineffective if the Mayor was occasionally called upon to make a casting vote.

It is quite concerning to me, that the only proponents for the unsubdivided model that I have spoken to are those Shire Councilors' who voted to put forward Proposed Model 1 as the preferred model of the Buloke Shire. This position definitely does not align with the wishes of the many people I have spoken to who sincerely value the accessibility, local knowledge and advocacy of their local representatives.

I would appreciate being able to speak in support of Proposed Model 2 at the Public Hearing on 12 April, 2023.

Kind Regards,
Cr Bernadette hogan