

Ward boundary review - Bass Coast Shire Council - Response Submission
Geoff Ellis - Harmers Haven - 06 March 2024, 04:18 pm

The stated intent of the VEC boundary review is to ensure that each vote is of equal value.

This time round that can only be achieved by removing the boundaries entirely to create one "Bass Coast" ward with nine councillors.

The last review achieved an equitable result in terms of number of voters per councillor but it created a geographic imbalance in the connection and community of purpose across Western Port Ward. Any redrawing of the current boundaries or even changing the number of wards to any number other than one will accentuate that geographic imbalance.

Two wards are based around Cowes/Ventnor and Wonthaggi/Inverloch whereas Western Port ward ranges from Outtrim to Newhaven to Lang Lang to Loch and all the 550 square kilometres between including San Remo.

Both the proposed revisions proposed by the VEC are based on Western Port Ward being nearly double the size of the other two wards combined.

This geographic imbalance makes it hard for each community to communicate directly with its elected representatives. The imbalance also means the number of community halls and recreation reserves to be maintained in WPW is over three times greater than the other two wards combined. This leads to competition between widely spread communities for part of a finite budget.

The poor internet and mobile phone coverage in this rural ward further hampers communication and leads to feelings of disenfranchisement of groups of electors who struggle to find relevance to Bass Coast, let alone Western Port.

This is not to say that the current structure has not been successful but the number of potential candidates willing and able to travel the distances required and who have the time to be a good councillor, is substantially diminished. Last election four people nominated for Western Port Ward (WPW) compared to nine and eight for the smaller wards. At the previous election there were six in WPW with much greater numbers of candidates in the other two.

Globally and historically, we are very good at dividing people with arbitrary lines, boundaries and labels that do little good and often a lot of disadvantage. I believe that the more people we can bring together and the fewer arbitrary divisions we make, the better for all.

There also appears to be a major failure in the fundamental equation meant to produce equity. The stated aim is to have no more than a ten percent variation of the number of voters in each ward from the average. That's fine except that the variation can be plus or minus ten percent from the mean.

Under the two proposals Island Ward could corral roughly 15,000 voters with WPW having 12,500 voters. They would both be within the 10% variation from the average number of voters per ward BUT, between those two wards the variation would be either 20% or 16.6% depending upon which ward is the base.

Unless the three wards each contain a closely equal number of voters there is no equity.

I respectfully request the opportunity to speak to this submission at the public hearing.

Salutations
Geoff Ellis
Harmers Haven

