

Electoral structure review - Hepburn Shire Council - Preliminary Submission
Brian Hood - Trentham - 01 March 2023, 04:07 pm

Preliminary submission to Hepburn Shire electoral review.

Brian Hood

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Number of councillors - 7. I support retaining the number of councillors as seven. That is a workable, practical number and is consistent with other councils of similar size. I note that while the number of councillors is important so too is the calibre of candidates in terms of their skills and experience and ability to work within the requirements of the Local Government Act.

Ward structure - I support a structure of seven wards with one councillor elected from each ward. At the grass roots level of government it is critically important that all residents are well represented. That is a fundamental foundation of democracy. Hepburn's population is numerically dominated by Daylesford and Creswick. It is vitally important that residents from the many smaller towns and communities across the shire have ready access to representation. This is especially important in Hepburn where a greater proportion of the community are of an older age than the Victorian average and those people rely on access to a representative that is part of their community, is aware of that community's issues and is accessible.

Hepburn spans a large geographic area from east to west. While there are a few common issues across the shire there are also vast differences between the many towns and communities from one end of the shire to the other. As an example the communities of Clunes and Trentham have little in common and do not relate to each other. But people do relate to their own area quite strongly.

Representation from 7 wards is also important in a shire that has such a diverse population. Farmers and producers have as much right to representation as town-dwellers.

For those reasons I would also strongly oppose an unsubdivided structure. That would be entirely inappropriate and disastrous for our communities. There would be significant risk of undue influence from political parties and other unrepresentative, single-issue groups. Fortunately Hepburn is currently free of party-political influence. In an unsubdivided structure there would be a significant risk that smaller communities/towns and groups such as farmers would be unrepresented and that larger communities would dominate and disproportionately benefit from inequitable resource allocation. That would be a huge risk in a financially challenged shire such as Hepburn.

The effectiveness of councillors carrying out their responsibilities across an unsubdivided and geographically large shire must also be questioned. It is a lengthy time-consuming drive from Trentham to Clunes.

The current ward system works in that councillors have the benefits of local knowledge but there are also adequate controls within the Local Government Act to ensure that councillors take a shire-wide view in their deliberations.

Increasing the number of wards from five to seven is easily achievable. Redrawing ward boundaries around Creswick and Daylesford can be done in such a way that provides for an equitable distribution across seven wards.