

Central Goldfields Shire Council electoral structure review 2023

Response submission

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As a resident of Central Goldfields Shire I would like to make two points relating to the Preliminary Report.

First, I believe that an unsubdivided council structure would run the risk of reducing council's responsiveness to unique problems in particular areas. This has been a problem in the recent past even with a ward structure. To facilitate responsive governance, I do not favour the Preliminary Report's Model 1.

Second, I would favour wards that will stay within tolerance for more than one council term. Given that the rate of population growth is not expected to be uniform across the Central Goldfields Shire, drawing wards with some continuity would be more feasible with a three-ward structure than with seven wards. For these reasons **I support the review's Model 2** (a three-ward structure) and would not favour Model 3 (a seven-ward structure).

Explanation

The relevant principles here are electoral equality (that each voter should have an equal chance of electing a representative) and efficiency (that expensive boundary reviews should not occur more often than is necessary).

The *Local Government Act 2020* does not specify how often the electoral structure of a local council will be reviewed, but for councils with wards there is a malapportionment trigger (at s.17). If the number of voters *in one or more wards* will be more than 10% from the shire average at the time of the next council election, the Minister would be advised and there is provision for ward boundaries to be reviewed.

Setting the malapportionment trigger at 10 per cent in even one ward, is a relatively strict requirement (compared for example to state or federal electoral triggers) and implies that equality is a very important consideration. Population growth will therefore be an important consideration when drawing ward boundaries if the review's aim is to draw wards that will, as far as possible, allow councillors to each represent the same number of voters not only at the first council election after the wards come into effect but for one or more subsequent terms.

Given that the geographic distribution of population growth is expected to be uneven across the shire it may be quite difficult to draw seven wards that would each keep voter numbers within 10% of the average for more than one council term, but it would be much more feasible with three wards.

For example, the current Preliminary Report estimates (at p.10) that the number of voters in the Central Goldfields Shire is currently 11,329 (and without access to projected population figures I use those 2023 estimates as a proxy for 2024). With a seven-ward structure, each ward would need to be drawn with 1,618 voters, plus or minus just 161 voters. Accepting that the calculation would change slightly every four years, a margin of that size would still be a very fine one for every ward to remain within, over more than one four year term – and failure would trigger a boundary review. By contrast a three-ward structure would allow wards to be drawn with 3,776 voters and, more importantly, a higher variation of plus or minus 377 (in the first instance and then slightly higher during the second term). A margin of the order of 377 voters would be likely to allow wards to remain in place for longer before being reviewed, compared to a margin of the order of 161 voters.

In summary it would be more feasible to draw three, rather than seven, wards that will stay within tolerance for more than one term, even if population growth within the council area occurs evenly across the council district.

In fact population growth across the Central Goldfields Shire is not expected to be uniform.

There is a shortage of new land for development in Maryborough because the town is surrounded by state forests, and in 2020 Central Goldfields Shire Council's *Population, Housing and Residential Strategy* reported there was only limited scope for additional housing in Maryborough (p.6). There are fewer constraints in Carisbrook, Dunolly and Talbot and the *Strategy* recommended an increasing focus on development around Carisbrook (at p.8).

The following map shows how various state forests constrain development in Maryborough (mapshare.vic.gov.au).



The three-ward structure proposed in the Preliminary Report would allocate 2 councillors to Maryborough and four to the outer areas. The proposed Flynn and Tullaroop wards do include some homes on the periphery of Maryborough.

I believe that this structure could foster better working relations between councillors because at least two, and perhaps four, of the councillors would see themselves as representing both Maryborough and the smaller townships. This would help to increase council's responsiveness to unique problems in particular areas.

Proposed ward boundaries

I have no objection to the boundaries proposed by the review for the three wards. However if the northern ward is named Flynn (after the Rev. John Flynn who was born at Moliagul) then I suggest

the use of Aston for the southern ward. Matilda (Tilly) Aston was born in Carisbrook in 1873 and after losing her sight as a young girl she dedicated her life to teaching and raising the status of visually impaired people. She is commemorated by a bell sculpture in Melbourne at Kings Domain as well as by a cairn and sensory garden at Carisbrook.

In summary,

- I do not favour the review's Model 1 (unsubdivided) because I believe that it would not facilitate good governance;
- I favour the review's Model 2 (three-ward structure) because it seems likely to provide greater equality as well as efficiency. In the face of uneven population change across the shire three wards would stay within tolerance for longer, so this option would provide more continuity for voters and elected councillors. It could also promote greater responsiveness to unique problems in particular areas; and
- I do not favour the review's Model 3 (seven-ward structure) because it seems less able to comply with the aims of equality and efficiency in the context of uneven population growth across the shire. Neither would it foster increased responsiveness.