

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

Firstly, I believe that Hepburn Shire is too small to be a viable council and it should be divided up and attached to neighbouring councils which are viable. However, I know that this is not an option for this enquiry.

For a number of years the Hepburn Council has not worked effectively. This appears to be partly due to the parochial views taken by most of the councillors. They look after their own ward and appear to have little interest in other areas of the shire.

Of the three options proposed by the electoral structure review, I believe the only viable one would be **Option 1**, an unsubdivided electoral structure. This would mean that all councillors would have to represent the whole shire and its best interests, rather than the parochial interests of an area. This might overcome a major criticism of the present council and enable them to work together in a more co-operative manner which would be far better than the present arrangement.

If the Shire was divided into seven wards with one councillor for each ward as in **Option 3**, this would mean that some communities would have to be broken up in an arbitrary manner in order to balance the numbers in each ward and some smaller communities would have to be joined together with no apparent community of interests. Smaller towns like Clunes, Trentham, Newlyn, Dean, Drummond and Glenlyon would have to be joined in some ways to make up wards with little or no community of interests. The major population areas of Creswick and Daylesford/Hepburn would be arbitrarily split thus destroying their communities of interest. This also leads to each councillor seeing themselves as mainly representing their particular area, leading to very parochial views by councillors. Also, boundaries would potentially change at each redistribution to balance the number of voters in each ward while community of interest may not be maintained.

Option 2, an electoral structure with 4 wards, each with 2 councillors would seem to be the worst of the three options. 8 councillors could potentially lead to tied votes on issues requiring a casting vote of the Mayor, thus giving the Mayor a lot more power than at present. It could also make it difficult to elect a Mayor, given the closeness of votes in the last few years and may mean drawing out of a hat becoming a common way of deciding who is to be Mayor. In addition, all the other arguments outlined above against 7 single member wards would also apply to this 4 ward option.

As a former Melbourne City Councillor for 10 years and Lord Mayor and its representative on the MAV, I have always had a keen interest in how well Councils work. I have also been a resident of Hepburn Springs for 33 years. So I submit that the best arrangement for Hepburn Shire Council would be to change from the present ward arrangement to an unsubdivided electoral structure for this council, with 7 councillors elected by the total population of the Shire to represent the whole shire.

Edwin Beacham



Hepburn Springs