



2015-16

**Council
Representation
Reviews**

Final Report

2015 Greater Shepparton City Council Electoral Representation Review

Wednesday 17 June 2015

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1 Executive summary

The *Local Government Act 1989* (the Act) requires the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) to conduct an electoral representation review of each municipality in Victoria before every third council general election.

The purpose of an electoral representation review is to recommend an electoral structure that provides fair and equitable representation for the persons who are entitled to vote at a general election of the council. The matters considered by a review are:

- the number of councillors
- the electoral structure of the council (whether the council should be unsubdivided or divided into wards and, if subdivided, the details of the wards).

The VEC conducts all reviews on the basis of three main principles:

1. ensuring the number of voters represented by each councillor is within 10 per cent of the average number of voters per councillor for that municipality
2. taking a consistent, State-wide approach to the total number of councillors and
3. ensuring communities of interest are as fairly represented as possible.

Current electoral structure

The last electoral representation review for Greater Shepparton City Council took place in 2004. The review recommended that the Council continue to comprise seven councillors elected from an unsubdivided municipality.

Preliminary submissions

Preliminary submissions opened at the commencement of the current review on Wednesday 25 February. The VEC received 11 submissions by the deadline for submissions at 5.00 pm on Wednesday 25 March.

Preliminary report

A preliminary report was released on Wednesday 22 April with the following options for consideration:

- Option A (preferred option)
Greater Shepparton City Council consist of nine councillors elected from an unsubdivided municipality.

- Option B (alternative option)
Greater Shepparton City Council consist of nine councillors elected from three three-councillor wards.
- Option C (alternative option)
Greater Shepparton City Council consist of seven councillors elected from an unsubdivided municipality.

Response submissions

The VEC received 11 submissions responding to the preliminary report by the deadline for submissions at 5.00 pm on Wednesday 20 May.

Public hearing

The VEC conducted a public hearing for those wishing to speak to their response submission at 5.30 pm on Thursday 28 May. Four people spoke at the hearing.

Recommendation

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) recommends Greater Shepparton City Council change to consist of nine councillors elected from an unsubdivided municipality.

This electoral structure was designated as Option A in the preliminary report. Please see Appendix 2 for a detailed map of this recommended structure.

2 Background

2.1 Legislative basis

The Act requires the VEC to conduct an electoral representation review of each municipality in Victoria before every third general council election, or earlier if gazetted by the Minister for Local Government.

The Act specifies that the purpose of a representation review is to recommend the number of councillors and the electoral structure that provides ‘fair and equitable representation for the persons who are entitled to vote at a general election of the Council.’¹

The Act requires the VEC to consider:

- the number of councillors in a municipality and
- whether a municipality should be unsubdivided or subdivided.

If a municipality should be subdivided, the VEC must ensure that the number of voters represented by each councillor is within 10 per cent of the average number of voters per councillor for that municipality.² On this basis, the review must consider the:

- number of wards
- ward boundaries (and ward names)
- number of councillors that should be elected for each ward.

2.2 The VEC’s approach

Deciding on the number of councillors

The Act allows for a municipality to have between 5 and 12 councillors, but does not specify how to decide the appropriate number.³ In considering the number of councillors for a municipality, the VEC is guided by the Victorian Parliament’s intention for fairness and equity in the local representation of voters under the Act.

The VEC considers that there are three major factors that should be taken into account:

- diversity of the population
- councillors’ workloads and
- profiles of similar municipalities.

¹ Section 219D of the *Local Government Act 1989*.

² *ibid.*

³ Section 5B(1) of the *Local Government Act 1989*.

Generally, those municipalities that have a larger number of voters will have a higher number of councillors. Often large populations are more likely to be diverse, both in the nature and number of their communities of interest and the issues of representation.

However, the VEC considers the particular situation of each municipality in regards to: the nature and complexity of services provided by the Council; geographic size and topography; population growth or decline; and the social diversity of the municipality, including social disadvantage and cultural and age mix.

Deciding the electoral structure

The Act allows for a municipality ward structure to be:

- unsubdivided—with all councillors elected 'at-large' by all voters or
- subdivided into a number of wards.

If the municipality is subdivided into wards, there are a further three options available:

1. single-councillor wards
2. multi-councillor wards or
3. a combination of single-councillor and multi-councillor wards.

A subdivided municipality must have internal ward boundaries that provide for a fair and equitable division of the municipality, and ensure that the number of voters represented by each councillor remains within 10 per cent of the average number of voters per councillor for the municipality.

In considering which electoral structure is most appropriate, the VEC considers the following matters:

- communities of interest, encompassing people who share a range of common concerns, such as geographic, economic or cultural associations
- the longevity of the structure, with the aim of keeping voter numbers per councillor within the 10 per cent tolerance as long as possible
- geographic factors, such as size and topography
- the number of voters in potential wards, as wards with many voters can have a large number of candidates, which can lead to an increase in the number of informal (invalid) votes and
- clear ward boundaries.

