

Electoral structure review - Buloke Shire Council - Preliminary Submission
Alan Kelvin Getley - Charlton - 15 February 2023, 01:00 pm

I write to support the Buloke Shire moving to an unsubdivided structure represented by seven councillors.

Unsubdivided structure

By viewing results for Buloke Shire Council Elections on the VEC website, it can be seen the Mallee Ward was uncontested in 2008, 2012, and 2020, while the Mount Jeffcott Ward was also uncontested in the 2020 election. As such, the people in these wards have no say in the makeup of the council that is to make decisions on their behalf. In an unsubdivided structure every eligible voter in the Buloke Shire would have been able to vote in each of these elections.

An argument often put forward in favour of wards is that it increases local representation on council. In practice, this is entirely dependent on the quality of the candidates themselves rather than something inherently built in to the ward structure (particularly as current legislation does not require ward candidates to reside within the ward itself).

The Buloke Shire has an estimated population of 6,178 people (Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Census" 2021), the vast majority of which (5,249) are eligible voters (VEC "Fact sheet - Buloke Shire Council"). The two biggest localities within the Buloke Shire are Donald and Charlton with populations of 1,472 and 1,095 people and 1,091 and 837 electors respectively. Other population centres include Birchip (694 people, 517 electors), Sea Lake (619 people, 477 electors) and Wycheproof (610 people, 494 electors), with the remainder of the population spread around the shire.

While the ratio of people located in the most populous area to the least populous area is almost 2.5:1, each of the population centres listed above should be able to elect a "local" candidate in an unsubdivided structure assuming the number of councillors is sufficient.

Number of Councillors

The current Buloke Shire Council is made up of seven councillors. The previous VEC Local Council Representation Review for the Buloke Shire (undertaken in 2019) considered the low voter-to-councillor ratio and the special circumstances faced by the council ("including flooding, drought and erosion, councillor travel times to attend meetings and community events, representation on different regional committees and an ageing population") concluded that "The VEC found no justification for either increasing or decreasing the number of councillors for Buloke Shire Council".

None of the special circumstances faced by council since the last review have changed. In fact, if moved to an unsubdivided structure councillor travel times to attend community events etc. may significantly increase. Therefore, decreasing the number of councillors would not only result in extra burden on elected councillors but would likely result in less representation and attendance at community events and meetings.

Seven councillors would also provide the best opportunity for the population centres (and their surrounding areas) of the Buloke Shire to elect at least one "local" candidate and the makeup of the entire council.

Regards,

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