

Submission to Local Government enquiry into realignment of ward boundaries for Hepburn Shire Council

As a ratepayer of 30 years in this area I would like to make some general observations about the working of local government in this area. Although not part of this review, Hepburn Shire is too small and the turnover of staff due to the opportunity of moving up the ladder of advancement means rapid turnover and low skill levels. Most staff do not live in the shire and commute, seeing their job usually as a transitional step in their career path.

Another failing of the current system is the model of a CEO and Board of Directors which denies ratepayers and residents the access to a councillor who acts as an advocate. The councillors are intimidated by their accountability to the council officers rather than the ratepayers which leads to disillusionment and frustration. Accordingly the rapid turnover of councillors has been a feature of Hepburn Shire since the new structure has been in place.

To create a more unified approach I believe an undivided council would be the best outcome for our shire. Councillors could develop a much better understanding of the needs of the whole shire and reach agreement on common goals than the present single ward system offers. As approximately 30% of ratepayers do not live here permanently and have little engagement about how resources are distributed, the broader engagement in Shire wide issues is hard to achieve.

An important issue to consider is that once lines are drawn on a map, barriers are immediately created. Parochialism is already a strong feature of country towns and breaking down those barriers is very important for thoughtful decision-making. As council officers do not have the understanding of the local communities in the way that occurred when they stayed longer in the one shire, councillors would then be able to play a mediating role more actively in regard to the competing interests.

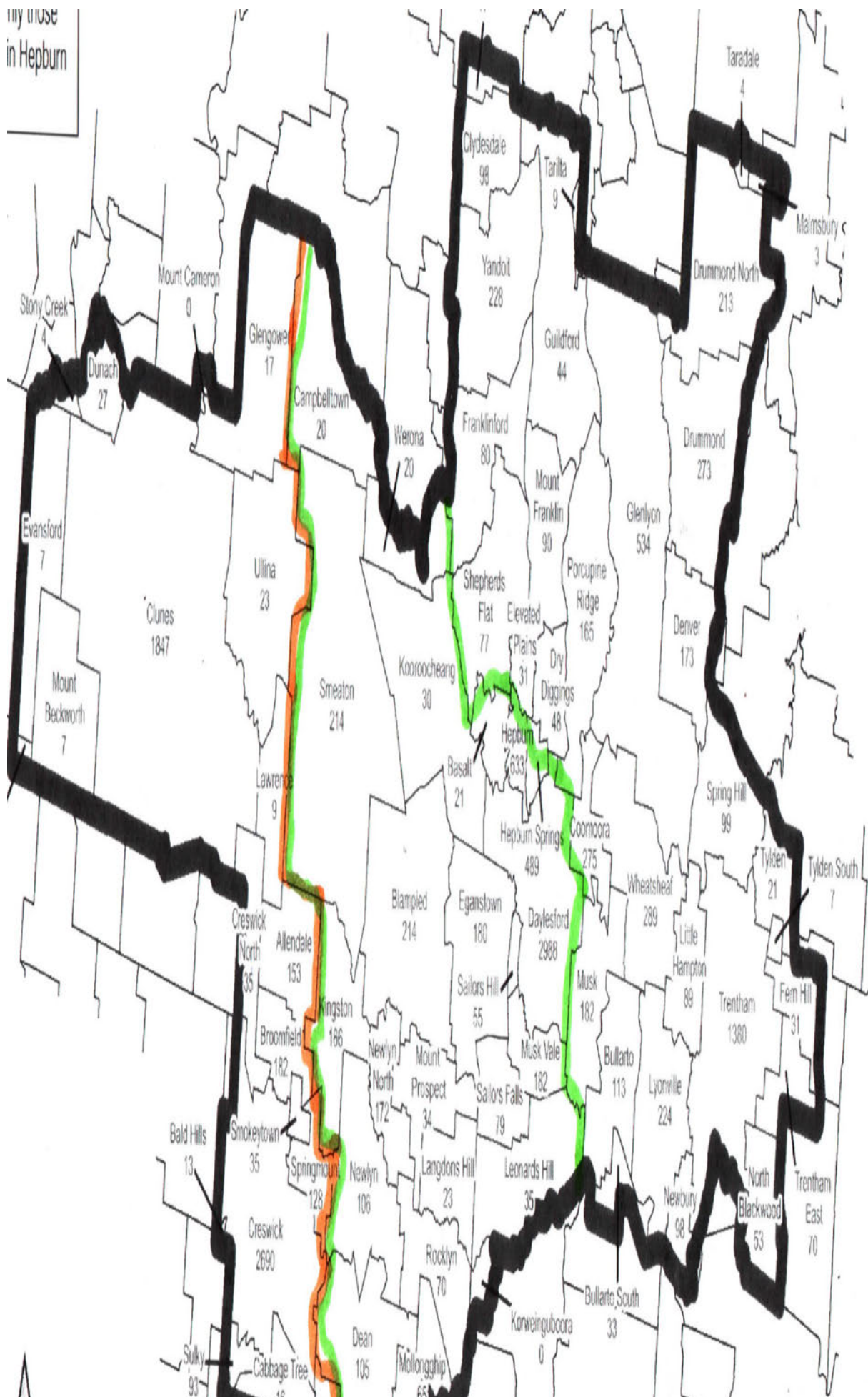
The other option of 3 wards with 3 councillors is my second preferred option. The only map which I have seen that does take account of community interest and creates 3 similar wards is attached.

Having more councillors has advantages as group dynamics are known to work better with 9-11 people. The reduction in elected councillors is a further erosion of democracy which has been proceeding for several years.

We have had single ward councillors for most of the last 20 years with nothing to show for the advantages.

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my house
in Hepburn



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I look forward to a more workable model of representation than has recently been the case

Kind Regards

Dr. Jennifer Beacham



Hepburn Springs Ph

