

**Barwon Heads  
Association**

Reg no. A0030244U



**Local council electoral structure review – Preliminary report –  
Greater Geelong City Council**

**Response by the Barwon Heads Association**

**Barwon Heads is part of the Bellarine, and the town should remain in the  
same Council ward as Connewarre, Ocean Grove, and Breamlea.**



**Acknowledgement of Country: The Barwon Heads Association acknowledges the Wadawurrung People as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters on which we live and pays respects to ancestors and Elders past, present and emerging.**



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## **1. The Barwon Heads Association**

The Barwon Heads Association Inc. (BHA) is a community organisation representing over 200 members who are residents of Barwon Heads. We have been actively involved in community issues in Barwon Heads for over 36 years and enjoy strong relationships with other community and sporting groups in Barwon Heads and with similar community organisations across the Bellarine Peninsula.

Barwon Heads is one of several holiday destinations on the Bellarine Peninsula and a growing local community. It is significant for its coastal character, formed by the strong visual connections with the river, the ocean, bridge, jetties, estuary, and wetlands where the river meets the ocean. The Wadawurrung people are the original custodians of the Bellarine coastline. Barwon Heads has always been recognised as part of Bellarine, it has close ties with other towns on the Bellarine Peninsula and the town and environs should therefore continue to remain as part of a Bellarine ward.

The BHA is a foundation and active member of the Combined Bellarine Communities Association constituted by all nine community associations on the Bellarine peninsula and which collaborate on matters of mutual concern. Such matters include:

- regular meetings with Bellarine ward councillors and active liaison with the local members of State and Federal parliaments,
- organisation of public forums for candidates for local government, state, and federal elections,
- active participation and the making of joint submissions to the State Government's Distinctive Areas and Landscapes (DAL) project which covers the Bellarine Peninsula and includes Barwon Heads as part of this DAL.

## **2. Review Background**

The *Local Government Act (2020)* introduced changes to local government representation. For the Greater Geelong City Council this means a move from multi-Councillor wards to single Councillor wards and a redrawing and renaming of wards. The Minister has established an independent electoral structure review panel to provide advice on

- the appropriate number of councillors and wards for the council
- the location of ward boundaries
- appropriate ward names.

## **3. Summary of our Submission.**

- The Barwon Heads Association strongly opposes the move to single Councillor wards for the areas of the Greater Geelong City Council on the Bellarine Peninsula. However, we recognise the Review Panel has been asked to provide advice on the electoral structure for the Greater Geelong City Council under single Councillor wards. We also note that the implementation of single Councillor wards for the Greater Geelong City Council is directly opposed to the recommendations of the VEC's 2015–16 Greater Geelong City Council Electoral

Representation Review in 2015-16.

“The Victorian Electoral Commission recommends Greater Geelong City Council consist of 11 councillors elected from three three-councillor wards and one two-councillor ward, in addition to the Mayor.” Page 3

While we will oppose the implementation of recommendations based on single Councillor wards, we wish to highlight the weakness of the proposed ward boundaries and assist the review in its deliberations to ensure that the best possible model is recommended based on the constraints within which you operate.

We offer the following comments on your Report:

- We support the retention of 11 Councillors for the Greater Geelong City Council.
- We believe that the 3 weeks we have had to consider your proposed models and the availability of detailed voter data has not enabled our Association or other interested groups to prepare well-researched submissions that can deal with the significant deficiencies in each of the three models proposed by the Review Panel.
- Barwon Heads and Ocean Grove must be included in the same ward no matter what model is adopted for the future electoral boundaries for Greater Geelong City Council
- We believe that Model 1 is the best of the three models. We have prepared an additional model for consideration, but all the models have weaknesses when compared to the current electoral structure with three Councillors representing the whole of the Bellarine Peninsula.
- The Moolap area should be included in the ward the current Brownbill ward not the Bellarine ward.
- The names suggested in the preliminary report are not suitable and some are not in common use for localities on the Bellarine. Many are not representative of the ward areas. Other than the generic guidance provided on page 10 of the report. there is no evidence provided in the report as to why particular names were selected, why names should be retained and why names should no longer be used. Names require much more research, justification and consideration than is possible in 3 weeks. We recommend that for wards covering parts of the current Bellarine ward naming conventions be adopted referring to location on the Bellarine – e.g. Bellarine Central, Bellarine South.

