Electoral Representation Advisory Panel c/o Victorian Electoral Commission
Hepburn.ERAPSubmissions@vec.vic.gov.au by David Moore ▓▓▓▓▓▓ Musk 3461

As a ratepayer since 2006 in Hepburn Shire and previously in Benalla and Hobsons Bay I have some observations about the working of local government in Hepburn. I believe it would be better to split the shire in 3 directions and amalgamate it with Ballarat, Macedon Ranges and Goldfields Castlemaine

The Hepburn Shire is too small. It only has a population of about 17,000 people. It has too small a rate base to withstand storms, bushfires and floods. The diverse Shire has several small towns pitted against the larger competing Trentham, Daylesford and Creswick. The needs across the shire vary greatly due to differences in topography, agriculture, history, and population density. But it's normal every day other services suffer due to this diversity and complexity, services that are commonly available in a city municipality are non-existent in Hepburn.

There is very high Staff turnover due to the opportunity for promotion, staff see their Hepburn job usually as a transitional step in their career path. There are often associated low skill levels of incoming staff. The majority of staff do not live in the shire and commute. Council officers do not have the understanding of the local communities in the way that occurred when they stayed longer in the shire.

A failing of the current model of a CEO and Board of Directors promoted by the MAV denies ratepayers and residents access to a councillor who acts as an advocate. So-called squeaky wheel citizens are actively discouraged from appointment via surveys preventing them contributing to various Shire projects.

The councillors when elected begin being advocates for ratepayers but soon fall into the sway of being beholden to the staff. Councillors should be able to play a mediating role acting as an advocate as they did traditionally, rather than just protecting the staff from the disgruntled citizens of the shire. Some Councillors become intimidated by their accountability to the council officers rather than the ratepayers. ▓▓ A prominent example is the failure to administer the Rex project to a successful outcome.

The revolving door of Mayors by turns are made to serve up a weekly PR monologue, written by governance officers with little real knowledge of the community they serve, and served out through the fortnightly Local paper and the Shire's own social media, PR which is thin on facts and usually overly optimistic, failing to address the real situations. Local investigative journalism is almost nonexistent, the 5th estate is dead. This leads to the disillusionment and frustration of the citizens of the shire.

The rapid turnover of councillors has been a feature of Hepburn Shire since this corporate structure has been in place. Parochialism is a feature of country towns, breaking down those barriers is very important for thoughtful decision-making in regard to competing interests.

If the amalgamation with other shires is not to be contemplated a collegiate structure should be adopted rather than the corporate model. To this end creating a more cooperative approach. An undivided council would be a better outcome for our shire with proportional representation and banning party tickets and how-to-vote cards. Candidates will need to appeal to the entire electorate rather than just a district, they will need to develop policies and platforms that are inclusive. Councillors would develop a much better understanding of the needs of the whole shire. They could then reach an agreement on common goals and distribution of resources, more equitably than the competitive model the present single-ward system offers.

While it might be argued the voters of Daylesford Trentham and Creswick would have disproportional influence over the final results, and their candidates may have an advantage over those from lesser-populated areas. However a

large percentage of ratepayers do not live here permanently and have little engagement about how resources are distributed, so broader engagement in Shire-wide issues is hard to achieve.

