

**Electoral structure review - Moorabool Shire Council - Preliminary Submission
John Kowarsky - Ballan - 21 February 2023, 09:52 am**

Divisions:

I am of the view that Moorabool Shire should be unsubdivided.

Councillors must act in the overall interest of the Shire, and having an undivided Shire is the strongest way to promote this responsibility.

At present, with a divided Shire, despite a clear direction to incoming Councillors that they must represent the whole Shire, in practice this either does not occur, or at least in some cases, this is perceived not to occur.

Moorabool Shire, like other Rural Shires, comprises a few towns surrounded by large areas of rural land with low population density. To draw ward borders within such a space is fraught with the real challenge of where such borders should be placed to ensure that each vote has equal value (that is, there are approximately the same number of voters in each ward for each Councillor). For example, it is a vexing problem to see how the largest town, Bacchus Marsh, could be sensibly divided (without, again, creating a perception, if not a reality, of an “us and them” mentality). Anyway, any benefit of such an arrangement (splitting the town) is not apparent to me.

Multiple single-Councillor wards would suffer from the same issues.

In addition, with single-Councillor wards, there would be a greater risk that an elected local representative, by virtue of a long-established, local traditional following, may be repeatedly re-elected despite not providing quality governance or even fairly representing the majority of voters.

This issue is particularly obvious at present where the Shire is experiencing significant population growth. The outcome of such a demographic shift places the old, established social networks at a great advantage in terms of mustering up numbers of votes, as the newer “migrants” are from disparate places and backgrounds, and not likely to quickly establish a large or cohesive following.

Thus the voting bloc of the established network will often trump anyone else, despite there being many more voters in the latter category. An undivided Shire would not remove the advantage of “the establishment” but would at least act to attenuate its influence by levelling the playing field a little.

Number of Councillors:

Moorabool Shire needs more than seven Councillors.

Council Meetings with one or two Councillors’ apologies (which are not unusual here) can lead to decisions being taken that do not fairly represent reflect the majority of the Shire’s ratepayers’ views.

A small number of Councillors also creates the risk, and sometimes the reality, of undue influence by one Councillor by virtue of their connection (including providing financial support at election time) with another Councillor.

Furthermore, the large physical area of the Moorabool Shire in comparison with city councils means that the task of a conscientious Councillor to properly visit, and represent, the whole Shire including its far-flung corners, is challenging in comparison with their city counterparts. Having more Councillors will spread the load and increase the likelihood of proper representation of the whole Shire.

My suggestion is that there should be at least eleven Councillors.