

## **Electoral structure review - Wangaratta Rural City Council - Response Submission Jennifer Garrett - Whorouly - 28 July 2023, 06:45 am**

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We support the rural boundaries proposed in Model 2, however, the name of the new north-eastern ward should be changed to Reedy Creek Ward, as per Model 1.

### INTRODUCTION

When the amalgamated municipality was formed in 1994, it was called the Shire of Milawa, but subsequent extensive consultation with the whole community identified the need to highlight the main city of Wangaratta while still acknowledging the rural areas, so it was renamed the Rural City of Wangaratta. The word 'Rural' is first to recognise the some 3600sq km (ie the majority of the municipality) beyond the urban centre.

We live and operate small businesses in the township of Whorouly, so we will primarily be addressing assumptions and concerns regarding this region.

### COMMUNITY OF INTEREST

Since the introduction of the ward system in 2016, specifically the creation of the South Ward which encompasses Whorouly township and the North Ward which covers the north-eastern side of the Ovens River, there have been major issues with the lack of recognition, support and representation on council for the Whorouly area.

Part of this problem relates to the fact that the Whorouly community of interest and, indeed, the Whorouly postcode was cut in half with the ward boundary being the Ovens River. There are currently single farming enterprises that occupy both sides of the river, so they have one foot in the South Ward and one foot in the North Ward.

The size of the wards is also a factor and this is particularly so in the 2146.15 sq km South Ward. The majority of the South Ward is the King Valley/River, with the majority of councillor's time and effort devoted to that area. Flung up on the north east corner of the ward, along the Ovens River, is Whorouly.

Another issue, which unfortunately results in Whorouly's lack of representation, is the broader community of interest. The township does not sit comfortably with the rest of the South Ward.

The King Valley/River, which geographically and as a community of interest incorporates Oxley and Milawa, is focussed on tourism and specifically viticultural tourism.

Whorouly does not profess to be a viticulture area. Instead we are focussed on generational and traditional farming. Dairy, beef and sheep, along with fruit and vegetable crops.

Whorouly's tourism appeal is its gold mining association. In the mid 1860s, Bowman's Forest and Paddy Gully were heavily worked for gold and quartz. Now, prospectors can regularly be seen wandering the Gapsted Hills and Paddy Gully near Whorouly looking for nuggets.

This aligns the Whorouly area with Eldorado, and to a lesser degree Everton and Tarrawingee, which have been major mining destinations and now focus on gold tourism.

While Whorouly does not have its own burial place, many spend eternity in Bowmans Forest Cemetery, located on the Great Alpine Road, along with their Bowmans Forest, Murruggee and Everton neighbours. Yet another indicator of the strong community that exists on both sides of the

Ovens River.

Whorouly township is also a popular rest point for those cycling along the Murray to Mountains rail trail, which runs from Wangaratta to Taylor's Gap parallel to the Great Alpine Road. Because of its close proximity and the availability of suitable tracks, Whorouly also attracts many cyclists from Beechworth.

#### DIVIDING WHOROULY

Given the strong community of interest that exists on both sides of the Ovens River, changing the boundary from the river to the Snow Road is a good option, however, it still divides the Whorouly community with Whorouly South and a section of Whorouly East being aligned with the new King River Ward.

This, while unfortunate, is a better option because:

- a) The Snow Road boundary offers a much clearer and obvious ward boundary than the often mysterious and morphing course of the Ovens River.
- b) The strong community of interest that exists between Whorouly township and the other side of the Ovens River is reflected in the name of the main linking road, Whorouly-Bowmans Rd.
- c) An argument could be put that Whorouly South also has a community of interest with Carboor (firmly in the King Valley), which is reflected in the name of the main linking road, Whorouly-Carboor Rd.
- d) Indeed, the line between Whorouly South and Carboor is not clear cut with some properties seeping into both areas, so it would be very difficult to establish a ward boundary between them.
- e) In an ideal world, Whorouly in its entirety being located in two well defined, strongly focussed and actively represented wards would result in two councillors advocating for the benefit of the entire Whorouly community.

#### RURAL WARD BOUNDARIES

Looking at the proposed rural ward boundaries, particularly as they may affect Whorouly and environs, there are strong reasons to retain three primarily rural wards, hopefully providing positive and focussed rural representation by the elected representative.

Model 2, with the Hume Freeway offering another clear boundary, provides the following:

Warby-Ovens Ward (3520 electors, 619 sq km) which features the hills and forests of the Lower Ovens State Forest and the Warby Range, flat-plains agriculture (ie cropping and cattle), the lower reaches of the Ovens River and, of course, the historic and viticultural tourism associated with Glenrowan and Taminick.

King River Ward (3451 electors, 2355 sq km), as previously stated, is aligned both geographically (King River) and as a community of interest (viticulture). Incorporating Greta and Laceby to the west reunites those smaller communities of interest, and retaining Oxley and Milawa to the east, only strengthens those common alignments.

Eldorado Ward (3317 electors, 650 sq km) would feature rugged hills and forests (Chiltern Mt Pilot National Park and Stanley State Forest) plus the upper Ovens River and Reedy Creek, hill-country agriculture (ie sheep and cattle), historic tourism (gold mining), and be book-ended by the comparable townships of Eldorado and Whorouly.

This division offers three rural wards that have clearly defined borders, communities and attributes. Although one is significantly larger than the other two in terms of area, by its geographic nature this is unavoidable but provides a clear corridor of interest.

#### WHAT'S IN A NAME

The rural ward names recommended in all the models reflect geographical features, except Eldorado Ward (Model 2).

We can only assume the ward was named such because Eldorado is considered the largest town in the proposed Eldorado Ward.

However, according to the 2021 Census, the population of Eldorado was 382 people and the population of Whorouly was 383 people. Tarrawingee, primarily being a domicile suburb without township infrastructure, also boasts a large population of 416.

Yet the preliminary report does not include Whorouly as a "large township". If it did, then perhaps one of the new wards may have been called Whorouly!

But as all other proposed ward names reflect geographical features, and given that most people find it difficult/confusing to pronounce Whorouly and the name 'Ovens' has already been used (ie Warby-Ovens Ward), the alternative choice of name for a north-east ward is as per Model 1, Reedy Creek Ward.

#### SUMMARY

At the end of the day, all councillors should represent all constituents/areas and the only time the ward system is obvious is at elections. However, a strong ward system that truly represents communities of interest, along with a councillor who is invested in the ward's entire community, will result in a positive outcome for constituents, the ward and the municipality.

To ensure equitable rural representation and advocacy on council, three strong rural wards should be retained to reflect the three strong but distinct rural communities of interest. Model 2 represents the best option to achieve this.

The name of the new rural ward in the north-east corner of the municipality should be Reedy Creek Ward.