2.3 The VEC's principles

Three main principles underlie all the VEC's work on representation reviews:

- 1. Ensuring the number of voters represented by each councillor is within 10 per cent of the average number of voters per councillor for that municipality.**

Over time, population changes can lead to some wards in subdivided municipalities having larger or smaller numbers of voters. As part of the review, the VEC corrects any imbalances and also takes into account likely population changes to ensure ward boundaries provide equitable representation for as long as possible.

- 2. Taking a consistent, State-wide approach to the total number of councillors.**

The VEC is guided by its comparisons of municipalities of a similar size and category to the council under review. The VEC also considers any special circumstances that may warrant the municipality having more or fewer councillors than similar municipalities.

- 3. Ensuring communities of interest are as fairly represented as possible.**

Each municipality contains a number of communities of interest. Where practicable, the electoral structure should be designed to ensure they are fairly represented, and that geographic communities of interest are not split by ward boundaries. This allows elected councillors to be more effective representatives of the people and interests in their particular municipality or ward.

2.4 The electoral representation review process

Developing recommendations

The VEC bases its recommendations for particular electoral structures on the following information:

- internal research specifically relating to the municipality under review, including Australian Bureau of Statistics and .id (Informed Decisions) Pty Ltd data⁴; voter statistics from the Victorian electoral roll; and other State and local government data sets
- small area forecasts provided by .id (Informed Decisions) Pty Ltd
- the VEC's experience conducting previous electoral representation reviews of local councils and similar reviews for State elections
- the VEC's expertise in mapping, demography and local government

⁴ .id is a company specialising in population and demographic analysis that builds suburb-level demographic information products in most jurisdictions in Australia and New Zealand.

- careful consideration of all input from the public in written and verbal submissions received during the review and
- advice from consultants with extensive experience in local government.

Public involvement

Public input is accepted by the VEC:

- in preliminary submissions at the start of the review
- in response submissions to the preliminary report and
- in a public hearing that provides an opportunity for people who have made a response submission to expand on this submission.

Public submissions are an important part of the process, but are not the only consideration during a review. The VEC ensures its recommendations are in compliance with the Act and are formed through careful consideration of public submissions, independent research, and analysis of all relevant factors, such as the need to give representation to communities of interest.

3 Greater Shepparton City Council representation review

3.1 Profile of Greater Shepparton City Council

The City of Greater Shepparton is located in north-east Victoria. It covers an area of 2,422 square kilometres, of which approximately 86 per cent is agricultural land and plantations, 7 per cent intensive use (mainly built up residential, commercial and industrial areas), and 6 per cent natural or relatively natural environments. The City is located on the lower agricultural floodplains of the Goulburn Broken Catchment. Three major streams, the Goulburn River, Broken River and Seven Creeks, meet at the geographical centre of the municipality. The City of Greater Shepparton is bordered by Moira Shire to the north, Campaspe Shire to the west, Strathbogie Shire to the south and the Rural City of Benalla to the east.

The City of Greater Shepparton has a population of 62,784,⁵ with 44,701 eligible voters.⁶ It is projected to experience growth at an annual rate of 1.2 per cent over the next 12 years, which is similar to rural and regional Victoria as a whole.⁷ The City has a population density of 26 people (and 19 voters) per square kilometre, making it significantly denser than rural and regional Victoria on average. The average number of voters per councillor is approximately double that for rural and regional Victoria generally, which is common for major regional centres such as Shepparton.

The population is unevenly spread across the municipality, with several sparsely populated rural regions surrounding the relatively densely populated town of Shepparton. There are several distinct localities in the municipality, with the following population breakdown:

Table 1: Current population distribution in major localities

Shepparton and surrounds	58.0%	Rural North West	4.9%
Mooroopna	12.9%	Rural South	4.4%
Kialla West	7.7%	Rural North	3.0%
Tatura	7.2%	Rural East	1.9%

Small rural centres include Murchison, Merrigum, Arcadia Downs, Tallygaroopna, and Dookie, all with less than 1 per cent of the population. The City of Greater Shepparton has a median age of 38, lower than the median age for rural and regional Victoria generally, which is 42. Although the population structure in the City of Greater Shepparton is similar to that for rural and regional

⁵ ABS Estimated Resident Population, 2013.

⁶ Data derived by Victorian Electoral Commission from State and Council voter rolls (as at January 2015).

⁷ Department of Transport, Planning and Local Infrastructure (2014) *Victoria in Future 2014 – Population and Household Projections to 2051*.

Victoria as a whole, there is a slightly higher percentage of 0 to 17 year olds and a lower percentage of people over 50.

