

From: Kelvin Thomson [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, 8 November 2023 2:49 PM
To: Merri-bek Submissions 2023
Subject: Local Government Electoral Structure Review - Round 3 review, Merri-bek.

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Dear Electoral Representation Panel

I wish to make a submission to the Round 3 Review of the Electoral Structure for Merri-bek Council. I have lived in the Merri-bek Council area for pretty much my entire life. I served as a Coburg Councillor from 1981-1988, Member for Pascoe Vale in the Victorian Parliament from 1988 to 1996, and Member for Wills in the Federal Parliament from 1996-2016. Both the Pascoe Vale and Wills electorates were overwhelmingly located in what is now Merri-bek Council, and so I have had a great deal of experience with the communities that live in Merri-bek, and their communities of interest, as well as seeing many different electoral boundaries in operation over a period of community involvement and representation exceeding 40 years. I have examined the 3 different models which have been put forward by the Panel for further consideration.

First let me observe that I think the Panel has done a very good job in coming up with Ward options that are coherent, and reflect the various communities of interest in Merri-bek. I think that any of the Options proposed could serve the interests of Merri-bek residents, and that there is a case for the boundaries that have been proposed in each option.

The Panel has elected to recommend 11 Wards. There were 10 Councillors when Moreland was originally established as a single member ward municipality in 1996, but since then the number has increased to 11. The workload of Councillors is very significant, and in my view there is a strong case for making Councillors a full-time position, but I am well aware that that is outside the scope of the Review. Given that, I support the recommendation to have 11 wards, therefore continuing with 11 Councillors.

I support the statement in the guidelines for the Ward Review that keeping, rather than splitting, communities of interest, and having clear boundary lines, are desirable. In my experience of Merri-bek the strongest features separating communities of interest are the Craigieburn Railway Line, Sydney Road, and Moreland Road. Whether you live on one side or another of these features plays a big role in where you shop, which schools you send your children to, which local sporting teams you might become involved with, and so on.

Each of the 3 Models recognizes the significance of Moreland Road as a community of interest boundary. They each propose 4 Wards for the Brunswick section of Merri-bek. Given that, there is little difference between them. The one difference is that Model 3 uses Sydney Road as the boundary, with two wards on either side of it, whereas Models 1 and 2 use Victoria St and Blyth St as the boundary, with one ward to the north and one to the south. Although the Federal electoral boundary for Wills used Victoria St and Blyth St when I was first elected in 1996, I don't think those streets are as strong a boundary as is Sydney Road, so I think that Model 3 is superior in that regard.

Model 3 is also superior to the other Models in its use further north of Sydney Road and Craigieburn Railway Line as Ward Boundaries. Model 1 does not make any use of Sydney Road at all, and uses Bell Street to separate Coburg North Ward from Coburg Ward. I think this is a weaker community of interest than the Harmony Park Ward/Merri Creek Wards created by the use of Sydney Road and the Merri Creek as boundaries. A further weakness for Model 1, which arises from not treating Sydney Road as a boundary, is that the western boundary of the Fawkner ward extends to East Street and May Street. These two streets are not community boundaries at all, and the streets east of East St, as well as Evell and Morell Streets, would certainly consider themselves part of Hadfield and not associated with Fawkner. Of course, boundaries are never perfect reflections of community of interest, given the need to have similar numbers of voters in each Ward. However, Models 2 and 3 don't have the same problem. They clearly include the suburb of Fawkner, but don't go further west than the General Melbourne Cemetery, which older people call the Fawkner Cemetery in any event.

Models 2 and 3 have the same boundaries for Merri Creek (Pentridge) Ward, Harmony Park Ward, Bababi Djinanang Ward, and Thomson Ward. The difference between the two lies in their treatment of Moonee Ponds Creek (Djirri Djirri) Ward, Box Forest Ward, and Westbreen Ward. I prefer the approach of Model 3, which uses the Craigieburn Railway Line as a Ward boundary. People living to the west of the railway line definitely have a shared community of interest. Notwithstanding the removal of the Glenroy Road level crossing, both the Craigieburn Railway Line, and Pascoe Vale Road, which runs parallel to the line through Glenroy and Oak Park, are strong community boundaries. In my view this makes Model 3 the best option. Again, I think Model 1 loses something by not making more use of the Railway Line or Pascoe Vale Road. Residents west of Widford St Glenroy would find themselves in the Glenroy West Ward, which they would find surprising. Model 1 also has weak community boundaries between the Coburg Ward and the Pascoe Vale South Ward – Linsey Street, Liverpool St and Hawthorn St. Coburg residents living west of these streets would be in the Pascoe Vale South Ward, whereas their community of interest is very much to their east. Gordon Street, proposed in Models 2 and 3, is a better boundary.

I think that all the Models pass the "Clean Lines" test, but I think that Model 3 has the cleanest lines, as well as the strongest boundaries. Furthermore Model 3 has achieved the closest to equal representation of voters among the models. It has no Wards with a deviation of more than 5% from the average number of voters, whereas in Model 1 Glenroy East has 5.74% more voters than the average, and in Model 2 Westbreen Ward has 7.57% more voters than the average.

I believe that Model 3 is the best Option, followed by Model 2, then Model 1.

I support the Ward names that have been proposed for the various options. They have a balance of indigenous and non-indigenous names, and will be largely familiar to local residents. The focus on parks and creeks in Model 3 is supported.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. I would like to briefly speak to the on line Public Hearing at 10 am on Tuesday 14 November, and would appreciate advice on how to do this.

Yours sincerely

The Hon. Kelvin Thomson

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