

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, 24 March 2023 12:41 PM
To: Buloke ERAP Submissions 2023
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Submission to - Preliminary Report - Buloke Shire Council - VEC electoral structure review

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Dear Electoral Review Advisory Panel,

Submission to the March 2023 Preliminary Report into the VEC local council electoral structure review of Buloke Shire Council

Thank you for allowing for submissions to your Preliminary Report into the future electoral structure of Buloke Shire Council. And well done in compiling this initial Report, which seems comprehensive.

I submit this response to this Report, and advocate for certain matters as set out as follows.

I support the Option 2 of having three wards, but suggest more than 2 Councillors per ward.

1. Counter to getting better fields of candidates.

There remains a thought that by having no wards the chance of better and or larger field of candidates may emerge. To take this to full extension the best numbers of people in Victoria is Melbourne, and thus perhaps we should source candidates from there.

This would be against the requirement of having the Councillors knowing and relating to their geographic location and the people.

Thus the municipality needs to have a number of wards to have real representation of the variety of the shire.

2. Representing the communities.

The Buloke Shire Council is like a lot of the more remote Councils, and is quite distinct from the metropolitan counter parts. Our municipality does not have or attract senior staff who live in the municipality the whole time. And thus the Councillors are the best conveyors of the nuances and opinions of the various communities.

Thus there is the need to continue to have separate wards, so the Councillors are not overloaded in their role.

3. Poor number of candidates.

2022 election was seemingly poor numbers for the Mallee and Mt Jeffcott wards, being exactly the right numbers of candidates. But the 2022 By-election for a Councillor standing down in the Mallee ward, had a field of 6 or 7. Interestingly in talking to some locals before that election, the matter of where the candidate resided was a matter high up in their minds, and wanting a person who lived in the ward was the focus.

Thus I support a number of Wards in Buloke Shire, and your Preliminary support of three.

4. Workload on Councillors

From observation, the distances the Councillors have to travel and be in contact with the various groups and communities is great. And the various communities have various forums and meetings representing the town or district. And Councillors need to be able to attend these for the good flow of information to and from the Council.

Buloke Shire recognises 10 distinct communities in its area.

And to thus be able to reflect the heard attitudes of the community in the Chamber, and also to be able to keep the communities informed of the Councils actions and activities, they need to be in a more confined geographic area than the whole shire.

This also allows the community members to know who their Councillor is, and the Councillor will have better appreciation of the community they live in and the context of that community and the local nuances, in which the resident is speaking. And gives a better chance for the community members to know and (feel comfortable with) who to approach if they have an issue or opinion they need to canvas.

Thus I support a number of Wards in Buloke Shire, and your Preliminary support of those three.

5. Example of Moira Shire.

The recent report on the failings of Moira shire and not being subdivided strikes a chord with me. I have a number of friends in that shire who live in Numurkah. They have expressed for large numbers of years (matching to the decades of complaints in that report) that they do not feel represented in Council. And that they only had one Councillor (in Nathalia I think) advocating for the west end of the shire. They believed that Numurkah was not getting the appropriate level of focus.

Thus I support a number of Wards in Buloke Shire, and your Preliminary support of three

6. Example of formerly Campaspe Shire Council.

I worked and lived in the Campaspe Shire 2008-2010. They had a ward system.

Echuca is the highest population area in the Shire, and clearly the greatest economic activity and (rapid) growth of all the towns in Campaspe. Thus a lot of focus for the Council office staff was on Echuca.

However I believe it was advantageous for the CEO and Senior Management to have to meet and interact with people from the rest of the shire (at least the Councillors), and thus be reminded to continue to focus on those other areas.

Thus I support a number of Wards in Buloke Shire, and your Preliminary support of three.

7. Lessen the load on Councillors by having more of them.

I believe we still do not have good representation of the whole community at Councils yet.

Generally not many 'busy family parents' or 'small business start-ups' are Councillors. The former are busy with day-care, preschool, schools, sports and family commitments. And the latter are focussing on their business.

I know some people see 4 years a big commitment, and cannot commit to it. Thus I believe we need to increase the numbers of Councillors to lessen the load on them and perhaps encourage a broader cross section of the community, and reflect their needs, desires and observations.

Again I also see that the Councillors need to have a back-up for when they are away or sick, etc.

Thus I contend 3 Councillors per ward would help to lessen the load on Councillors.

8. Ward names.

I had missed in readings, the request for suggestions of names of wards in the Preliminary Public Submissions, and so I apologise for not addressing this in my Preliminary submission.

I concur the names for the three wards should remain as they predominately are.

However, I feel there is a better approach to an independent review group to name the ward, but rather to allow the existing Council to consider the names. This would induce a (small) degree of ownership of the new electoral structure in the existing Councillors.

My experience in this was in 1994 during the Council amalgamation process. The Western District was the first non-metro and City region to be put through the amalgamation process. I was then working at the former Shire of Mt Rouse, which was one of three shires that were to be amalgamated with the City of Hamilton. They were the Shires of Dundas [the doughnut municipality], Mt Rouse and Wannon.

Once the three sets of rural shire Councillors (and staff) realised that they were going to be amalgamated with the (then despised) City of Hamilton, we commenced a monthly meeting process of a Councillor and a senior officer of the four municipalities to negotiate common matters and matters of concern due to the impending Governor in Council endorsed directive.

At one of the first meetings the topic of name of the new municipality was tabled, and the City of Hamilton Town Clerk cleverly and insightfully recommended that the name Southern Grampians be advocated over Greater City of Hamilton (or the like). He said this was because the Grampians was more marketable and identifiable to the nation, and internationally, than Hamilton.

This was accepted by the meeting (and subsequent respective Council meetings), and formed a good basis to start on. And a degree of ownership of the new municipality was established.

9. Misleading name in your Report.

I can see there is some confusion with the surname Getley and their Preliminary submission. Kelvin Getley was a candidate in 2020 Council election for Lower Avoca Ward, and was unsuccessful. Alan Getley, his father, was successful at that election for the Mallee Ward. And in the 2022/23 year is the Mayor. I believe that the Preliminary Submission that you received, was from Kelvin Getlay, who is not the Mayor.

10. Finally

Thank you for taking my submission and I hope my comments help the Panel realise the better value of a three ward electoral structure, and preferably three Councillors per ward.

I will be happy to speak to members of the Panel on Wednesday 12 April, to help explain my points, and to allow further conversations and information sharing.

Regards,
Martin Duke

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Date – 24 March 2023