Compared with rural and regional Victoria as a whole, the City of Greater Shepparton is significantly more culturally diverse, with 10 per cent of the population born in a country where English is not the first language; and over 3 per cent of the population identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Both these figures are double those for regional and rural Victoria generally. Over 12 per cent of the population in the City of Greater Shepparton speak a language other than English at home, compared with 5 per cent in regional and rural Victoria. The most widely spoken languages other than English are Italian and Arabic.

The City of Greater Shepparton has a slightly higher unemployment rate at 6 per cent than regional and rural Victoria generally (which has a rate of 5 per cent). Approximately 38 per cent of the workforce earns less than \$400 per week, similar to the rural and regional Victorian average. Likewise, the profile of employment by industry is very close to the average, with construction and manufacturing providing 21 per cent of the employment, health care and social services providing 14 per cent, and retail trade 13 per cent. The industries of agriculture, forestry and fishing; education and training; accommodation and food services; and public administration and safety are also significant employers.

3.2 Current electoral structure

Greater Shepparton City Council has had its current structure of seven councillors elected from an unsubdivided municipality from its first election, in 1997. Following the 2004 electoral representation review, the VEC recommended that this structure be retained, for the following reasons:

- the number of councillors was similar to that of other large regional councils
- there was a high level of interdependence across the entire municipality
- this interdependence meant that it was appropriate for all voters to be able to vote for all candidates
- an unsubdivided structure would encourage councillors to think on the municipal scale rather than parochially, and to represent sparsely populated rural areas as much as the major towns
- thanks to the imminent introduction of proportional representation, the unsubdivided structure would facilitate the representation of the diversity of the municipality, including non-geographic communities of interest.

3.3 Public information program

Public involvement is an important part of the representation review process. The Greater Shepparton City Council representation review commenced on Wednesday 25 February and the VEC conducted a public information program to inform the community.

Advertising

In accordance with the Act, public notices of the review and the release of the preliminary report were placed in the newspapers listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Public notices

Newspaper	Notice of review	Notice of preliminary report
<i>Herald Sun</i>	Wednesday 4 February	Wednesday 1 April
<i>Shepparton Adviser</i>	Wednesday 25 February	Wednesday 22 April
<i>Tatura Guardian & Kyabram Free Press</i>	Wednesday 25 February	Wednesday 22 April
<i>Shepparton News</i>	Friday 27 February	Friday 24 April

Media releases

A media release was prepared and distributed to local media at the commencement of the review on Wednesday 25 February. A further release was distributed at the publication of the preliminary report on Wednesday 22 April.

Public information session

A public information session for people interested in the review process was held at 5.30 pm on Thursday 5 March in the Board Room, Council Offices, 90 Welsford Street, Shepparton.

Helpline and email address

A telephone helpline and dedicated email address were established to assist members of the public with enquiries about the review process.

VEC website

The VEC website delivered up-to-date information to provide transparency and facilitate public participation during the review process. An online submission tool was made available and all public submissions were posted on the website.

Guide for Submissions

A *Guide for Submissions* was developed and distributed to those interested in making submissions. Copies of the *Guide* were available on the VEC website, in hardcopy on request and also provided to Council.

Council website and newsletter

Information about the review was provided to Council for publication in council media, e.g. website and newsletter.

4 Preliminary report

4.1 Preliminary submissions

The VEC received 11 preliminary submissions by the deadline for submissions at 5.00 pm on Wednesday 25 March. A list of people who made a preliminary submission can be found in Appendix 1.

The outstanding feature of the submissions was their universal acceptance of the unsubdivided structure. The only partial exception was the Proportional Representation Society of Australia (PRSA), which supported the current structure but also regarded a model of three three-councillor wards as acceptable. A common theme was that, with an unsubdivided structure, councillors would make decisions for the whole municipality instead of a location.

There was more variation about the number of councillors. The Greater Shepparton City Council and several other submissions supported the status quo of seven councillors. Two submissions preferred a reduction to five, on the grounds of cost and efficiency. Seven submissions wanted an increase to nine councillors, on account of the increasing diversity of the community.

4.2 Preliminary report

Number of councillors

The VEC considers that similar types of municipality of a similar size should have the same number of councillors, unless special circumstances justify a variation. Table 3 shows where the City of Greater Shepparton fits among the regional urban municipalities. The municipalities are ranked by number of voters.

On the basis of numbers of voters alone, the VEC considered that there was a case for increasing the number of councillors to nine. Greater Shepparton is by far the largest of the seven-councillor regional urban municipalities. It has a larger population (though a much smaller area) than the nine-councillor Rural City of Mildura. Greater Shepparton's number of voters per councillor (6,386) is much greater than the median for regional urban municipalities (4,215). An increase to nine councillors would reduce Greater Shepparton's voter-to-councillor ratio to 4,967, still higher than the median. Moreover, Greater Shepparton's population is growing steadily, making it one of the larger regional urban municipalities.

