

## **Electoral structure review - Greater Geelong City Council - Response Submission Drysdale Clifton Springs Curlewis Association - Drysdale - 26 July 2023, 04:39 pm**

RE:- Greater Geelong City Council electoral structure review

We write to you regarding the impact of the Local Government Act 2020 on the City of Greater Geelong, and in particular the Bellarine Peninsula.

Under the terms of this Act, the City of Greater Geelong is classified as a regional city, and therefore is required to fit the model of single councillor wards. This contrasts with the multi-councillor wards which have been used in the Council elections in 2017 and 2020.

When one Googles what suburbs are a part of the Bellarine Peninsula, the following is provided in answer: -

- Barwon Heads
- Bellarine Peninsula
- Clifton Springs
- Drysdale
- Indented Head
- Ocean Grove
- Point Lonsdale
- Portarlington

The three proposals put forward in this review dissect and split these communities

The DCSCA is a member of the Combined Bellarine Community Associations (CBCA). This association represents nine community associations from the towns and villages on the Bellarine Peninsula: Ocean Grove, St Leonards, Barwon Heads, Portarlington, Drysdale - Clifton Springs - Curlewis, Point Lonsdale, Queenscliff, Indented Head, and Breamlea.

The CBCA has collaboratively since 2017, represented the Bellarine and its communities. Together this organisation has represented us as one voice. By dissecting the Bellarine to fit into the desired VEC model we become fragmented and inefficient in the shared values and voices of our communities.

The Bellarine is quite different to the urban areas of Geelong City in that:

- The coastal settlements have retained a coastal village and township character
- The demographic characteristics of most parts of the Bellarine are quite different
- The environments and challenges are similar across the Bellarine and contrast with the challenges faced by urban Geelong
- The peninsula coastal areas will face shared coastal climate challenges
- Infrastructure needs differ from Geelong City

The Surf Coast Shire is classified rural. It shares similar local economies and interests, has a wider range of ward structures available under the Act. We strongly believe that the Bellarine are more closely aligned with the Surf Coast Shire.

We recognise that the ideal number of councillors can be influenced by the circumstances of each council, such as the:

- nature and complexity of services the council provides
- geographic size and topography of the area
- forecast population and voter growth or decline
- social diversity

In July 2016, the State Government appointed a Citizens' Jury to recommend the best future design of the City of Greater Geelong, including its electoral structure. The Citizens' Jury's final report, released in January 2017, stated:

The citizens jury agreed as a 'super majority' on a four-ward structure, comprising of 11 councillors in total. We suggest these wards be divided into rough geographical areas, dependent on the electoral population of the areas. The proposed wards would encompass the Bellarine coastal

region, the Northern region, suburban Geelong and central Geelong. The preferred distribution of councillors would be three in each ward, except for central Geelong, which would have two. As was noted in the VEC Commission of inquiry into Greater Geelong City Council 2016. Single Councillor Wards 'creates silos of Councillor interest and undermined collegiality' discouraging engagement and debate by Councillors on the key issues facing the City.

The 2016 Inquiry resolved as follows:

'Replacement of single councillor wards by multi-councillor wards supported by mechanisms to ensure strategic, whole of municipality planning and delivery would strengthen council leadership, corporate behaviour and decision making.' (Executive Summary page 12)

This has been proven true.

Geelong is the gateway to the Bellarine Peninsula with its collection of towns fronting the sandy beaches of Port Phillip and the exhilarating ocean waters of Bass Strait. The Bellarine Peninsula is an acclaimed food destination with its collection of wineries, breweries, farm gates and dining establishments.

As is noted by the declaration of the Distinctive Area and Landscape (DAL), the Bellarine is an area of significant landscape value. This area is the area of:-

- Barwon Heads
- Breamlea
- Drysdale - Clifton Springs - Curlewis
- Indented Head
- Ocean Grove
- Point Lonsdale
- Portarlington
- Queenscliff
- St Leonards

We - the Bellarine - need to be retained as one. To continue to preserve the Bellarine for the future we need to remain intact.

The current councillor representation in place for the Bellarine is 'fit for purpose'. It allows for the communities within the Bellarine to continue to thrive, prosper and be viable for future generations to come.

The DCSCA wishes to lend its voice to preserving what is in place for the benefit of our community and all of those within the Bellarine.

Yours sincerely

Lynne Sutton

Acting President Drysdale Clifton Springs Curlewis Association