

Electoral structure review - Campaspe Shire Council - Response Submission
Zoe Cook - Rochester - 12 April 2023, 12:55 pm

To whom it may concern,

After reviewing the three proposed boundary changes to the Campaspe Shire Council boundaries, I firmly believe the first option of removing the wards entirely is the best option. Given the low population of only 31,046 electors in the Council area, there is only a small number of residents who are willing and able to stand as candidates at an election. Furthermore there is a precedent of this happening in single member wards where candidates have won unopposed due to no residents contesting the election. This small population number therefore, if split between wards, would limit the breadth of political ideas and differences between candidates, with smaller ballots for each ward compared to if the boundaries were removed. These smaller ballots then inhibit the democratic ability for residents to vote for candidates who best align with their politics, and thus can decrease the broader representation of the community amongst elected councilors, as candidates who might have appealed to a larger demographic across the shire are limited to only receiving votes from the ward they contest for.

By removing the ward boundaries entirely voters from across the shire are able to share representation from councilors based on their politics and views, rather than their physical residency, resulting in a more democratic society and a higher likelihood for issues that concern residents to be addressed.

From several personal conversations I have had the issue of an Echucan-dominated council has come up as a reason to not remove ward boundaries. I do believe this is a very prominent concern of residents living outside Echuca, however I do not believe that keeping ward boundaries is an effective way to counter this. Firstly because a candidate does not have to be a resident of a ward in order to contest for it, and secondly because I feel like the single member wards that are not contested, residents within wards may feel that as long as they have their three representatives from that physical ward area, it concerns them less what their actual policies are - or may deter prospective candidates for the same reason. This encourages political apathy, which is not congenial to democracy.

By removing the ward boundaries I believe this will actually encourage residents from outside Echuca to contest the election in order to level the playing field in terms of politics based on residence - which then gives voters across the shire a more diverse range of candidates to vote for. Regarding the other options for the ward boundary changes, my second preference would go to the second proposed model as it has the best division of electors across the wards, meaning each councilor is representing a very similar number of residents and are not being voted in on a significantly lower number of votes than other councilors.

Thank-you for taking this into consideration,

Zoe C

PS. I am available to speak at the public hearing if the Council requests.