

Electoral structure review – Greater Geelong – response submission

26/7/23

The Hon Melissa Horne  
Minister for Local Government

Ms S. Fisher

██████████  
Hamlyn Heights

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Dear Minister Horne,

I am writing regarding my concerns about the proposed council electoral structure review proposed for the City of Greater Geelong by the Electoral Representation Advisory Panel. I am a constituent within the Brownbill ward of the City of Greater Geelong and I take an active role in the community to promote participation in democratic processes by participating in civil society as a local leader.

The report proposes 3 possible models with varying boundaries and either 11 or 12 Councillors to represent our growing population. I find all three proposals inadequate to support good governance and representation in Geelong.

Geelong's population growth and the existing and future ratios of Councillors to population/voters highlight that something needs to change to maintain adequate representation in local government in Geelong. Rearranging the boundaries and even adding one additional Councillor will not address the existing imbalance we have of having almost 20000 residents to one Councillor compared to the nearest Council of approximately 10000 residents to one Councillor (Bendigo Council) (reference : Table on page 16 of the report). **Rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic will make little difference.** It is unreasonable to expect Councillors working in a part-time capacity to be able to attend to all their constituents at these ratios. The workloads required to adequately represent voters are a barrier to entry for those who do not have extensive supports to allow them to consider this role. It is creating inequity and increasing the likelihood that those with fewer resources will consider standing for Council or be able to satisfactorily manage that role if elected.

I believe that the outer boundaries of the City of Greater Geelong should be reviewed due to the issue of population growth. It is time to explore whether the existing Bellarine ward area should remain within the boundaries of the City of Greater Geelong. Adding the current Bellarine ward to the Surf Coast would add another three Councillors to their existing nine Councillors and group the City of Geelong coastal regions with a Council that has more similarities with the Surf Coast than the remainders of the City of Greater Geelong (ie significant coastal zones, rural areas and higher socioeconomic areas). This re-allocation would then allow for lower ratios for the City of Greater Geelong councillors to represent.

I do not believe that single ward representation is going to represent residents well. Residents tend to live, work and play in neighbourhoods which roughly cover the existing Ward structures, not isolated suburbs randomly divided on a map. Whilst existing population growth may justify additional representation in the south of Geelong, we will soon see enormous growth in the NW of

Geelong which will require additional representation too. Additionally, I have found some Councillors more accessible than others and willing to represent my concerns. Having only one Councillor limits our ability to have a Voice in the event that a Councillor can not respond to constituent needs adequately (and often understandably given the number of people they are expected to represent currently).

I think these are significant issues which the review has not had the scope to consider. I hope that the Minister will consider the more fundamental issues I have outlined above which are impacting on the ability of the Council to represent its constituents now and even moreso into the future.

If the ward re-structure goes ahead regardless as proposed using one of the proposed models, I am strongly in favour of Wadawurrung names being used wherever possible and as advised by Traditional Owners.

Yours sincerely,



Sally Fisher

