

01 February 2023

**Victorian Electoral Commission
Level 11, 530 Collins Street
Melbourne VIC 3000**

To Whom It May Concern

Re: Yarriambiack Shire Council Electoral Structure Review Submission

On behalf of the Councillors who represent the Yarriambiack Shire, I write to raise several concerns that must be considered and factored into the final decision of the electoral structure review.

The panel will be assessing if the Council has an appropriate number of Councillors, and if the Shire should be one large unsubdivided area or subdivided into wards, as currently stands .

Yarriambiack Shire is a large rural Shire based in the Wimmera, Southern Mallee region of Victoria. It covers 7,158 square kilometres with an approximate population of 6,556 people (2021 ABS Census).

Our Shire provides an abundance of services to the community, due to either market failure and/or thin markets:

- Customer Service (including VicRoads Agencies)
- Home and Community Care
- Animal Management and Local Laws
- Environmental Health
- Community Development (including youth, sport and recreation, tourism)
- Kindergartens and Playgroups
- Maternal Child Health Services (immunisation programs)
- Building and Planning
- Library Services
- Emergency Management
- Roads and Footpaths
- Livestock Exchange
- Waste Management

Our Councillors recognise that to meet the requirements of the Local Government Act 2020;

- a) Each ward is to have approximately an equal number of voters per Councillor;
- b) The number of voters per Councillor in a ward does not vary from the average number of voters per Councillor in any other ward by more than 10 percent; and
- c) Be unsubdivided, or multi-Councillor wards with equal number of Councillors per wards.

This requirement is problematic for Yarriambiack Shire, as the population density resides in the Warracknabeal Ward, as is evident based on the 2015 Structural Review figures. The Wards had a distribution of electors as follows:

Dunmunkle – 1855

Hopetoun – 1662

Warracknabeal – 2577

Challenges of the Review and Changes within the Local Government Act

As Councillors we acknowledge that representation from across the Shire is extremely important to ensure the diverse landscape, interests, and issues are expressed and represented at a local level.

The climate, soil type, farming conditions, social isolation and service availability differs across our Shire, particularly between the Northern end (Tempy, Turriff, Speed) to the Southern end (Lubeck, Minyip, Murtoa and Rupanyup). It is 191km between Tempy to Lubeck, meaning the time to travel the length of our Shire is over two hours.

Advocacy and representation are important for small rural Shires. A Councillors role is to advocate for their community, and unless they understand the challenges at hand, they are not always best placed to advocate on a community's behalf.

As Councillors, we believe that retaining wards would provide the best outcome for our Shire, however due to the population distribution requirements within the Act, we are aware this may be problematic.

Therefore, if wards are not possible, we wish to retain the same number of Councillor representatives.

The Councillors recognise that to provide proactive representation across 7,158 square kilometres, seven Councillors are required into the future. Reducing the representation down to five Councillors would significantly increase the workload and could be a deterrent for people nominating. Especially when factoring in the tyranny of distance to be travelled across our Shire, the abundance of services provided to our residents and the advocacy required to ensure our voices are heard.

It will also be important for the VEC to provide support to candidates prior to the next Council Elections on how to effectively market themselves, and the tools available to assist. This will be especially important if our Shire becomes unsubdivided. People from Lubeck, Minyip and Rupanyup may not know of, or be aware of, a candidate who resides in Patchewollock or Woomelang for example. This is where candidates will be required to upskill on their marketing and communication skills and tools to promote themselves across the Shire.

We thank you for considering our submission, and we look forward to being invited to attend in person to articulate our views and concerns at a later date.

Please do not hesitate to contact Tammy Smith, Chief Executive Officer via mobile [REDACTED] or email [REDACTED] if you wish to discuss this letter further.

Yours Sincerely

[REDACTED]
Cr Kylie Zanker
Mayor