

22 November 2023

Naim Kurt

██████████ Greenvale 3059

Victorian Electoral Commission
Level 11, 530 Collins Street
Melbourne Victoria 3000
info@vec.vic.org.au
vec.vic.gov.au

To whom it may concern,

I write this submission in response to the Victorian Electoral Commission's Preliminary Electoral Structure Review for Hume City Council for the forthcoming 2024 Hume City Council Elections.

I note that Under the Act (and with reference to the notice published in the Victoria Government Gazette by the Minister for Local Government on 23 April 2020) all regional city, metropolitan and interface councils must have single-councillor ward electoral structures and that as a result, an Electoral Structure Review is required for the City of Hume.

During their reviews, the panel have attempted to assess the suitable number of councillors and wards for the Hume City Council, the positioning of ward boundaries, and the appropriateness of ward names. My submission to the panel aims to address some of these questions.

Basis for Submission

Over the past seven years, I have had the privilege to serve as an elected Councillor representing the Meadow Valley Ward on Hume City Council as both a Deputy Maor and now currently as Mayor.

As a result I have had a deep involvement in serving and engaging with our community on many issues and from many walks of life, through sporting groups, community groups, seniors groups and resident associations.

The overriding experience has taught me that there are distinct communities of interest in our municipality, centered on territorial lines who have differing interests and wants from local government for services, infrastructure and facilities.

The boundaries drawn by the panel have attempted to align wards along rivers and creek lines, using waterways as natural boundaries for the wards and as the basis for community's of interest. Some of the ward names also reflect the panel's approach to applying the use of Aboriginal Language and the panel have decided that in reflecting the current size of Council's that there is no suggested increase to the number of Councillors who might serve a future Hume community, past 2024.

Throughout this submission, I will endeavour to tackle the raised concerns, explain the reasons supporting the consideration of a 12th councillor, propose alternative names for wards derived from previous ward names and local knowledge, and put forth recommendations for boundary amendments.

Deciding on the number of Councillors

The report notes that the Act allows Councils to have 5 to 12 councillors. However, both the Act and the 2020 Local Government (Electoral) Regulations lack sufficient details on determining these numbers. Based on advice from the Electoral Representation Advisory Panel, the recommendation is to have 11 councillors, aligning with the current and projected population, voter distribution, and municipal geography of the City of Hume.

This recommendation stems from the panel's assessment that 11 councillors adequately meet the present requirements, drawing comparisons with councils like Casey, Whittlesea, and Wyndham in the interface regions, which share similar population numbers and growth patterns. However, comparing Hume with these councils raises concerns, especially when considering those under administration, served by administrators rather than elected officials.

Administrators receive higher remuneration than councillors and lack the same accountability to the electorate. Consequently, comparisons between Hume and councils like Casey and Whittlesea, under administration, are flawed, as the workload and involvement of councillors serving our community compared to administrators are significantly higher.

Specifically, Hume's significant multicultural community, with a higher prevalence of non-English speakers and lower socio-economic demographics, along with satellite towns like Sunbury and Bulla, green wedge challenges, and growth-related issues in infrastructure and services, contribute to a more demanding workload for Hume's Councillors. Additionally, addressing lower-economic areas in the southern part of Hume that require attention from local government and essential services further adds to the complexities faced by the Councillors in the Hume context.

Moreover, assuming that these councils, including Hume, should all maintain 11 members may not be valid, especially since all four councils are undergoing electoral reviews concurrently. An exception could be made for these four councils, representing a significant portion of the Greater Melbourne population, to be considered for additional members, given their electoral reviews, in contrast to other interface councils like Melton with considerably fewer residents.

The submitter strongly urges the panel to seriously consider the addition of an extra councillor in the Hume context, creating a 12th ward. Given that all four councils, including Hume, are currently undergoing electoral reviews simultaneously, relying on the expectation that Hume should remain at 11, based on comparisons with other interface councils, is flawed. This is especially true when those councils are also in the process of electoral structure reviews that could potentially allow for a 12th councillor in all major growth area councils.

An exception should be granted for these four councils—Hume, Whittlesea, Wyndham, and Casey—considering that together they represent 1.1 million residents, or a fifth of Greater Melbourne's population of five million. This consideration for additional members is justified by their ongoing electoral reviews, setting them apart from other interface councils like Melton, which have considerably fewer residents.

Ward names

The submitter asserts that Ward names should closely reflect historical names for the sake of continuity and community identification. Encouraging the use of Aboriginal language within the municipality, is important as a recognition of the indigenous connection to the land, waterways, and skies in Hume. This practice also aims to balance European names with local Aboriginal words.

However, the submitter acknowledges challenges in using Aboriginal language for Ward names in Hume, where only 45.2% of the community uses English as a language (2021 ABS) and proficiency in English is low for a significant percentage.

The suggestion is to maintain previous Ward names or use names that align with town centers or major landmarks for each Ward.

In 2005, the last time single-member Wards were in use in Hume, names included Evans Ward (Sunbury and Bulla), Jacksons Ward (Western Sunbury), Aitken Ward (Craigieburn and Mickleham), Woodlands Ward (Greenvale), Airport Ward (Tullamarine, Gladstone Park, and Jacana), Ningulabul Ward (Broadmeadows), Maygar Ward (Campbellfield), Shankland Ward (Meadow Heights), and Merri Merri Ward (Roxburgh Park and Campbellfield).

The submitter proposes renaming Bababi Ward to Upfield, Gaayip – Yagila to Mickleham or Mount Ridley, Yubup to Mickleham or Yuroke, and renaming Broadmeadows Valley and Merlysnton Creek to Upfield and Broadmeadows/Meadow Valley to avoid confusion between Broadmeadows community members who will be split over the two wards. Banum Warrik is suggested to be called Merri Merri Ward (previous Ward name) due to its proximity to the Merri creek or Kalkallo, reflecting the eastern boundary or the township. Kalkallo is also thought to be an Aboriginal word for bug trees or tomahawk, according to Vicplaces. Tullamarine Ward is recommended to be renamed Airport Ward, reflecting the importance of the Airport as an employer and landmark to that Ward and Burt-kur-min in option one should be named Aitken Ward, considering the presence of Aitken Hill in the ward. Any ward that features Woodlands Historic Park should be called Woodlands, reflecting the previous ward name for that area on council.

Ward boundary amendments

The submitter firmly asserts that all ward boundaries in Hume should align along town centers rather than creek lines, as communities in Hume primarily identify with town centers rather than creeks. The suggestion is made that, if ward boundaries are to remain unchanged, the section of Greenvale Gardens Estate (west of Mickleham Road) should be reconsidered for its addition to the Yuroke Ward and Craigieburn West, given its lack of connection with that area in terms of road access, location, and identity. Maintaining the cohesiveness of the distinct identity of Greenvale is deemed crucial.

Furthermore, it is proposed that the Tullamarine Ward in all three proposals should be adjusted to include Gladstone Park, Jacana, and Tullamarine, reflecting the previous boundary of the Airport Ward. Combining Attwood, Westmeadows, and the western side of Broadmeadows into a single ward is recommended to reflect their cultural similarities and shared history with Old Boradmeadows. Lastly, the Banum Warrik Ward should be redrawn in all three models to prevent the townships of Kalkallo and old Craigieburn from being united in a singular ward, considering the separation created by the freeway and industrial land between these two townships. Kalkallo and it's surrounds should be separate ward to reflect it's unique and direct needs as a growing and aspirational community.

Conclusion

Thank you for considering these suggestions, and the submitter appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the ongoing discussions and considerations regarding the ward boundaries in the Hume municipality.

Kind regards,

Naim Kurt