Table 3: Regional urban municipalities

Municipality	Current estimate of voters#	Number of councillors	Voters per councillor	Area (sq km)
Greater Geelong*	177,363	12	14,780	1,248
Greater Bendigo	83,641	9	9,293	3,000
Ballarat*	76,304	9	8,478	739
Latrobe	55,234	9	6,137	1,426
Greater Shepparton*	44,710	7	6,386	2,422
Mildura*	39,120	9	4,347	22,083
Wodonga*	28,574	7	4,082	433
Warrnambool*	25,850	7	3,693	121
Wangaratta*	22,122	7	3,160	3,645
Horsham*	15,863	7	2,266	4,267
Benalla	11,558	7	1,651	2,353
Ararat	9,103	7	1,300	4,211

* The municipality is currently undergoing an electoral representation review by the VEC during 2015–16.
Voter estimate calculated after the January 2015 merge of the State electoral roll and Council-only electors as at the 2012 council elections.

Greater Shepparton has a number of characteristics that strengthen the argument for an increase in the number of councillors. It is the most culturally diverse municipality in regional Victoria. Greater Shepparton has the third highest proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents in the State, at 3.4 per cent (after Swan Hill Rural City's 4.3 per cent and Mildura Rural City's 3.6 per cent). One eighth of Greater Shepparton's population speak a language other than English at home, compared to a rate of 5.5 per cent for regional Victoria as a whole. Greater Shepparton includes a large number of recent arrivals from overseas, with 27 per cent (2,147 persons) of the overseas born settling in the municipality in the period between the 2006 and 2011 censuses. There are well established communities of immigrants from Italy, Greece, Albania and Turkey, and more recent arrivals from India, Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan and Congo. A number of members of these communities have stood in the Council elections. The Council celebrates Shepparton's cultural diversity as enriching the community.⁸

However, this diversity adds to the demands on Council. Residents who are not proficient in English make up 2.9 per cent of the population—nearly four times the proportion for regional Victoria in general (0.8 per cent). Shepparton has been a site for refugee and humanitarian settlement programs; in 2011, 1,090 residents were refugee and humanitarian entrants. A 2013 Monash University study commissioned by the Australian Government found generally positive

⁸ See the Greater Shepparton City Council website, greatersepparton.com.au/diversity

attitudes to multiculturalism and that relatively few respondents had experienced discrimination, but also that 52 per cent of respondents thought that immigration levels were too high.⁹

The City of Greater Shepparton is also characterised by a degree of social disadvantage. At the 2011 census, Greater Shepparton scored 951.9 on the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) index of disadvantage, making it the thirteenth most disadvantaged municipality in Victoria.¹⁰ Parts of urban Shepparton are more severely disadvantaged, with scores ranging down to 847.2 for Shepparton South East.¹¹ The Monash University study found that 36 per cent of respondents felt that life in their local area was getting worse, and that 63 per cent felt unsafe walking alone at night.

All these factors—size, growth, culturally diverse immigration, and social disadvantage— increase the tasks of Council and councillors. The VEC agreed with Patricia Moran of Shepparton that “The number of elected Greater Shepparton councillors needs to reflect the diverse and complex nature of the population”, and believed it would be preferable to increase the number of councillors to nine. The preferred option in the report provided for nine councillors.

It was the Council’s view that seven councillors “is appropriate and workable for this municipality, as it effectively allows for streamlined decision-making, and optimal representation and accessibility for the various communities of interest”. As there has been no evidence that the current number of councillors is unworkable, the VEC also put forward a seven-councillor option.

Two submissions preferred a reduction to five councillors, Dr John Lawry of Kialla on the grounds of cost, and John Gray of Toolamba because of group dynamics. Mr Gray took a “board of directors” approach to council business, and considered that five was the most effective number for meetings. The VEC considers, however, that the purpose of representation reviews is to ensure fair and equitable representation of the voters rather than the most effective number of councillors for council meetings. Five councillors would be insufficient to effectively represent the number of voters in the City of Greater Shepparton and the diversity of the City’s community.

Electoral structure

Arguments commonly advanced for unsubdivided structures are that they encourage a municipality-wide focus on the part of councillors, candidates and voters; maximise the choice for voters in elections; produce the fairest election results (with proportional representation); and enable constituents to approach any of the councillors with their concerns. The Council included

⁹ Andrew Markus: *Mapping social cohesion: local areas report 2013*, Monash University, Clayton, 2014.

¹⁰ The SEIFA index of disadvantage measures the relative level of socio-economic disadvantage based on a range of census characteristics, such as low income, low educational attainment, high unemployment and jobs in relatively unskilled occupations. A lower score on the index means a higher level of disadvantage.

