

Local Council Representation Review

Final Report



**CAMPASPE
SHIRE COUNCIL**
October 2019

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Recommendation

The Victorian Electoral Commission recommends that Campaspe Shire Council continue to consist of nine councillors elected from a subdivided electoral structure of five wards with adjustments to the current ward boundaries (two three-councillor wards and three single-councillor wards).

This recommendation is submitted to the Minister for Local Government as required by the *Local Government Act 1989*.

Please see Appendix 2 for a detailed map of this recommended structure.

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 people 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 ward boundaries and the number of councillors per ward).

The VEC conducts all reviews based on three main principles:

1. taking a consistent, State-wide approach to the total number of councillors
2. if subdivided, ensuring the number of voters represented by each councillor is within plus-or-minus 10% of the average number of voters per councillor for that local council
3. ensuring communities of interest are as fairly represented as possible.

Current electoral structure

Campaspe Shire Council currently comprises nine councillors elected from five wards (two three-councillor wards and three single-councillor wards). More information on Campaspe Shire Council and the current electoral structure is available in the council factsheet on the VEC website at vec.vic.gov.au.

Prior to the last representation review in 2007, Campaspe Shire Council was comprised of seven councillors elected from six wards (one two-councillor ward and five single-councillor wards). Visit the VEC website at vec.vic.gov.au to access a copy of the 2007 review final report.

Preliminary submissions

Preliminary submissions opened at the commencement of the current review on Wednesday 12 June 2019. The VEC received three submissions for the representation review of Campaspe Shire Council by the deadline at 5.00 pm on Wednesday 10 July 2019.

Preliminary report

A preliminary report was released on Wednesday 7 August 2019 with the following options for consideration:

- Option A (preferred option)
Campaspe Shire Council consist of nine councillors elected from five wards (two three-councillor wards and three single-councillor wards).
- Option B (alternative option)
Campaspe Shire Council consist of nine councillors elected from an unsubdivided electoral structure.

Response submissions

The VEC received seven submissions responding to the preliminary report by the deadline at 5.00 pm on Wednesday 4 September 2019.

Public hearing

The VEC conducted a public hearing for those wishing to speak about their response submission at 5.30 pm on Tuesday 10 September 2019. Four people spoke at the public hearing.

Recommendation

The Victorian Electoral Commission recommends that Campaspe Shire Council continue to consist of nine councillors elected from five wards, with adjustments to the current ward boundaries (two three-councillor wards and three single-councillor wards).

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

Background

Legislative basis

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

The Act states 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 people 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 local council
- whether a local council should be unsubdivided or subdivided.

If a local council is subdivided, the VEC must ensure that the number of voters represented by each councillor is within plus-or-minus 10% of the average number of voters per councillor for that local council.² On this basis, the review must consider the:

- number of wards
- ward boundaries
- number of councillors that should be elected for each ward.

Public engagement

Public information program

The VEC conducted a public information program to inform the community of the representation review, including:

- public notices printed in local and State-wide papers
- a public information session to outline the review process and respond to questions from the community
- a media release announcing the commencement of the review and the release of the preliminary report
- a submission guide to explain the review process and provide background information on the scope of the review

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

² *Ibid.*

- an information email campaign targeted at known community groups and communities of interest in the local council area
- sponsored social media advertising geo-targeted to users within the local council area
- ongoing information updates and publication of submissions on the VEC website.

More information on the VEC's public information program for the representation review of Campaspe Shire Council can be found at Appendix 3.

Public consultation

Public input was accepted by the VEC via:

- preliminary submissions at the start of the review
- response submissions to the preliminary report
- a public hearing that provided an opportunity for people who had made a response submission to expand on their submission.

Public submissions are an important part of the review process but are not the only consideration. The VEC ensures its recommendations comply with the Act and are formed through careful consideration of public submissions, independent research, and analysis of all relevant factors.

The VEC's principles

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

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

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

2. If subdivided, ensuring the number of voters represented by each councillor is within plus-or-minus 10% of the average number of voters per councillor for that local council.

This is the principle of 'one vote, one value', which is enshrined in the Act. This means that every person's vote counts equally.

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

Each local council 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 local council or ward.

