

## **Electoral structure review - Greater Geelong City Council - Response Submission Ocean Grove Community Association - Ocean Grove - 26 July 2023, 02:57 pm**

VEC Electoral Review – City of Greater Geelong (CoGG)

The Ocean Grove Community Association (OGCA) has been representing Ocean Grove residents since 2003. This response is supported by 7 committee members and over 100 residents. First, OGCA wholly support the Combined Bellarine Community Associations (CBCA) VEC response.

OGCA strongly wish to retain the current Greater Geelong Council 4 ward structure. OGCA ask the VEC electoral structure review for the City of Greater Geelong Council be extended for a further 14-36 months and that the current structure is retained for the next Council term. At that point we will be able to fully evaluate our current 4 Ward model.

The 2020 Local Government Act forces CoGG from the current successful 4 ward structure into the dysfunctional 1 Councillor per ward that existed prior to 2016. We do not understand why CoGG is being forced back to the previously unsuccessful 1 Councillor per Ward structure after only 7 years in the current successful Multi-Councillor Ward Council structure.

Evidence supporting CoGG Multi-Councillor Wards

- The Commission of Inquiry into Greater Geelong City Council, in 2015/2016 states:  
[https://www.localgovernment.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0023/165254/Geelong-City-Council-Report.pdf](https://www.localgovernment.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0023/165254/Geelong-City-Council-Report.pdf)
    - o Executive summary, P10 - “The Commission further recommends that the individual ward Councillor system be replaced with multi-councillor wards and that the Deputy Mayor, like the Mayor, become a directly elected position.”
    - o Executive Summary P12 - “Replacement of single councillor wards by multi-councillor wards supported by mechanisms to ensure strategic, whole of municipality planning and delivery would strengthen council leadership, corporate behaviour and decision making.”
    - o Inquiry Recommendations, P13 - “The individual Councillor ward electoral system be replaced with multi-councillor wards to share representative responsibilities.”
    - o Electoral System and Structures 3.4, P77 - “The Commission’s assessment is that the single ward councillor system has not served the city well. The Commission’s view is that there should be multi-councillor wards to share representative responsibilities.”
  - VEC 2017 CoGG Electoral Structure Consultation - From VEC website
  - VEC 2015-16 CoGG Representation Review was conducted in 2015-16. - From VEC website
- All 3 reports recommended CoGG move to the current 4 Ward Multi-Councillor structure, which has only been in place for the last 7 years. 4 years when the 2020 Act became law.
- We are dismayed that the changes required under the Act will threaten this positive collaboration between OGCA and our 3 Councillors who have been working together to support the Bellarine Ward. This relationship with all the Bellarine towns and our Councillors was instrumental in The Bellarine Distinctive Area and Landscape (DAL) proclamation.
- Separating the Bellarine Ward into separate Wards will split communities, potentially producing negative impacts on the City of Greater Geelong. Years of the pre 2016 single ward structure resulted in CoGG being placed into Administration. If this new VEC proposal goes ahead OGCA feel that CoGG may head back into Administration.

All 3 studies mentioned that the large population made it difficult to cut us into smaller Wards while accounting for the 10% Ward population requirements and accounting for future growth. CoGG is unlike most regional cities because of its large size (1,252 sq km) and high population in 2022 estimated to be 276,116. It has a substantial amount of rural land especially to the north and the east, as well as a growing urban centre and small country towns. These characteristics, in addition to the City’s history, warrant it being considered differently to the models stemming from

the Local Government Act 2020.

The OGCA notes that the adjacent Surf Coast Shire, classified rural, and with similar local economies and interests, has a wider range of ward structures available under the Act. Including Multi-Councillor Wards

We believe that COGG community representation and governance have improved since the period of Administration and the resumption of Council elections in 2017.

The OGCA struggles to understand the value of single-councillor wards and argues that a return to the single councillor wards as in the period 1995-2016, is a retrograde step. This will likely destabilize council and lead to Councillor accountability issues and re introduce all the old issues that the 2016 reviews were trying to alleviate.

The 2016 Commission of Inquiry specifically noted that the single-councillor system had NOT served the CoGG well, and that the shared representative responsibility of multi-councillor wards would improve Council performance.

Since 2017 Councillors have reflected a community of interest within their wards, and the multi-councillor wards have enabled diversity of opinion and representation of a greater range of interests. The Bellarine Peninsula (currently one ward represented by three councillors) has an established community sharing interests supported by a great network of town community organizations.

The Statement of Planning Purposes for the Bellarine Distinctive Areas and Landscapes (DAL) will soon go before the Governor-In-Council. It is imperative that the Bellarine is recognised and retained as a geographical unit if it is to remain 'a special place' for at least the next 50 years, as is intended and documented in the SPP.

The impressive work undertaken by DELWP/DEECA, the Bellarine communities, Councillors and other stakeholders would be placed at risk by introducing single councillor wards across Bellarine and will encourage competition between communities rather than collaboration. Once passed, all Bellarine communities will need to work together to refine the Planning changes that result from the DAL. The Bellarine DAL was made possible because of our Ward encompassing our like communities and our 3 Councillors working together with CoGG.

The OGCA requests that the Minister for Local Government confirm the value of the current ward structure of the City of Greater Geelong and retain our multi-councillor wards.

Preferences:

For all the above reasons none of the proposed options are acceptable. However:

- Option 1 is the least bad. It is the only option with a chance of the Bellarine continuing to work together. This can only happen if the 3 wards Councillors are willing to share resources and cooperate. We note that Point Lonsdale as a Coastal Ocean town has much more in common with Barwon Heads and Ocean Grove.

The ward boundaries must be changed to address Drysdale, Indented Head and St Leonards issues. Communities must be in the same Ward

We suggest that Moolap (1477 voters) be removed from proposed Moolap Ward. It has little in common with the Bellarine and its character is more like Newcomb.

- Option 2 places the smallest Bellarine towns in a Ward with Armstrong Creek. They will likely see no Council funds or representation. This destroys any chance of Bellarine towns having a voice to implement the DAL recommendations because of the inclusion of Armstrong Creek. Completely unacceptable

- Option 3 destroys any chance of Bellarine towns having a voice to implement the DAL recommendations because the boundaries merge the Bellarine with Greater Geelong. The Concept of a Bellarine community is completely lost. This splits Ocean Grove in half which goes against VEC's stated objective 'to keep communities together. Completely unacceptable

- Ward Names: Bellarine North, Bellarine Central and Bellarine South.

Councillor Numbers : 11 Councillors – 12 produces a potential deadlock in Council. The Name Moolap is completely unacceptable.

We note that CoGG previously had 13 which included a separately elected Major. Each Councillor has approx. 20,000 voters. Councillors in Bendigo and Ballarat only have approx. 10,000 voters, while Queenscliffe has 800 voters per Councillor.

Sincerely,