¹¹ See profile.id.com.au/shepparton/seifa-disadvantage

such arguments in its submission. These arguments have been informed by the experience of 18 years under the unsubdivided structure. It is also significant that submissions were unanimous in their support of the unsubdivided structure.

Municipalities that are centred around a single urban hub, such as Greater Shepparton, are natural candidates for an unsubdivided structure. The main town and its rural hinterland often form one community of interest, with urban and rural areas reliant on one another. For instance, the orchard areas around Shepparton have very close relations with the SPC Ardmona canning factory in town. The rural area of the municipality is substantial, but no part of the municipality is more than 50 kilometres from the urban area of Shepparton.

Under an unsubdivided structure, voters can choose candidates from anywhere in the municipality. The list of current councillors indicates that this is occurring, as sitting councillors are widespread across the urban area, with three councillors coming from Shepparton itself, one from across the Goulburn River in Mooroopna, one from the municipality's third largest town (Tatura), and one each from the rural localities of Shepparton East and Shepparton North, as illustrated in Diagram 1. No part of the municipality appears to be under- or over-represented.

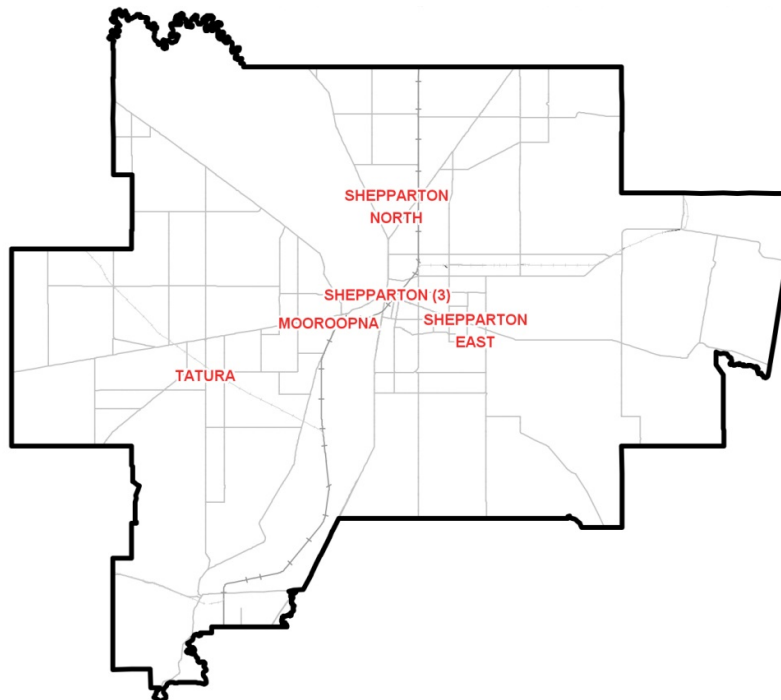


Diagram 1: Distribution of councillors elected in 2012.

For these reasons, the VEC provided an unsubdivided electoral structure as its preferred option in its preliminary report.

One potential defect of an unsubdivided structure is that a large number of candidates can lead to an increase in the informal vote at an election. Under the Act, voters have to number every

box on the ballot paper at a council election or their vote cannot be counted. Experience from council elections indicates that informal voting rates tend to increase sharply once the number of candidates in an election exceeds 15, simply because of the difficulty of numbering every box correctly. Someone who votes informally has not contributed to the election of any candidate, and a large number of informal votes makes the election result less representative. Greater Shepparton’s elections have encountered this issue, with the informal voting rate increasing with the number of candidates over the last three council elections, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Informal voting rates, 2005–12 Greater Shepparton City Council elections

Election	Number of candidates	Informal vote (%)
2005	18	6.43
2008	19	6.98
2012	26	9.53

In order to reduce the informal voting rate, the VEC proposed a model (Option B) comprising three three-councillor wards as an alternative option (see Diagram 2). The subdivided model did not divide urban from rural areas. Rather, each ward was a microcosm of the whole municipality and incorporated both urban and rural elements. Three councillors in each ward would be elected on an equal basis and would allow scope for diverse representation. The proposed ward boundaries were as clear as possible as they followed the Goulburn and Broken Rivers and the Midland Highway.

