

Proportional Representation Society of Australia (Victoria-Tasmania) Inc.



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Submission to the Electoral Representation Review of Moorabool Shire

This submission makes the following key recommendations, namely that:

- All future elections in Moorabool be by proportional representation, using the single transferable vote (PR-STV)
- Seven councillors be elected from an unsubdivided municipality by PR-STV
- Given the already significant 'deviation' of the size of the largest ward (East Moorabool), the easiest way to ensure fair representation for the entire municipality is an unsubdivided municipality.

In expressing support for all seven councillors to be elected in an unsubdivided municipality, PRSAV-T Inc. bases its submission on the following important principles of democracy:

- 1) That majority support in the community leads to a majority of councillors,
- 2) That minority opinions are heard in Council, and
- 3) That electors in all parts of the Council area are represented equally.

The Society urges the abandonment of the current system in the Moorabool Shire, where there are three single-councillor wards and one four-councillor ward. A system that sees all councillors elected on the same basis is preferable to the current system, which elects some councillors on one basis and others on a different basis, and consequently lacks even-handedness, and is by its nature discriminatory.

Problems with the current system:

Different quota sizes in different wards mean that some candidates can be elected with lower support than others

Under proportional representation, a quota for election is determined by the number of candidates to be elected. In the existing 4-councillor ward (East Moorabool), a quota is 20% of the vote + 1 vote whereas for the single-councillor ward, it is 50% of the vote + 1 vote. Thus in the proposed existing single-councillor wards (Central Moorabool, West Moorabool and Woodlands, with approximately 3,600 voters each, the quota for election will be about 1,801, but in the East Moorabool Ward, with about 18,000 voters, the quota would be 3,601. That represents a significant distortion, and it is demonstrably unfair from the perspective of voters in the town of Bacchus Marsh.

Likely distortions of the overall result

Elections are held because there are contests of ideas as to how local councils should be run. Those contests may relate to issues, and an important principle of democracy is that if one side in such a contest gets a majority of voter support in the municipality, that side should win a majority of the councillors.

PRSAV-T Inc. will present a hypothetical but possible situation under the existing system. This is based on a submission that it lodged in 2011. Suppose there is a major issue dividing the community, and two major groups have formed to fight an election on the issue. Group 1 draws most of its support from Bacchus Marsh, and has a very large majority of support there and clear majority support across the whole municipality. Group 2, on the other hand, is a minority, but draws a narrow majority of support in the more rural areas of the Shire. Such a scenario is not implausible.

In this hypothetical example, Group 1, although having well over 60% support, nevertheless ‘loses’ the election (i.e. it fails to elect a majority of councillors) because its support is strongest in the PR-STV-elected ward (East Moorabool) whereas Group 2 draws its support mostly from the three rural single-councillor wards, but it nevertheless has enough support to win one councillor in the PR-STV--elected ward. The details of such distortion that could occur are presented in Table 1 below:

Ward	Group 1	%	Councillors elected	Group 2	%	Councillors elected
Central Moorabool	1600	44.4%	-	2000	55.6%	1
East Moorabool	14000	77.8%	3	4000	22.2%	1
West Moorabool	1600	44.4%	-	2000	55.6%	1
Woodlands	1600	44.4%	-	2000	55.6%	1
Totals	18,800	65.3%	3	10,000	34.7%	4

Table 1: Comparison for two groups of voters between numbers of votes cast and councillors elected

Some people might object that this scenario is unlikely, and perhaps it is. This submission, however, is that it is not appropriate in a democracy to maintain a voting system that can be clearly demonstrated to potentially lead to such a distorted result.

Objections to single-member wards:

While PRSAV-T Inc. understands that the current Local Government Act specifies a preference for single member wards in some parts of the State, that is not the best method for achieving good democracy. Single-member wards mean that

- a) Voters can have only a single representative, and a large minority of voters in each ward is represented by councillors that they didn’t vote for
- b) Single-councillor wards very often lead to uncontested elections, and
- c) Single-councillor systems often lead to large majorities in elected bodies for groups that have minority support. Consider the recent State election in Victoria in which 36.66% of voters cast ballots with a first preference for the Australian Labor Party candidates, but the party’s candidates nevertheless won 63.64% of the seats. Single member electoral systems regularly lead to distortions of the will of the electors, which are distortions that can’t occur in the unsubdivided 7-member Council that PRSAV-T Inc. recommends.



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