Developing recommendations

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

- internal research specifically relating to the local council under review, including data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics and .id³; voter statistics from the Victorian electoral roll; and other State and local government data sets
- 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
- careful consideration of all input from the public in written submissions received during the review and via oral submissions at the public hearing
- advice from consultants with extensive experience in local government.

Deciding on the number of councillors

The Act allows for a local council to have between five and 12 councillors but does not specify how to decide the appropriate number.⁴ In considering the number of councillors for a local council, the VEC is guided by the Victorian Parliament's intention for fairness and equity in the local representation of voters under the Act.

The starting point in deciding the appropriate number of councillors for a local council is comparing the local council under review to other local councils of a similar size and type (Principle 1). Generally, local councils 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 also considers the particular circumstances of each local council which could justify fewer or more councillors, such as:

- the nature and complexity of services provided by the Council
- geographic size and topography
- population growth or decline

³ .id is a consulting company specialising in population and demographic analysis and prediction information products in most jurisdictions in Australia and New Zealand.

⁴ Section 5B(1) of the *Local Government Act 1989*.

- the social diversity of the local council.

Deciding the electoral structure

The Act allows for a local council ward structure to be unsubdivided—with all councillors elected ‘at-large’ by all voters—or subdivided into a number of wards.

If the local council is to be subdivided into wards, there are three options available:

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

A subdivided electoral structure must have internal ward boundaries that provide for a fair and equitable division of the local council.

The Act allows for wards with different numbers of councillors, as long as the number of voters represented by each councillor is within plus-or-minus 10% of the average number of voters per councillor for that local council (Principle 2). For example, a local council may have one three-councillor ward with 15,000 voters and two single-councillor wards each with 5,000 voters. In this case, the average number of voters per councillor would be 5,000.

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

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

- the VEC’s recommendation at the previous representation review and the reasons for that recommendation
- the longevity of the structure, with the aim of keeping voter numbers per councillor within the 10% tolerance for as long as possible (Principle 2)
- communities of interest, consisting of people who share a range of common concerns, such as geographic, economic or cultural associations (Principle 3)
- the number of candidates in previous elections, as outcomes from previous elections indicate that large numbers of candidates can lead to an increase in the number of informal (invalid) votes
- geographic factors, such as size and topography
- clear ward boundaries.

Campaspe Shire Council representation review

Profile of Campaspe Shire Council

Campaspe Shire Council is a predominantly rural local council area located on the border of Victoria and New South Wales. The Murray and Goulburn rivers form the northern border of the local council area and the Campaspe River runs through the Shire. The Shire has five service centres: Echuca, Kyabram, Rochester, Rushworth and Tongala, and other smaller towns.

Echuca is the principal town, with a population of 14,043 at the 2016 Census. The next largest town is Kyabram (with a population of 7,331) followed by Rochester (3,113), Tongala (1,926), Rushworth (1,335), Stanhope (828) and Lockington (808).⁵

Agriculture and manufacturing are the Shire's traditional industries, with dairy farming, cereal and grain growing, and sheep grazing being its primary agricultural outputs. The Shire also has several major dairy processing and vegetable processing centres. Tourism is important particularly in Echuca, which has the historic Port of Echuca (the largest Australian inland port before the development of the railway network in the 1800s).⁶ Other attractions include Gunbower National Park which can be accessed via Gunbower in the Shire's north-west and the Waranga Basin in the south-east, which offers water sports and other recreational activities. Also located in the south, the historic town of Rushworth showcases a history built on the gold rush and timber industry.⁷

Residents in Campaspe Shire are mainly employed in healthcare and social assistance (13.4% of the population); agriculture, forestry and fishing (13.3%); manufacturing (12.4%); and retail trade (10.4%). While the percentage of residents working in healthcare and social assistance has grown in recent years, it has declined in manufacturing (from 14.5% at the 2011 Census to 12.4% in 2016).⁸ Factors affecting the sustainability of manufacturing in Australia, such as the rising cost of utilities and competition from overseas are also affecting the Shire.⁹

⁵ Figures from Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2016 Census Quickstats for towns. See for example, ABS, '2016 Census Quickstats Echuca (SSC)', accessed 19 August 2019, https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/SSC20832?opendocument.