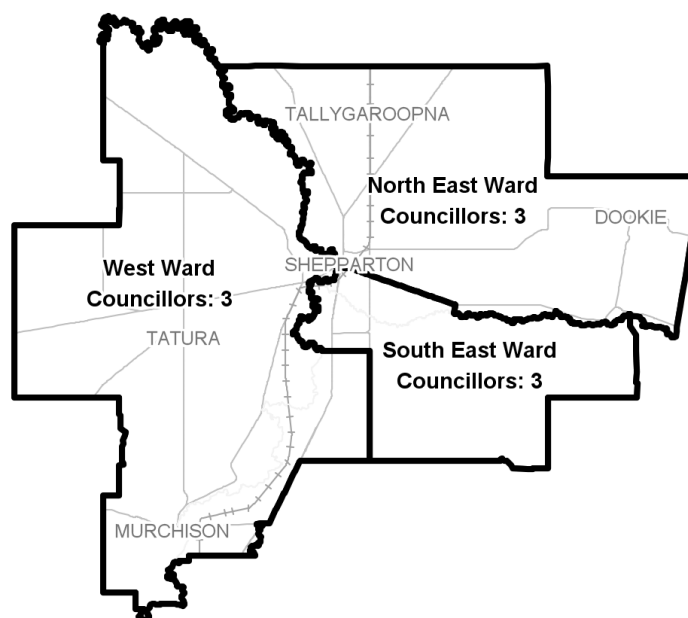


Diagram 2: Option B – three three-councillor wards.

Options

A preliminary report was released on Wednesday 22 April. The VEC considered public submissions and research findings when formulating the options presented in the preliminary report. After careful consideration, the VEC put forward the following options:

- Option A (preferred option)
Greater Shepparton City Council consist of nine councillors elected from an unsubdivided municipality.
- Option B (alternative option)
Greater Shepparton City Council consist of nine councillors elected from three three-councillor wards.
- Option C (alternative option)
Greater Shepparton City Council consist of seven councillors elected from an unsubdivided municipality.

5 Public response

5.1 Response submissions

The VEC accepted submissions responding to the preliminary report from Wednesday 22 April until 5.00 pm on Wednesday 20 May. The VEC received 11 response submissions. A list of people who made a response submission can be found in Appendix 1. Table 5 indicates the level of support for each option.

Table 5: Preferences expressed in response submissions

Option A	Option B	Option C	Other models
6	0	3	2

A majority of submissions supported the VEC's preferred option of an increase to nine councillors while maintaining the unsubdivided structure. These submitters contended that nine councillors would best suit Greater Shepparton's size and diversity. One submitter thought that the strenuous workload for councillors deterred excellent candidates, and that an increase to nine councillors would ease the workload for individual councillors.

Three submissions, including that from the Council, supported the status quo of seven councillors. The Council stated that seven councillors allowed 'for effective, streamlined decision-making, and optimal representation and accessibility for the various communities of interest'. The Council also maintained that an increase would cause an additional financial burden on Council and ratepayers of some \$67,500 annually. John Gray argued that there was no prospect of better decision making from nine councillors, and that the number of constituents per councillors did not have much relevance to good governance.

Two submissions put forward other ideas. Dr John Lawry proposed a reduction to five councillors, believing that the election of a smaller number of high quality councillors would produce better results for the municipality than is the case at present. Julie Reed submitted that an Administrator should be appointed to replace the councillors.

All submissions that mentioned the electoral structure supported the current unsubdivided municipality, which was considered to suit the nature of the community and to encourage a municipality-wide focus on the part of all councillors. Submitters were concerned that any division into wards would lead to geographic division and "horse-trading" between councillors.

5.2 Public hearing

The VEC conducted a public hearing for those wishing to speak to their response submission at 5.30 pm on Thursday 28 May in the Board Room, Council Offices, 90 Welsford Street, Shepparton. A list of people who spoke at the hearing can be found in Appendix 1.

Keppel Turnour OAM argued that the current councillor workload was too much for seven councillors. In Mr Turnour's opinion, the cost of two extra councillors was insignificant compared to the \$2.7 million cost of 32 extra Council staff proposed in the 2015–2016 draft budget. He thought that an increase in councillors would lead to more effective decision making, as a wider variety of councillors would add value to Council deliberations.

Gordon Hamilton spoke for the Better Local Government Association Inc., which has some 40 members. Mr Hamilton stated that there was too much work for too few councillors, pointing to the number of community events which councillors needed to attend. He stated that the Council did not fully represent the diversity of the community, and that an increase to nine councillors would improve opportunities for the election of young people, women and members of Greater Shepparton's multicultural communities. In relation to the possible introduction of wards, Mr Hamilton said that a good ward councillor could be very effective, but the advantage of the unsubdivided structure was a good spread of councillors and the avoidance of any risk of parochialism. He added that there are a number of different communities of interest spread across the municipality, and the creation of wards would split these communities.

Dr Lawry contended that there was no evidence that the effectiveness of representation was related to the number of representatives. He believed that a smaller number of councillors would mean that only those with substantial support would be elected, and they would probably be the best candidates.

Cr Leslie Oroszvary spoke on behalf of Greater Shepparton City Council. Cr Oroszvary said that the current arrangements were working well. He acknowledged, though, that the addition of two councillors would not be a big financial impost. He described councillors' substantial workloads, involving advisory committees and community gatherings as well as Council meetings. In Cr Oroszvary's view, an increase to nine councillors could reduce the number of advisory committees per councillor, but each councillor would still need to do a prodigious amount of reading. Cr Oroszvary was proud of Greater Shepparton's cohesive multicultural community, pointing to his own Hungarian heritage. He observed that many recent settlers came from war torn countries and did not have strong English language skills, and accepted that additional councillors would provide greater diversity on Council and therefore better representation of the diverse communities of interest within Greater Shepparton.

