

**Electoral structure review of Hepburn Shire Council**

Preliminary Submission

Submitted by:

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**Submission in summary**

Number of Councillors: I strongly support continuing with seven (7) councillors

Electoral Structure: I strongly support a subdivided council, i.e. seven (7) Wards

I have also made some comments about the name of Wards.

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My reasons for supporting the above:

**1. Number of councillors**

While Hepburn Shire is described as a small rural council and has the characteristics of a relatively small population and an extensive road network it also intrudes into the peri-urban growth zone. The former could argue for less than 7 councillors but the demands of a complex mix of towns, communities and differing development pressures argues against any reduction. Similarly, Hepburn's precarious financial situation does not support any more than the existing 7 councillors.

**2. Electoral structure**

As noted, Hepburn is a complex mix of communities and development pressures. There are 4 larger urban areas (and one of these claims 2 distinct 'towns', although the casual observer would see these as a contiguous urban settlement) plus a number of smaller settlements.

When the Shire was created by municipal amalgamation it was, in my opinion, put together of bits and pieces left over in the region after the first round of amalgamations that focused on Ballarat and Bendigo.

There is no community-of-interest across the Shire.

The absence of any real community-of-interest is my main reason for supporting a subdivided structure and I submit the following additional reasons to further support this view:

1. While I agree with one-vote-one-value, the importance of local / geographic representation better provides for environmental, agricultural land, road networks and local character considerations to be heard in debate. Environmental sensitivity is ever more pressing given climate change. Council officers

tend to seek to apply a one-size-fits-all without the nuance the environment demands and in any case cannot be expected to have that finer level of knowledge. In rural shires it is possible to envision an un-subdivided council making decisions regarding a smaller but significant town without local representation. [Trentham-specific considerations: Trentham and its immediate surrounds is served by a different Water Authority to the rest of the shire and is on a separate Powercor line. It is subject to considerable growth pressures extending from metropolitan Melbourne along the Calder Highway and rail links not evident in other parts of the shire. Only the eastern part of the shire sits within the peri-urban zone and this demands careful planning and local representation.]

2. Similarly, socio-economic, considerations vary across a diverse shire like Hepburn.

These put the focus on the significance of community – which is always local.

People define their own community by where they connect, their sense of belonging – and which way they turn as they drive out of their own property. There is no longer a weekly newspaper covering Hepburn (the last, which was delivered to all households, ceased during Covid-19 – a current fortnightly publication isn't seen by many people) and a large part of the community do not use, or avoid, so-called social media. As far as I'm aware, Hepburn Council has not sought to determine residents' access to local news – for Council matters we are very dependent on our local Ward Councillor and his regular reports in the local community newsletter.

[Trentham-specific considerations: most Trentham people connect to either Kyneton or Woodend as their nearest town for locally-unavailable retailing and professional services rather than Daylesford or elsewhere in the shire. Similarly the majority travel to Melbourne via the Calder Highway or by rail from Woodend. An analysis of 2011 'travel-to-work' census data by La Trobe University Planning students showed 9 of every 10 people who worked outside Trentham traveled east.

More significantly, when threatened by fire (which in the past has been from the west) Trentham people will most likely take the eastern (Kyneton/Woodend) 'leave' option. The roads south (to Blackwood) or west (to Daylesford) both traverse thickly forested and winding roads.

For Trentham, which is growing rapidly, to not be represented at the Council table - a possibility in an un-subdivided council - is untenable]

In summary: the imperatives of community and changing climate demand geographically distinct wards.

#### **Names of Wards:**

In my opinion, Wards should never be named after persons living or dead.

My strong preference is for names to reflect local environmental or geographic significance. Names should be as short as possible and descriptive.

In terms of process, the naming of Wards should engage the community rather than be imposed from afar, e.g. a vote on 3-5 options. Unless there is a good reason existing names should be retained (I would like to see Coliban Ward retained) rather than change for the sake of change.

Submission ends