#### **4. Concerns regarding the impact of changes to the current electoral structure of the Greater Geelong City Council.**

The Barwon Heads Association is concerned about the stability of the future governance of the Greater Geelong City Council if these changes are implemented. The move from multi-Councillor to single-Councillor wards following changes to the Local Government Act will result in the reintroduction of an electoral system that has miserably failed the people of Geelong within the last 10 years. Implementation of these changes as proposed by the Victorian Electoral Commission in the “Greater Geelong City Council electoral structure review” released on 5 July will increase instability.

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Currently, within Greater Geelong City Council the Bellarine Peninsula is a single ward represented by three Councillors. This arrangement was adopted in 2017 after the abject failure of the single-Councillor ward model which, in part, led to the sacking of the City Council by the Government.

The current move to re-introduce single Councillor wards means that the division and lack of cohesion among Councillors, which characterised Greater Geelong City Council before the sacking, is likely to re-emerge. The changes will reverse the recent findings regarding the electoral structure of the Greater Geelong City Council by the VEC's previous review in 2016. This move to multi-Councillor wards also was strongly supported by the Citizens Review process that took place after the Greater Geelong City Council Councillors were sacked.

We believe the constraints imposed by the *Local Government Electoral Act (2020)* on the Review Committee's task will destroy some of the common community interests that currently exist on the Bellarine Peninsula. The three best options developed and published in the preliminary report will produce significantly worse outcomes for the voters of the Bellarine. The single Councillor ward boundaries in each of the three models divide local communities and fail to recognise the significant differences between the representation needs of the urban fringe areas of Geelong and of the semi-rural/coastal areas of the Bellarine Peninsula. They will be a disaster for the people of the Bellarine.

To achieve 11 or 12 single Councillor wards within the Greater Geelong City Council and provide fair and equitable representation each ward must have an equal number of voters per councillor (within +/-10% of the average). To achieve this under a single Councillor ward model, communities with strong links will be divided into different wards and rural and coastal communities will be included in wards with urban growth areas on the outskirts of Geelong. Even Model 1 which the Review Panel notes:

“has the advantage of keeping the townships of the Barwon Peninsula largely within ward boundaries and not divided across wards.”

fails to keep the townships of the northeastern part of the Bellarine together. The communities of Indented Heads and Portarlington are split from St Leonards and the communities of Point Lonsdale, St Leonards and Swan Bay which are on the coast on the eastern part of the Peninsula are combined into a ward with Moolap and Leopold, areas that have tenuous links with the Bellarine Peninsula and much stronger affinities with the Geelong urban area to the west.

Models 2 and 3 compound these problems with Model 3 providing increased representation by increasing the number of Greater Geelong City Council Councillors to 12, breaking up the strong communities of interest across the Bellarine Peninsula and by lumping coastal towns and rural areas into wards with large numbers of voters living in growth areas on the urban fringe or with urban areas of Geelong where community interests will be quite different across the different parts of the ward.

The proposed changes will also adversely impact the concept of the Bellarine being a single entity as proposed by the Bellarine Distinctive Areas and Landscapes legislation. To effectively manage and protect the Bellarine it needs to be a single/whole geographical unit. The introduction of single members wards across the Bellarine will set up competition between different areas, leading to a failure to adequately protect the special place that is the Bellarine.

We are concerned that twenty-one days to understand, review and comment on proposals that have

been developed by the VEC Review Panel over many months and which will significantly impact the way the Bellarine will be governed at a local level, will lead to a series of poor outcomes for the voters of the Bellarine and the wider community of the Greater Geelong City Council.

However, we also recognise that the Review Panel has been given a task and must operate within these constraints. It is also in our community's interest that we advocate for the best outcome for Barwon Heads within these constraints.

## **5. The number of Single Councillor wards**

The Electoral Representation Advisory Review Panel has proposed representation models with 11 or 12 Councillors for the Greater Geelong City Council. We support an uneven number of Councillors as we believe it leads to better governance where the mayor does not have both a substantive vote and then a casting vote if Council is split evenly on a matter.