6 Findings and recommendation

6.1 The VEC's findings

Number of councillors

The most contentious issue in the current representation review is whether Greater Shepparton City Council should continue with seven councillors or increase to nine. The arguments for maintaining the current number of councillors (or reducing the number) are based on the corporate model of representation, under which the representative body is seen as authorised to act for the electorate as a whole, and to deliberate and make decisions on behalf of the voters. Decision making efficiency is seen as vital, and a large number of councillors can be regarded as an obstacle to efficiency. The Council's preliminary submission stated that seven councillors 'effectively allows for streamlined decision-making'.

In contrast, the arguments for an increase in the number of councillors were based more on the mirror model of representation, which seeks to create a representative body whose composition reflects the make-up of the constituents, with groups represented on the council in proportion to their numbers in the community. For instance, Mr Hamilton at the public hearing said that at present there are six Anglo councillors and one Albanian, with no Aboriginal councillor, no orchardist, dairy farmer or manufacturer. For Mr Hamilton and other submitters, an increase would improve the prospects of the Council representing Greater Shepparton's diversity.

The legislated purpose of an electoral representation review is to recommend 'the number of Councillors and the electoral structure that provides fair and equitable representation for the persons who are entitled to vote at a general election of the Council'.¹² For the VEC, the primary consideration is fair and equitable representation. Greater Shepparton is the right size for nine councillors, and its social diversity and challenges would increase the demands on Council. An increase to nine councillors would offer more scope to represent the voters of the most diverse community in regional Victoria.

Although Cr Oroszvary at the public hearing said that the current number of councillors is workable, it is clear that the workload for councillors is very substantial. An increase to nine councillors would somewhat alleviate councillors' workloads, making it more practicable for people with full-time employment to be councillors.

The Council's response submission contended that a larger Council would cause an increased financial burden on the ratepayers, stating that the estimated additional cost would be \$67,500

¹² *Local Government Act 1989*, s. 219D(1)(a).

annually. However, at the public hearing, Cr Oroszvary stated that the cost of two additional councillors would not be a big impost.

The VEC considers that nine is the appropriate number of councillors for the Greater Shepparton City Council.

Electoral structure

The VEC's Option B in the preliminary report proposed to divide Greater Shepparton into three three-councillor wards—not to provide local representation but to deal with the high informal vote at Council elections. In the 2012 council elections, Greater Shepparton had the highest informal vote in regional Victoria, at 9.53 per cent of total votes. The informal voting rate was mainly the consequence of the record number of candidates (26)—more than any other unsubdivided municipality. The high proportion of Greater Shepparton residents who are not proficient in English may also have contributed to the informal voting rate. A high informal vote diminishes the representativeness of the election result, and so is relevant to representation reviews. There might be even more candidates under a nine-councillor council, potentially aggravating the issue. Option B was an attempt to deal with this problem by dividing the candidates into three groups, thereby making the ballot papers shorter and easier to complete.

However, the VEC has to take account of the universal acceptance of the unsubdivided structure. This structure was praised in submissions and at the public hearing as suiting the interdependent nature of Shepparton and its hinterland, encouraging councillors to focus on the municipality as a whole, and enabling constituents to approach any of the councillors. Ward structures were condemned as promoting parochialism and jealousy, and opening up the possibility of poor quality representation due to a lack of candidates in particular wards.

It would be wrong to change a structure that is clearly appropriate to Greater Shepparton and is so strongly supported. The VEC and the Council will need to consider other methods of tackling the informal vote, such as a concentrated communication campaign in the lead-up to the 2016 council election. Optional preferential voting would address this issue, but this is a matter for Parliament and would require legislative change. In any case, the informal vote fluctuates from election to election along with the number of candidates. For example, East Gippsland Shire had 29 candidates and an informal voting rate of 9.58 per cent in 2008, but only 17 candidates and an informal voting rate of 6.9 per cent in 2012.¹³

The VEC considers that Greater Shepparton's unsubdivided electoral structure should continue.

¹³ It should be noted that in the four councils where the number of councillors increased in 2012, there was also a rise in the number of candidates. However, none of the affected councils was unsubdivided, so they are not directly comparable.

6.2 The VEC's recommendation

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) recommends Greater Shepparton City Council change to consist of nine councillors elected from an unsubdivided municipality.

This electoral structure was designated as Option A in the preliminary report. Please see Appendix 2 for a detailed map of this recommended structure.

