

Electoral structure review – Moorabool Shire Council – Response submission

Summary responses

1. **Number of councillors:** I do not support an increase in the number of councillors from the current seven. The VEC's report does not provide any convincing evidence for such an increase.
2. **Electoral structure:** I support the adoption of Model #1, unsubdivided as this is the best way to ensure all councillors understand they must act in the best interest of the whole Shire. The current structure and proposed Model #2 subdivided ward structure encourages and enables partisan thinking.

Further explanations

Number of councillors

- i. The table on p14 of the VEC report sets out data which do not necessarily indicate that an increase in the number of councillors is justified.
- ii. Mitchell Shire for example is over 35% larger in area and has almost 24% greater voting population and has similar representation per voter as Moorabool Shire currently.
- iii. Macedon Shire is much smaller in area being only 83% of Moorabool Shire, but has a significantly greater voting population 36% higher, but arguably has lesser representation of councillors per voter.
- iv. At 7 councillors Moorabool Shire has about the right number. A far more significant issue for Moorabool Shire is the fact that the population of Bacchus Marsh and surrounds currently comprises just over 60% of the whole of the Moorabool Shire. Victoria In Future forecasts of population growth indicate that the population of Bacchus Marsh & surrounds will continue to grow strongly out to 2036 and will account for over 70% of the Shire's population by that time. Around 90% of the projected growth in population to 2036 will be in the Bacchus Marsh area. There are good reasons why that growth is happening: proximity to Melbourne metropolitan area; substantial new housing developments providing relatively cheap houses and central Bacchus Marsh is well serviced by retail, banks and social infrastructure. This disparity in population density and growth across the shire will continue to present significant challenges for council and councillors in ensuring service provision keeps up with growth. However, this focus on the Bacchus Marsh area must be balanced by the meeting the needs of populations in the rural areas. A greater number of councillors will not resolve this and council funds are better directed to improving service levels to the community.

Electoral structure

- v. The proposed Bungal ward takes in significant areas around Blackwood and the VEC report argues that there is a significant degree of community of interest with the large areas of west Moorabool.
- vi. There is little in the way of community of interest between west Moorabool and the Blackwood region. West Moorabool is largely characterised by small towns in and amongst widespread agricultural production of vegetables and cattle and sheep grazing. Forest cover is limited and mineral prospectivity is low to moderate. By contrast the area around Blackwood has relatively high forest cover (large areas of which will soon be designated national parks) and relatively high mineral prospectivity with a number of companies actively exploring for gold, silver and platinum. These differences in the two regions are significant and are reflected in the pressures on land use and community needs. The

Blackwood region has relatively high tourism potential and with new areas being designated national parks will become increasingly focused on servicing tourists. By contrast, west Moorabool does not offer the same potential for tourism. The small towns spread throughout the region each have their appeal and bicycle riding is expanding, but the lack of forest cover and tourist facilities continue to limit opportunities for the service sector.

- vii. Finally, inclusion of Ballan in the proposed Bungal ward is another anomaly in that there is very little in common between Ballan and west Moorabool. Ballan is experiencing continued strong growth in population. Ballan is an attractive town for people as it has the recently upgraded mainline railway station and is well served by shops and social services such as doctors, a pharmacy and a bank. Ballan is increasingly much more like Bacchus Marsh in character. Ballan has a population density of over 265 people per square km (2021 Census data) compared to Bacchus Marsh and surrounds which has over 360 people/sq km. By contrast, west Moorabool is only 6.6 people per sq km. These vastly different population densities say much about the needs of the people and the demands on council and councillors to meet these.
- viii. The proposed Lerderderg ward includes most of Darley most of which is indistinguishable from the Bacchus Marsh area, being increasingly urbanised and has been and will continue to experience much faster population growth than west Moorabool.
- ix. The northern areas of the proposed Lerderderg ward have much more in common with the Blackwood area than Darley.

Footnote

The above analysis serves to emphasise the substantial differences in character across Moorabool Shire. For people who live in the west Moorabool area, the proximity to Ballarat makes it the destination of choice for shopping, health care, social services and entertainment as well as work. People who live in the west of the Shire are more likely to travel to Ballarat for most needs than make the 40 or 50km journey to Bacchus Marsh. This and the projected population growth poses a significant question for the state government: is the current Moorabool Shire area best served by a council which must necessarily focus most of its attention on Bacchus Marsh and surrounds?

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