

Electoral structure review - Horsham Rural City Council - Response Submission
Terry O'Donnell - Jung - 18 July 2023, 02:57 pm

I believe the best future Horsham Rural City can have, is through Model 3.

In the current form, the Councillor base is heavily city-centric, which results in a biased community focus and the only regional spend is roads based rather than broader community benefit. It is not adequate that there is expectation to always have to journey to Horsham for any resources, and existing rural resources are no longer being maintained through this process. The current claim that there are 2 farmers on the Council is a stretch where 1 of those might live on a farm, but has shown only a regard for the City of Horsham. I understand that this can occur, my statement is purely to reference that claims have been made that might be more to affect the judgement of the panel rather than a true reflection of the specific values of the current Councillors regarding a ward system.

I feel that both model 1 and 2, whilst allowing for the rural zone create a greater burden on the two rural Councillors who may wish to interact with the constituents there, as the land size is beyond the scope of financial and time constraints. It also guarantees five Councillors from the city, which creates a guaranteed vote split from urban/rural balance.

Model 3 allows for the true integration that Horsham has always been a blended municipality. It leaves it to the people of Horsham through the votes for a mixed and blended makeup of Councillors from those nominating. By having Councillors from a wedge of the pie makes it more likely that they will have similar regional reference, and whilst that would mean they would stand their ground for the sector, it is only through that true discussion, deliberation and of course compromise that best benefit can be ensured, rather than having a city verses rural blockade.

I also believe that it is more likely that a higher number of candidates would nominate under Model 3 as they may see a chance to finally be representational of the community. Currently it is important to be relevant to an entire shire to garnish votes for election. Possible nominees with a stronger local connection and proven outcomes both regional and urban can, under Model 3, rely on that community base for support to represent them, rather than becoming a 'general blend' of Councillors without a support base. It is also more likely that a region can base Councillor performance outcomes for future elections creating multi-term Councillors, something that has been sorely lacking in the region.

It is well known that our selection pool at elections has been limited, causing possible unfortunate outcomes where Councillors do not have the relevant skills or understanding to acknowledge the implications of decisions placed upon them. Sure, there could be a situation where all seven positions become City based, but I believe the general population can understand the significance of a fully blended Council with a broad range of skills, particularly after past results.

I am active in Council activities, and through that have been involved in discussions with a wide range of residents. I have had the opportunity to talk to others in the community that could be representational and future Councillors. The general feedback is the concern over urban/rural divide, and the difficulty in being able to be in consideration of election under the single region style. The fear that by not obtaining general municipality support, even though they may garner it locally, could negatively impact their election outcome.

While my statements may be personal, or anecdotal, I hope they may have a bearing on the review regardless of the lack of specific statistical or situational data.