

**Electoral structure review - Greater Bendigo City Council - Response Submission  
City of Greater Bendigo - Bendigo - 19 July 2023, 03:26 pm**

Hello,

On behalf of the City of Greater Bendigo Council and Executive please find attached our submission.

Please also note that the Mayor has written to the Minister for Local Government, with our more fulsome response unconstrained by the limits of your terms of reference.

Regards,

Geoff Fallon  
Manager Governance  
City of Greater Bendigo

## Detailed Assessment of “Options”

### Summary

1. The number of Councillors being determined as nine. This recommendation is supported, a Council of nine members is considered suitable for Greater Bendigo.
2. By consensus of Councillors, but by no means unanimous, Model Three is considered the least inappropriate of the models presented.
3. The City of Greater Bendigo requests to speak at the online public hearing at 2 pm on Tuesday 25 July.

### All Models

4. The Preliminary Report states that the panel has considered relevant forecasts of voter growth or decline. Yet it is unclear how these impact all three models, particularly with regard to the identified growth corridors of Epsom/Huntly, Maiden Gully/Marong, and Strathfieldsaye. **Question:** How long does the VEC forecast each model will be valid before needing to re-review?
5. The Preliminary Report states that the panel has considered numbers of candidates nominating. Yet it is unclear how confident the VEC is with regard to candidate interest. Increasing the quantities of Wards will, all other things being equal, decrease the quantity of candidates competing democratically in any one Ward. The VEC also, presumably, has access to historic data on the impact on candidacy numbers from previous structural reviews (for Greater Bendigo, for comparable Councils in aggregate, and for all Councils in aggregate). **Questions:** What is the VEC forecast, for each Model over time, for:
  - a. Sufficiency of candidate numbers for each Ward
  - b. Uncontested elections
  - c. Rates of informal voting
  - d. Sustainability of the diversity of candidates, being reflective of the increasing diversity of Greater Bendigo.
6. The Preliminary Report states that the panel has considered the establishment of meaningful and effective ward boundaries that are easily identifiable to local communities. It is noted the Model PDFs helpfully provide comparison to the current Ward structure. However, the more granular .kml files do not similarly provide this layer, nor do they allow ease of comparison to Greater Bendigo’s suburb boundaries, which residents would be more familiar with. **Question:** How well do the boundaries of each proposed Ward, in each Model, reflect the existing boundaries of Greater Bendigo’s suburbs? Whole suburbs should not be split into different Wards, as occurs multiple times across all models.
7. **Question:** Has the VEC considered the impact on work health safety, particularly psychosocial, of Councillors from being solely responsible for all engagement and representational activities?

8. The Act (as noted correctly in your Preliminary Report) requires electoral structures to facilitate good governance. The VEC has provided no research or analysis on how any of these models will achieve this. Including:
- a. How the inequity of Ward size and the heavier workload of representing a rural Ward versus an urban Ward will facilitate good governance.
  - b. How fair and equitable representation will be achieved for rural Wards or rural members of mixed Wards.
  - c. How fair and equitable representation will be achieved for any community member. Currently each of our three Wards contain a mix of genders, ages, experience with Council, political/philosophical outlook and availability. This allows choice for community members on which Councillor to approach.
  - d. How fair and equitable representation will be achieved if a Councillor is unwell, on leave or unmotivated. Without Council having to proceed through a lengthy Councillor conduct and/or electoral count-back, or without community having to wait until the next election to resolve.
  - e. How fair and equitable representation will be achieved where Councillors inherently have differing levels of availability (due to work, study, parental or other caring responsibilities).
  - f. How fair and equitable representation will be achieved for the Ward whose Councillor is elected Mayor. The Mayor:
    - i. Has increased Municipal-wide statesperson obligations and responsibilities which may conflict with Ward representational duties.
    - ii. Has increased focus, when chairing Council Meetings, on procedural impartiality and fairness, which may be detrimental to, or create a conflict with, Ward representational duties.
  - g. How good governance at the Municipal level is facilitated with the increased focus on individual "patches". Particularly with regard to section 8, 28.1.b and 28.2.a of the Act, which specifically reinforce the importance of a Municipal-wide and strategic focus.

#### Model One

9. Nil feedback

#### Model Two

10. Con - the minor adjustment to the historic border from Retreat Rd to Spring Gully Road (separating what in this model would be Golden Square and Strathfieldsaye) seems an unnecessarily change for residents.

#### Model Three

11. Pro – doesn't fragment Spring Gully community.
12. Con - creates a massive Ward from Flora Hill to Heathcote.
13. Con - Localities such as Tooleen, Knowsley, Ladys Pass, Redcastle and others north/north west of Heathcote depend on Heathcote for services and as such be located in the same Ward.