

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the electoral review of Surf Coast Shire.

Number of councillors

While I would support any proposal to increase the number of councillors on Surf Coast Shire to 12, I note that currently there are no councils in Victoria with 12 councillors and that those with 11 councillors are major urban centres. Meanwhile, councils with similar population and population distribution have 9 councillors. As such I propose that the Shire retains its 9 councillors. I do not support any reduction in the number of councillors.

Structure

As a first option I support an undivided council, for the following reasons.

- Undivided councils are the most democratic, in that they lead to the greatest diversity of candidates and therefore greatest diversity of councillors.
- Under an undivided council of 9 councillors, the quota is much more attainable for representatives of our diverse communities of interest. It is important to remember that communities of interest are often not bound by geography or town boundaries. Communities of interest that exist right across the Shire include, among many others: parents of young children, aged care residents, tourism business owners and workers, renters, people with an interest in protecting the Shire's diverse environments, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, people living with a disability, CALD community members and First Nations community members. Representatives of these communities are much more likely to be represented under an undivided council.
- Councillors are elected to make decisions on issues that affect the entire Shire, not just the town in which they reside. As such, they should be accountable to all voters in the Shire and be aware of a wide range of issues and perspectives. Further, an undivided council reduces parochialism and populism.
- An undivided council gives voters the greatest possible choice of candidates to choose from, not just what could be a very small field in a ward system, where the candidates on offer may not align with your views.
- An undivided council avoids future redrawing of ward boundaries as a result of population changes.
- It is sometimes argued that wards are required to ensure representation from across the Shire. The current Winchelsea ward demonstrates that this is not always the case. This ward stretches from Torquay's west right across to Deans Marsh, yet the two current councillors for this ward reside in the same locality.
- Surf Coast voters don't live in bubbles. Many voters work or study in a town or city different to where they live. Sometimes this is within the Shire, often it is outside the Shire. Likewise, a significant number of voters don't actually live in the Shire, being non-resident property and business owners.
- Some argue that an undivided council results in an unrepresentative number of councillors coming from the largest township. The experience of other undivided councils, such as neighbouring Colac-Otway and Golden Plains, or further afield Moyne and East Gippsland Shires, demonstrate that this is not the case, with councillors residing in towns throughout their shires. The same situation also existed when Surf Coast Shire was last undivided, in 2008.

Second option – 3 x 3 wards

Should the review recommend a ward system, then I support a structure of 3 wards with 3 councillors each.

Boundaries

Two-thirds of the population of the Shire is concentrated in the eastern corner - in the Torquay, Jan Juc and Anglesea corridor. The remaining one third of the shire is generally lightly populated, with the exception of Winchelsea. As such, in determining the boundaries of the three wards, in line with the requirements, it is proposed that three wards be determined by their urban-rural nature, with an urban ward, a peri-urban ward and a rural/remote ward.

- Urban ward:
Centred on Old Torquay between the Surf Coast Highway and the coast and Torquay North.
- Peri-urban ward:
Centred on Jan Juc, Bellbrae and Anglesea, along with the rural and bushland interface areas of Torquay, west of the highway.
- Rural/remote ward:
The remainder of the Shire becomes a ward made up of Winchelsea with the small townships and localities of the Otways Hinterland, the Thompson Creek Valley and the Otways coast.

Ward names

Should a ward system be chosen, I believe that wards should have Aboriginal names, as determined by Traditional Owners.

Mat Hines
Torquay (current Winchelsea ward)