

Electoral structure review - Greater Shepparton City Council - Response Submission Greater Shepparton City Council - Shepparton North - 26 July 2023, 09:18 am

Electoral Structure Review – Council Submission

In response to the preliminary report prepared by the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC), Council makes the following submission:

While Council understands what the single-member ward structure aims to achieve, we are disappointed with the lack of electoral structure options provided and feel that the single-member ward structure does not offer the best model of representation for our community.

Council has maintained this position and advocated for an unsubdivided structure since the 2015 VEC Electoral Review. Following the review, the single-member ward structure was again opposed in our submission on the 2019 Local Government Bill and through subsequent correspondence to the Minister for Local Government.

In Council's view, the proposed model will further challenge our ability to achieve gender and culturally diverse representation. Recognising that we hold one of the most diverse municipalities within the State, the need to ensure our representation is reflective of our community is of high importance to Greater Shepparton. Currently, our Council contains a mix of genders, ages, cultural backgrounds and experience. The introduction of a ward structure will unnecessarily segregate our municipality and will likely lead to illogical representation where the elected member may not reflect the broader demographic of the ward they represent, causing disconnect for that community.

It should also be noted that Greater Shepparton Councillors historically have not been affiliated with political parties and we feel that the introduction of a ward structure will create unnecessary divide amongst an otherwise cohesive and functioning Council.

Specifically in response to the current process being facilitated by the VEC, Council wishes to express its concern with the lack of time provided to prepare a submission in response to the preliminary report. This has resulted in Council's inability to engage and seek the feedback of our community in order to prepare a comprehensive submission on an alternative model.

In both Model 1 and 2, the ward names proposed lack any consistent theme or meaning to our municipality, and the ward boundaries appear illogical and unbalanced.

Council strongly opposes the division of the township of Mooroopna and feels that a divide of this nature will present a number of challenges for the elected representatives of those wards. In particular, we anticipate that the small rural townships are likely to be exposed to disadvantage through competing interests against stronger areas of representation such as inner suburban Mooroopna. In our view, the separation of the township of Mooroopna is in direct conflict with the VEC's express position that communities of interest should be maintained.

In summary, Council's past performance has demonstrated that an unsubdivided municipality has delivered fair and equitable representation for our community, with no record of intervention from Municipal Monitors or Administrators. We believe the change in electoral structure poses a risk to our high performing Council, and therefore strongly oppose the introduction of single-member wards. We respectfully request your support through recommendation to the Minister for Local Government, that Greater Shepparton City Council be exempt from the single-member ward structure and remain constituted as an unsubdivided municipality in accordance with section 13(4)(a) of the Local Government Act 2020.