

**Electoral structure review - Hepburn Shire Council - Preliminary Submission
Lesley Hewitt - DAYLESFORD - 01 March 2023, 04:25 pm**

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the Hepburn Shire Council Electoral Structure Review.

Hepburn Shire was formed in 1995 and consists of 4 major towns - Creswick, Clunes, Daylesford/Hepburn Springs and Trentham and includes a number of smaller hamlets and rural areas. The Shire currently has a population of over 16,000 and covers an area of 1473 sq.km. and is currently categorized as a small rural shire. There is little commonality between the 4 major towns with differences in demographics, history, agriculture and economic development. Residents in the east of the Shire tend to travel to Ballarat or Maryborough for services whilst residents in the east travel to Bendigo, Kyneton or Woodend. Census data shows that the median age of residents is considerably older than the median age of all Victorians. Residents also have higher health risk factors than the total Victorian population including for diabetes, obesity, mental health and our children have a higher risk of developmental delays in one or more domains than all Victorian children. The ageing population and the health risks create high demands on the provision of Council, health and education services.

It is for these reasons that I do not support an undivided electoral structure. Ratepayers and residents would be better represented at a local level by Councillors who understand the particular needs of local residents and ratepayers.

Representation is also determined by the experience and qualifications of those who nominate for Council and who are subsequently elected. Historically in Hepburn Shire there have been times when there have not been enough nominations in particular wards for a contested election. This does not provide for good representation.

Consequently I support a three ward structure with 2 or 3 Councillors per ward. I would prefer 3 Councillors per ward due to the geographic distance and the factors outlined above - an older demographic and a population with considerable health risk indicators for both adults and children. Whilst there would be an increase in costs, these are minimal and would lead to greater diversity of representation.

Whilst the structure of single ward councillors may appear to be superficially appealing it would be difficult to construct individual wards with the requisite population numbers given the towns of Creswick and Daylesford/Hepburn Springs have high population numbers in a small geographical area compared with the rest of the Shire.

It is my view that the one vote one value principle that underpins the electoral structure review is best achieved for Hepburn Shire residents by a three ward structure with 2, or preferably 3 councillors.