Despite their limitations, the proposed models with 11 members have a lesser impact on dividing communities into different wards if the Bellarine Ward is split in single Councillor wards.

## **6. Ward Boundaries**

In any restructure of Council wards, Barwon Heads must remain in the same ward as Ocean Grove.

Barwon Heads is part of the Bellarine Peninsula and has close ties with Ocean Grove. It is vitally important that connected and integrated communities be represented in the Greater Geelong City Council by the same elected representative/s and Barwon Heads is strongly connected and integrated with Ocean Grove and the wider Bellarine Peninsula and has many interests and links shared with Ocean Grove

### **a. Area and Physical features**

The Bellarine peninsula is an area well known to and understood by government and its agencies. It has been declared as a Distinctive Area and Landscape under the Planning and Environment Act 1987 and is recognised as a distinct place in the Greater Geelong Planning Scheme with a specific Localised Planning Strategy. Barwon Heads together with Ocean Grove and other Bellarine towns has always been included in this strategy with specific integrated planning policies and objectives.

The Barwon River is a key physical feature in the Bellarine and together with the ocean and river beaches connects and binds Barwon Heads and Ocean Grove each sharing the recreational and social values of the extensive swimming, surfing, boating, and fishing interests across both communities.

The Barwon Coast Committee of Management provides an important connection between Barwon Heads and Ocean Grove. It is appointed by the State to manage coastal crown land in Ocean Grove and Barwon Heads and employs residents of both communities.

## **b. Traffic arteries and communication**

The main road from the southern Bellarine is the C129/C121 road which runs through Ocean Grove and Barwon Heads to connect with Geelong and the southern entry to the Geelong by-pass. This is one of three major roads that connect the Bellarine Peninsula with the rest of Victoria. Significant increases in visitor demands during peak holiday periods result in significant use of this road across the Barwon Heads Bridge and along the spit to Ocean Grove.

There is limited public transport within the Bellarine District and that which is provided flows in an east-west direction. The Route 55 Bus route passes through Barwon Heads and terminates in Ocean Grove. This bus route is an important link between Barwon Heads and Ocean Grove. The problems created by traffic in Barwon Heads are common throughout the Bellarine but the constraint of the river crossing and the traffic flow between Barwon Heads and Ocean Grove in the summer holiday period highlights the significance of this road link to both communities. The Barwon Heads and the Ocean Grove community have both formed committees with representation from each town to collaborate with Council and Government to address these issues. Joint Council representation of both towns is critical to managing these issues.

## **c. Community Links between Barwon Heads and Ocean Grove**

The Barwon Heads community has developed and maintains strong relationships with the Ocean Grove community and more widely across the Bellarine. We share social networks, facilities and the custodianship of our precious coast and river systems with the Ocean Grove community. Barwon Heads and Ocean Grove being joined by the Barwon River and the ocean share recreational values and interests both on and off the water. The ocean and river beaches are the core of our communities.

Barwon Heads and Ocean Grove communities have strong social and economic connections which include:

- Service clubs including Lions Club of Ocean Grove/Barwon Heads, Rotary Club of Ocean Grove (whose service area includes Barwon Heads) and the Ocean Grove/Barwon Heads RSL all have membership from both communities.
- The City of Greater Geelong's Social Infrastructure plan states that the "proximity of Barwon Heads to Ocean Grove means that the two communities share access to some facilities" - City of Greater Geelong Social Infrastructure Plan, June 2020 p 36.
- Senior Citizens Clubs, the combined churches and Scouts also have strong links with similar organisations in Ocean Grove and in organisations other Bellarine communities – e.g., the Scouts combine with Queenscliff Scouts for their weekly meetings and are part of the Geelong Peninsula District which is mostly Bellarine Peninsula scout groups.
- Sporting groups and facilities including Surf Life Saving clubs at Ocean Grove and 13<sup>th</sup> Beach, surfboard riders club, cycling clubs, bowls clubs, gymnasiums, swimming pool and pony clubs are all linked to similar clubs in Ocean Grove, or the facilities are used by residents of both communities.
- Arts groups including Barwon Heads Arts Council and Barwon Heads Quilters have members from Ocean Grove and the Bellarine community and the Barwon Heads Arts Hub includes Ocean Grove community representation.
- Schools and childcare facilities are strongly linked.

