

**Electoral structure review - Corangamite Shire Council - Preliminary Submission
Judy Buchholz - Lismore - 20 February 2023, 11:49 am**

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the VEC review panel on the proposed change to the Corangamite shire's electoral structure. I am strongly in favour of keeping a ward structure rather than moving to an unsubdivided, no ward model.

The current mixed structure of multi- and single-member wards has worked well for Corangamite shire; the ward boundaries appear to be very well thought out, providing both equitable distribution of voters per councillor & ensuring local representation of industry & community groups.

As this mixed-ward structure is no longer an option then retaining the current number of seven councillors but changing to a single ward representation would in my opinion be the next best & most equitable model to consider. Keeping the current ward boundaries but dividing the current central ward with the largest population into three wards each with a single councillor being the least disruptive restructure.

An unsubdivided structure is only equitable if the community is homogeneous in their interests and geography, as in single main industry shires, urban areas or large regional townships. Corangamite shire is vast: 4,600 square kilometres with a distance of over 180kms between the north and south boundaries. Keeping a subdivided ward model ensures a voice and some knowledgeable representation for the remoter & more sparsely populated areas & smaller communities of the shire, whose interests, concerns and services are vastly different to those of the larger central townships of Camperdown, Terang and Cobden. The differences largely centre on variations in amenities, access to services & industry focus. Issues such as social isolation, public transport/no public transport, sewage/septic, rubbish disposal/no rubbish collection, unmade rural roads/highways versus streets, kerbing & footpaths, access to healthcare/no health care, paid staff versus volunteer committees for example in sporting facilities. Access to education, library services, child care, aged care & essential services such as ambulance, SES, fire brigades & police vary widely throughout the shire. Many of the residents in the smaller towns and rural areas already feel disenfranchised and are struggling to keep existing amenities. A change to a no-ward council would further reduce their voice & encourage a greater township-rural divide.

Corangamite is quite unusual as a rural council in that it has diverse industries & community interests & vastly different agricultural enterprises. Retaining the ward system means that each councillor who puts themselves up for election has a lived experience therefore is familiar with & comfortable in representing the community's best interests. A very real risk in an undivided council would be that potential candidates residing in the Northern or Southern communities maybe reluctant to stand for election to council due to not feeling comfortable to adequately represent voters in an area who's interests & concerns are outside their field of understanding. Moving away from wards would mean no local informed representation for the smaller communities and they would become further isolated and disenfranchised from the shire, & the pool of candidates would be township-dominated.

The use of preference voting further disadvantages candidates from the smaller/rural communities as they are not so well known, making it more difficult to become elected.

It's vitally important for the communities outside the major towns to have a voice in council that understands their particular issues. For example the southern coastal communities of Port Campbell

**Electoral structure review - Corangamite Shire Council - Preliminary Submission
Judy Buchholz - Lismore - 20 February 2023, 11:49 am**

& Princetown's main concern would be with tourism enterprises, smaller scale agriculture such as fishing, horticulture/viticulture & concerns specific to coastal areas, such as coastal erosion.

The north ward's agricultural industry includes broad acre cropping, sheep and wool production, & associated machinery & transport industries, with the smaller towns of Skipton, Derrinallum, Lismore and Darlington supporting them.

The central, south central & south-west wards primary agricultural industry is dairying, with the larger centres of Camperdown, Cobden, Terang & Timboon largely servicing these industries. These different primary industry sectors have relatively little overlap, and arguably there is similarly little overlap in the interests of these communities, and if the shire went to a no-ward council there would be a concern that the council would become largely township & dairy sector dominated.

If we went to an unsubdivided council then the biggest concern would be no representation & little or no contact with councillors for the remoter townships and farming districts. I have really valued having both formal & informal contact with my various local councillors over the years. Subdivided wards with boundaries along like industry and interest base with local representation is the only way to guarantee voters outside the major towns have fair representation & a sense of community and belonging.

Thank you for your consideration

Judy Buchholz

Lismore