

Electoral structure review - Hepburn Shire Council - Preliminary Submission
Charles Sherlock - TRENTHAM - 09 February 2023, 12:50 pm

I have been a resident of Hepburn Shire for 25 years. I wish to make two points in this submission,

First: the Shire is too small.

I believe that the current Shire (total population now around 16,000) does not have a large enough rate base to function as well as it could. This is not only in financial terms, but also in attracting key staff to stay for more than a few years. NB: this makes no criticism of current staff, especially the half dozen long-termers who do the practical jobs around Trentham.

However, I see the challenges in how a large Shire could be formed ...

Second: the best structure for the present Shire is single councillor Wards.

During my time here, Coliban Ward, based on Trentham, has had just one councillor, who has often struggled to get a seconder for a motion. Trentham, on the east side of the Shire, has until the last few years been largely ignored by the Shire, and suffered from rate inequity. This was in part because the town was small and 'distant', in part due to some councillors in neighbouring wards opposing Ward projects for personal reasons.

I am glad to say that changes in councillors, and Trentham's (rapid) growth, have seen a much better Shire - Ward relationship emerge. But what I learnt from all this is the importance of each ward having just one councillor.

Hepburn Shire is too small to have nine councillors (three councillors in three wards), so that model would not work. And - for similar reasons as the experience of 2010-2017 - the election of all councillors across the Shire as a whole (ie no Wards) is very likely to see this, and similar parts of the Shire, given less resources than the bigger towns.

In sum, my submission is:

1. Restructure Councils in this region into large Shires
2. Have Hepburn Shire governed by seven councillors elected from one ward each - and NOT by councillors elected across the Shire as a whole.