

Ward boundary review - Murrindindi Shire Council - Response Submission

Murrindindi Shire Council - Alexandra - 13 March 2024, 03:07 pm

Ward Boundary Review – Official Submission of the Murrindindi Shire Council

Murrindindi Shire Council supports Model 2 as the preferred model for ward boundaries in the Murrindindi Shire.

Council does not support Model 1, primarily due to the proposed extension of the Cathedral Ward to the west to include parts of the communities of Toolangi and Castella.

These two localities are separated from the existing area of the Cathedral Ward via the Black Mountain Range, making access and representation by a single Councillor very difficult and onerous.

There are no made roads within the municipality that provide a direct connection between the Cathedral Ward and Toolangi / Castella. Safe access can only be provided within the municipality using the Maroondah, Goulburn Valley and Melba Highways (via the townships of Alexandra and Yea to the north), a circuitous route through other Wards taking approximately 1 to 1.25 hours by car. Alternatively, access can be gained by travelling south on the Maroondah Highway via the Black Spur (a picturesque yet difficult drive in poor weather) to the township of Healesville in the Yarra Ranges Shire, then travelling north west to Toolangi via the Kinglake Healesville Road, a journey of approximately 50 minutes.

Due to the topographical barrier of the Black Range and lack of road connection the communities of Toolangi and Castella have very little involvement or association with the existing communities of the Cathedral Ward. Although the two localities and the Cathedral Ward share similar environmental features (predominantly mountainous and forested terrain), the focus of activity and access for the communities of Toolangi and Castella is either to the south into the Yarra Ranges Shire (Healesville and Yarra Glen) or west to the communities of the Kinglake Ranges.

From a municipal planning perspective, the needs and aspirations of the communities of Toolangi and Castella consistently align with those of the communities of Kinglake, Kinglake West and Flowerdale to the west. The provision of municipal services and infrastructure in the south west of the Shire is often determined with reference to the collective needs of these communities across the Kinglake Ranges, including Toolangi and Castella. It was precisely due to this alignment of needs that following the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires the focus of the State Government and Council in supporting the recovery effort was to facilitate the development of the Kinglake, Flowerdale and Toolangi Plan and Design Framework. Whilst much of the Cathedral Ward was also destroyed in these fires, a separate planning and recovery focus was undertaken for the communities of Marysville, Narbethong, Buxton and Taggerty in the Cathedral Ward, recognising the commonality of needs and the connectedness amongst these communities.

To date the communities of the Kinglake Ranges, including Toolangi and Castella have been represented by two councillors (representing the Kinglake and King Parrot Wards). Given the commonality of needs across these communities we do not feel it would be advantageous to divide representation further with the introduction of a third Councillor whose constituents are primarily located to the east of the Shire, remote from the communities of Toolangi and Castella. We feel representation may be weakened rather than strengthened for these two townships under this model.

We also feel that given the lack of access and connection between the current Cathedral Ward and the communities of Toolangi and Castella, and the relatively small additional population the Toolangi and Castella communities would add to the Ward, that someone based in either township may be

at a slight disadvantage if standing for Council in terms of being able to demonstrate an ability to adequately understand and represent the needs of the larger part of the Ward to the east.

For these reasons Council does not support Model 1.

Council prefers Model 2. Although the Cathedral and Koriella Wards have significant areas relative to other Wards in this model, we feel the new boundaries best preserve a commonality in the interests, needs and focus amongst the communities that make up these Wards. Road connectivity and accessibility within each Ward is also more practical in this model.

There is some concern that the locality of Cheviot is not in the Cheviot Ward under Model 2. It is recognised this locality shares characteristics that are aligned with the rural areas of other localities in the Koriella Ward, and less aligned with the urban characteristics of the Yea township. It is therefore agreed that the naming of the Cheviot Ward may need to be reviewed in the future.