A critical issue to consider is that once lines are drawn on a map, barriers are immediately created. Musk is in the Trentham/Coliba Ward for instance but Musk has little relationship with Trentham and much more to do with Daylesford due to distance and geography
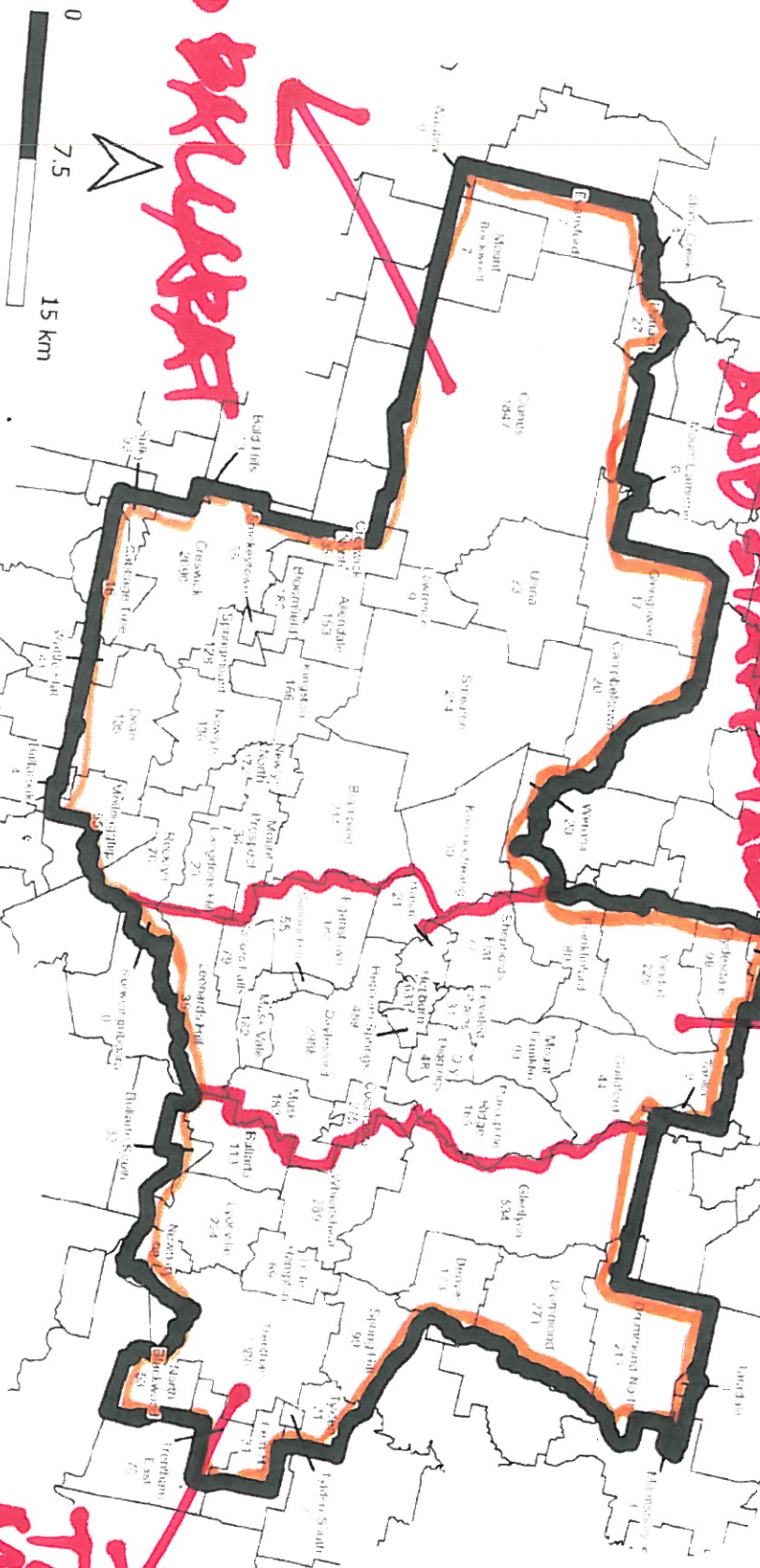
Voter numbers by locality (map)

Legend
☐ Council Boundary
☐ Locality Boundary

Please note: Where a locality overlaps Hepburn Shire Council and a neighbouring council, the total voters shown includes only those voters found within Hepburn Shire.

Hepburn Shire Council
TOTAL VOTERS: 16,283
Voter numbers as at December 2022

SPLIT THE SHIRE TO BENIFIT FROM MORE RESOURCES AND SERVICES

TO BALLARAT

TO MT ALEXANDER

TO MACEDON RANGES