- Some medical, dental, imaging and pathology services for Barwon Heads residents are in or provided from Ocean Grove.
- Commercial facilities such as supermarkets, hardware, and light industrial services (including garden supplies and motor vehicle servicing) used by Barwon Heads residents are in Ocean Grove.
- The major emergency services including CFA, ambulance, police, SES, and coastguard are in Ocean Grove and service both communities.

The strong social networks and supports that exist between Barwon Heads and Ocean Grove and between Barwon Heads and the rest of the Bellarine Peninsula must be maintained and strengthened in the interest of the health and wellbeing of the Barwon Heads /Ocean Grove community. Council representation of these strongly connected communities must not be compromised by shifting Barwon Heads into a different Council ward where the community may not share such interests or may wish to pursue different interests or priorities than those of the Barwon Heads community.

#### **d. The Models proposed in the Review Panels preliminary report.**

Of the three models proposed, **Model 1** best in meets the Council representation needs of our community as it maintains the Barwon Heads area (including Breamlea and Connewarre) in the same ward as Ocean Grove.

**Model 2** provides a more equitable voter distribution, but it splits Barwon Heads from Breamlea and Connewarre and places these two areas in a ward with Indented Heads, St Leonards, and Point Lonsdale. This ward (Connewarre) is divided by the Connewarre wetlands and the only road links between Breamlea and Connewarre and the rest of their ward would be the road through Barwon Heads and Ocean Grove or via Geelong and the Bellarine Highway. The Breamlea and Connewarre communities will have no social or community links with the remainder of their ward under this scenario.

The BHA strongly opposes the ward boundaries proposed in **Model 3**. This model places Ocean Grove and Barwon Heads in different wards and splits Ocean Grove into two different wards. Under this model different areas of the community of Barwon Heads/Ocean Grove will be represented by three different Councillors. The Barwon Heads, Connewarre and Breamlea areas are in a ward with the Armstrong Creek area where there will be few links and the needs and demographics of our community are completely different to those of the population of Armstrong Creek.

The significant weaknesses in the three models presented in the Review Panel's Preliminary report provide a strong justification for retaining the status quo for the current Bellarine ward as any model with single Councillor wards is found wanting when compared to the current arrangement as it appears impossible to meet the +/- 10% voter tolerance requirement and not divide specific Bellarine communities across different wards.

## **7. Improvements and alternatives to Electoral Reform Models.**

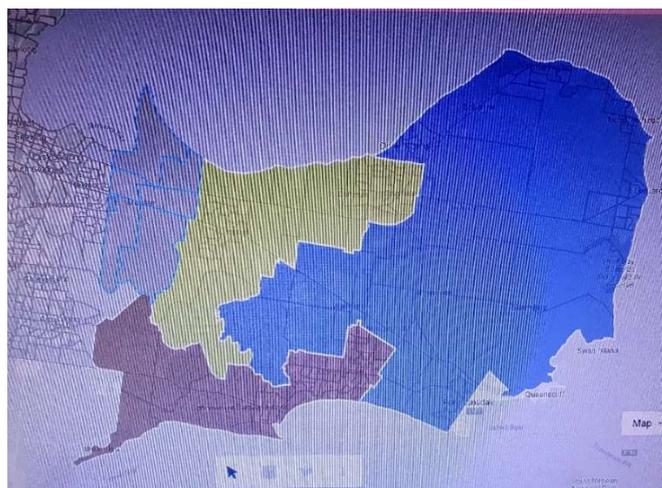
The current Bellarine ward is 6.03% above the average voters per Councillor within the Greater

Geelong City Council. This is higher than in any of the other three wards. To reduce this difference, we suggest that the Moolap area be transferred from the Bellarine ward and included in the current Brownbill ward. Moolap was moved from the Bellarine electorate in the state electoral redistribution last year as it is on the fringe of the Geelong urban area and has stronger social and economic links with Geelong than the Bellarine. This would transfer 1,477 voters out of the current Bellarine ward and reduce the voters in that ward to 59,935 which is 3.5% above the average per Councillor for the 11 Councillor model.

