

**Electoral structure review - Corangamite Shire Council - Preliminary Submission  
Michael Lines-Kelly - Camperdown - 14 February 2023, 12:42 pm**

Thank you for the opportunity to present the following points for consideration.

'The 2016 Commission of Inquiry into Geelong City Council found that single-member wards 'had the effect of undermining good governance; and that 'they compromised decision-making by trading off decisions for the common good in favour of ward interests' and 'distorted resource allocation and 'rational priorities'' (The Age 14 July 2019).

While the findings relate to a metropolitan council, they effectively apply, in varying degrees, to all councils with single-member wards.

No system is perfect, but in an undivided shire, where all residents elect all councillors, residents can consult any or all councillors on any issue. Any resident can nominate for election, opening the field to a wide range of candidates, including well-qualified residents who would be excluded in a wards-based shire. And importantly, the loudest voice or sectional interest cannot as easily dominate the agenda or proceedings.

The main argument put forward in favour of wards in Corangamite Shire boils down to 'only a local resident can really know and understand what our diverse local issues are, therefore only a local resident should be elected to represent us'.

While this argument has considerable merit, the fact is that regardless of whether a shire has wards or not, the electoral odds invariably favour incumbent councillors and well-known local identities. But tenure and popularity do not guarantee the capacity, aptitude, diligence, integrity and stamina that residents expect and are entitled to find in their councillors.

For more certainty in this regard, Corangamite Shire needs an open contest between candidates across the shire. Where needed, more councillors would ensure the shire's diverse interests are adequately represented.

A periodic review process may already be in place. If not, one should be established to keep the ship maintained and on course.

Finally, and this may be stepping outside the review's terms of reference, a portfolio system that allocates areas of responsibility to individual councillors would facilitate communication between council and industry, community groups and individual residents, potentially achieving better representation and outcomes and a more equitable distribution of the heavy and mostly thankless workload borne by councillors.

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