Appendix 1: Public involvement

Preliminary submissions

Preliminary submissions were received from:

Better Local Government Association Inc
Jenni Bransgrove
Carmel Gordon
John Gray
Greater Shepparton City Council
John Lawry
Brendan Ley
Maree McKenna
Patricia Moran
Proportional Representation Society of Australia (Victoria-Tasmania) Inc
Keppel Turnour

Response submissions

Response submissions were received from:

Better Local Government Association Inc
John Gray
Greater Shepparton City Council
John Lawry
Brendan Ley
Garrick Meadows
Patricia Moran
Proportional Representation Society of Australia (Victoria-Tasmania) Inc
Julie Reed
Chris Solum
Keppel Turnour

Public hearing

The following individuals spoke at the public hearing:

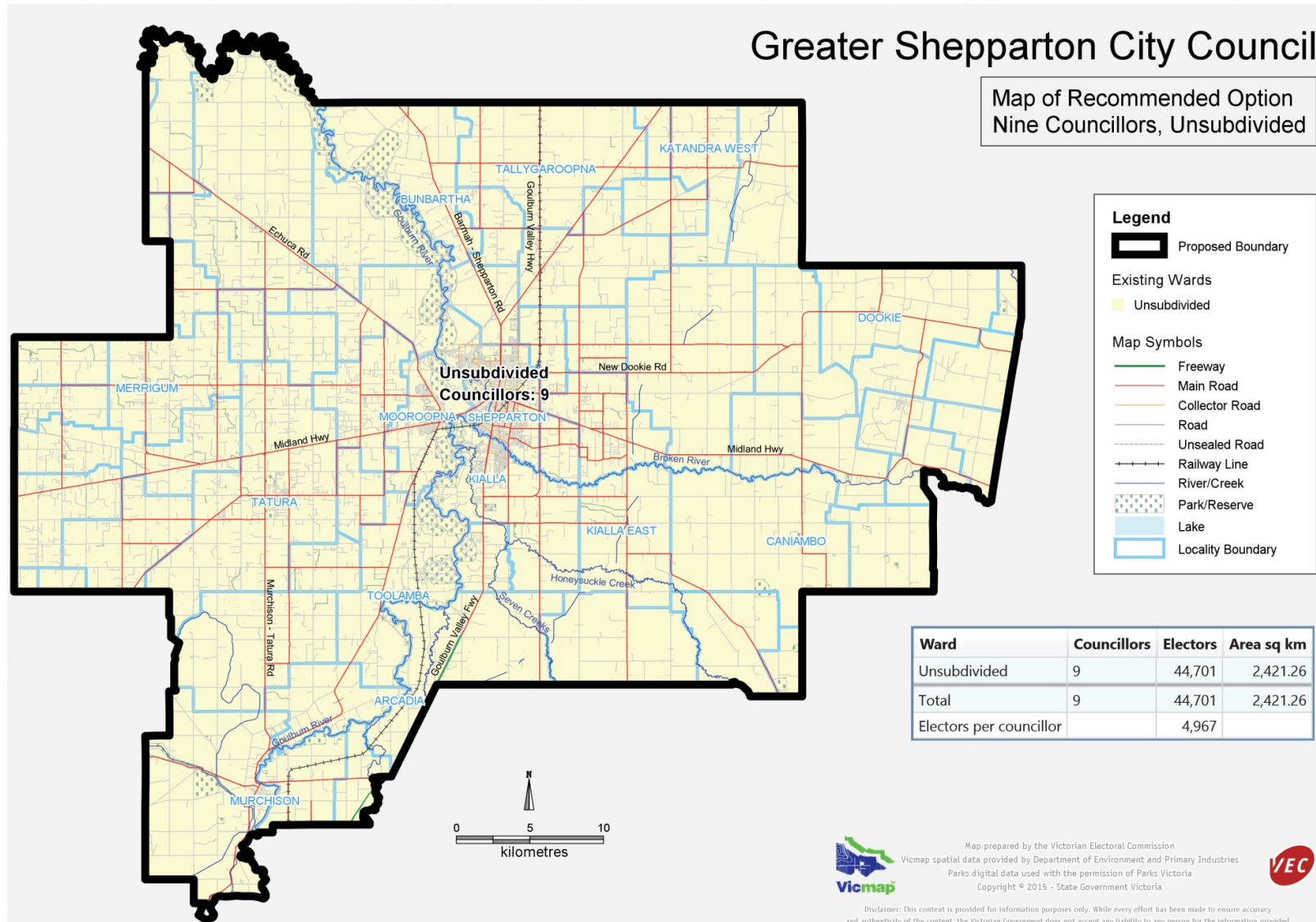
Keppel Turnour

Gordon Hamilton, Better Local Government Association Inc.

John Lawry

Cr Leslie Oroszvary

Appendix 2: Map



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Melbourne VIC 3000

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