For the remaining areas of the current Bellarine Ward the adoption of a ward that encompasses the centre of the Peninsula and includes Leopold at the west of the ward and of Point Lonsdale (the Greater Geelong City Council part) and St Leonards in the east does not create a ward with strong community links. The separation of St Leonards from Indented Heads and Portarlington splits a community into different wards and creates a ward with at least three distinct types of community interests:

1. The coastal communities of the eastern section;
2. The urban area of Leopold which is close to Geelong; and
3. The rural areas of Wallington, Marcus Hill, Mannerim, and Swan Bay.

We have therefore tried to develop further options that would enable the creation of three wards based on the three Bellarine communities of Barwon Heads/Ocean Grove, Drysdale/Clifton Springs/Curlewis, and Portarlington/Indented Head/St Leonards and their surrounds using the Mapping Tool for eleven single Councillor wards. We have been unable to totally achieve this, but we offer a model where most of the communities with common interests are in one ward except for the Clifton Springs area which is included with Portarlington in a Bellarine North ward to meet the +/- 10% voter variation requirement – see Map. This splits the Drysdale/Clifton Springs community, but other communities retain their local ties within the wards and the wards will have greater common and community interests than other models.



Schematic diagram of proposed boundaries. For details see the map created using the Mapping Tool provided by the VEC Review Panel.

The areas included in the three wards, the proposed ward names and the voter numbers are detailed below.

## BHA - Model 4

Voters	Description	Recommended Ward Name
20,116	Barwon Heads, Ocean Grove, Connewarre, and Breamlea	Bellarine South
20,511	Leopold, Curlewis, and Drysdale	Bellarine North
19,308	Mannerim, Swan Bay, Marcus Hill, Wallington, Clifton Springs, Portarlinton, Indented Heads, St Leonards Point, and Lonsdale.	Bellarine East
1,477	Moolap, Point Henry	Transfer to current Brownbill ward

Due to time constraints in developing our submission, we have been unable to discuss this option with other community groups but believe it is a better starting point if single Councillor wards are adopted for the Bellarine and should be used for further consultation with the Combined Bellarine Community Associations (CBCA) to improve the model and ensure that the best possible single Councillor ward structure is implemented for the voters of the Bellarine.

### 8. Ward names.

The Ward names proposed in the three models are less than satisfactory. For this review there is insufficient time for an in-depth consideration of ward names. With out the detailed work necessary to select relevant names for each ward, we support the continued use of the Bellarine as a ward name and the use of location to differentiate between the wards. For instance, the names should be Bellarine South, Bellarine East, and Bellarine North in our proposed model.

### Conclusion

The Barwon Heads Association strongly opposes the move to single Councillor wards for the Bellarine Peninsula area of the Greater Geelong City Council. However, as the Electoral Representation Advisory Committee must provide advice to the Minister on the electoral structure of the Greater Geelong City Council using single Councillor wards:

- We support the retention of 11 Councillors for the Greater Geelong City Council.
- We believe that there has been insufficient time to fully consider the Review Panel's proposals and develop the best model for single Councillor wards.
- Barwon Heads and Ocean Grove must be included in the same ward no matter what model is adopted for the future electoral boundaries on the Bellarine.
- Of the three models proposed by the Review Panel, Model 1 is the best as Barwon Heads, Connewarre, Breamlea, and Ocean Grove are in the same ward.
- We have provided a model that is better than the proposed models as it reduces the breakup of communities on the Bellarine Peninsula. However, it still divides the community of Clifton Springs/Drysdale into different wards and needs wider consultation.

- None of the single Councillor ward models will improve Barwon Heads or the Bellarine community's representation on the Greater Geelong City Council.
- Some names suggested in the preliminary report are not suitable for the wards on the Bellarine Peninsula.

The Barwon Heads Association wishes to speak at the online public hearing in support of this submission, and to expand our views. The two Barwon Heads Association spokespeople are:

Philip Bade – BHA President

[REDACTED] Barwon Heads, 3227

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Brian Cook – BHA Secretary & Treasurer

[REDACTED] Barwon Heads, 3227

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]