

3 April 2023

Electoral Representation Advisory Panel  
C/- Victorian Electoral Commission  
Level 11, 530 Collins St  
Melbourne VIC 3000

Via Online submission Portal – [www.vec.vic.gov.au](http://www.vec.vic.gov.au)

To whom it may concern,

**Buloke Shire Council – 2023-24 Local Council Electoral Structure Reviews; Submission to the Preliminary Report (March 2023)**

As Mayor of Buloke Shire Council (BSC), I would like to thank the Victorian Electoral Commission for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Electoral Representation Advisory Panel's (ERAP) Preliminary Report regarding the Local Council Electoral Structure Review of BSC. Our Council considered similar models at our Council Meeting on 8 February 2023 and based on this consideration, I provide the following feedback on the models proposed in the Preliminary Report.

*Preliminary Report – General Feedback*

BSC would like to express its appreciation for how the potential options for electoral representation have been explored in the Preliminary Report. Debate on the models put forward for consideration and even those not put forward was on-the-whole, balanced and informed.

BSC would however offer some diverse feedback from community members, in that some found the online portal difficult to navigate, while others found the interactive mapping tool simple enough to utilise. Future reviews may benefit from more thorough training materials and sessions (AV and written) being available to communities to increase participation and feedback.

BSC also acknowledge that the ERAP referred to "a separate submission" from Mayor Alan Getley on Page 12 of the Preliminary Report. This statement is incorrect. There was only one submission signed by Mayor, Cr Alan R Getley, on behalf of Buloke Shire Council. There was however a separate submission from Alan K Getley, a family member, but who is not the Mayor. It is requested that a correction is issued to clarify this confusion.

*Model 1 – BSC has an unsubdivided electoral structure with 7 councillors*

Model 1 is in alignment with BSC's preliminary submission prior to release of the Preliminary Report. As such, BSC agrees with the ERAP's findings that Model 1 has several strong justifications. Maintaining representation by 7 councillors was supported by a majority of Buloke Shire Councillors

as the preferred model for similar reasons to those outlined in the ERAP's analysis, including increased potential of diversity of choice for voters at the time of Council Elections.

BSC is the fifth largest council by land area in Victoria. The total number of councillors representing BSC is an important factor given this large geographic area, and the subsequent infrastructure and service coverage that Councillors must oversee across the expanse of the shire. A reduced number of councillors may increase councillor workloads or reduce the representational experience of residents with remaining councillors potentially being unable to meet the gap.

The ERAP detailed their concern on the unsubdivided model requiring Councillors to travel long distances to connect with voters, attend council meetings and events. Regardless of its current subdivided structure, BSC representation is conscious that decision making is undertaken in consideration of the whole shire and often takes interest in issues outside individual ward boundaries. Councillor Briefings are held in locations throughout the Shire where Councillors will connect with varied community groups during these sessions. BSC does not believe an unsubdivided structure will change how representation currently interacts with constituents as holistic decision making and representation is often the status quo within smaller communities such as Buloke's. BSC agrees with the ERAP's findings around other well-functioning, unsubdivided councils that have large land areas, and with the assumptions made that an unsubdivided structure would offer future candidates the opportunity to adapt their campaigns to a wider range of issues and subsequently provide voters with more choice.

#### *Model 2 – BSC has 6 councillors and is divided into 3 wards with 2 councillors per ward*

Model 2 presented by the preliminary report would see a drop in total councillor representation in order to remain consistent with state-wide voter/councillor ratios. BSC believes sustainable councillor representation across such a large area would be difficult to achieve with this reduced representation level, and contrary to the ERAP's findings, that this increase in workload would not be balanced by continuing to maintain a similar electoral structure.

In addition to geographic factors and appropriate representation levels, it remains a concern for BSC that a council governed by an even number of councillors (6) would provide an ineffective decision-making environment. In the event of a tie, an even number of councillors would see the mayoral role hold a deciding vote more often when compared to an odd number of councillors making decisions by majority vote. BSC notes that the ERAP report referred to Hindmarsh Shire as an example of a shire operating with a 6-councillor model, however BSC would like to draw attention to the fact that Hindmarsh Shire is currently the only Victorian Council with an even number of Councillors. This model working in one council should not provide the assumption that it would remain successful in all other councils. Councils with similar characteristics may have vastly different policy and political-based landscapes to navigate.

In the interest of providing a consistent and equitable decision-making environment, Buloke Shire Council would prefer representation of the Shire by an odd number of councillors so that a majority vote can be achieved in most instances.

**It is for these reasons that Buloke Shire Council would recommend that the ERAP adopt MODEL 1, an unsubdivided electoral structure represented by seven councillors, as its recommendation to the Minister for Buloke Shire Council's electoral representation review.**

When compared with other options available for the ERAP to consider, Model 1 will allow for appropriate and equitable representation of the Buloke community while being mindful of a sustainable workload for councillors over a large geographical area.

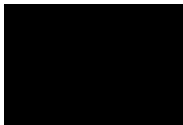
Another benefit of moving to Model 1 is the impact it may have on the local government election process. BSC has seen ward elections over the last 14 years pass with either low contention or unopposed representation. Opportunities for voters to participate in local government elections may increase in an unsubdivided structure, with prospective councillors being considered by voters across the whole municipality rather than only within respective wards. This is as opposed to being unable to cast their vote due to uncontested elections.

Model 1 is viewed by BSC to be the most appropriate compromise of effective representation, voter interests and compliance with the *Local Government Act 2020*. We hope the ERAP considers Model 1 favourably in its further deliberations for the Final Report.

**Buloke Shire Council would appreciate the opportunity to speak in support of its submission at the Public Hearing on Wednesday 12 April 2023.**

Should further information be sought regarding this preliminary submission please contact Buloke Shire Council on (03) 5478 0100 or email [buloke@buloke.vic.gov.au](mailto:buloke@buloke.vic.gov.au).

Yours sincerely,



Mayor Cr Alan Getley  
Buloke Shire Council