⁶ Know Your Council, 'Campaspe Shire', State Government of Victoria, accessed 19 August 2019, <http://knowyourcouncil.vic.gov.au/councils/campaspe>. See also, Campaspe Shire Council, Economic Development Strategy 2014-2019, Campaspe Shire Council, 2014, accessed 19 August 2019, <https://www.campaspe.vic.gov.au/assets/Strategies/Economic-Development-Strategy.pdf>.

⁷ See for example, Campaspe Shire Council, 'Rushworth', accessed 19 August 2019, <https://www.campaspe.vic.gov.au/discover/campaspe-communities/rushworth/>.

⁸ ABS, 'Data by Region, Campaspe (S) (LGA) (21370)', accessed 19 August 2019, https://itt.abs.gov.au/itt/r.jsp?RegionSummary®ion=21370&dataset=ABS_REGIONAL_LGA2018&geocconcept=LGA_2018&maplayerid=LGA2018&measure=MEASURE&datasetASGS=ABS_REGIONAL_ASGS_2016&datasetLGA=ABS_REGIONAL_LGA2018®ionLGA=LGA_2018®ionASGS=ASGS_2016.

⁹ Campaspe Shire Council, *Economic Development Strategy 2014-2019*, Campaspe Shire Council, 2014, p. ii. Available at: Campaspe Shire Council, 'Strategies and Future Plans', accessed 19 August 2019, <https://www.campaspe.vic.gov.au/council/council-documents/strategies-and-future-plans/>.

The median age in Campaspe Shire Council is 45 years, which is older than the average age for regional Victoria at 42 years. The population tends to be older in the smaller towns and the median age in Rochester is 51 years and in Rushworth, 54 years.¹⁰

Overall, the unemployment rate and labour force participation rate in Campaspe Shire are similar to or better than regional Victoria and Victorian averages. The Shire's unemployment rate at 4.9% is distinctly lower than the average for rural and regional Victoria at 6%. Its labour force participation rate is 55%, which is similar to the average for rural and regional Victoria at 56.1%.¹¹ However, residents generally have a lower median household weekly income at \$1,081 compared to the average across regional Victoria at \$1,124.¹²

Campaspe Shire scored 967 on the SEIFA Index of Relative Disadvantage at the 2016 Census, which indicated a higher level of social and economic disadvantage compared to other regional local council areas in Victoria.¹³ The average score across regional Victoria is 977.¹⁴ The average score for the Loddon Mallee Region is 964.¹⁵ Campaspe Shire's score indicates that it is less disadvantaged for its region.

The Yorta Yorta, Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung people are the traditional owners of the lands along the Murray, Campaspe and Goulburn Rivers.¹⁶ The proportion of the Shire's population identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, at 2.4%, is distinctly higher than the average of 1.6% across rural and regional Victoria.¹⁷

Most of the Shire's population were born in Australia (84.3%). Of the residents born overseas, the largest groups are from England, New Zealand, Philippines, Italy and the Netherlands. Correspondingly, residents that speak a language other than English at home only comprised 2.9% of the population, which is lower than the average of 6% for rural and regional Victoria

¹⁰ ABS, '2016 Census Quickstats: Campaspe (S)', accessed 19 August 2019, https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/LGA21370?opendocument.

¹¹ See for example, ABS, 'Data by Region, Campaspe (S) (LGA) (21370)'.

¹² ABS, '2016 Census Quickstats: Campaspe (S)'.

¹³ The Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (IRSD) measures the level of socio-economic disadvantage in an area. The scores are based on a range of Census characteristics such as low income, low educational attainment, high unemployment, and jobs in relatively unskilled occupations. See, ABS, 'Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas', accessed 19 August 2019, <https://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/censushome.nsf/home/seifa>.

¹⁴ .id, 'Campaspe Shire: SEIFA by profile area', accessed 19 August 2019, <https://profile.id.com.au/campaspe/seifa-disadvantage-small-area>.

¹⁵ ABS, Census of Population and Housing: Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), Australia, 2016, 2033.0.55.001. The region includes a total of ten local council areas. See: Regional Development Victoria, 'Victoria's Loddon Mallee Region', State Government of Victoria, accessed 19 August 2019, <https://www.rdv.vic.gov.au/victorias-regions/loddon-mallee>.

¹⁶ Department of Premier and Cabinet, 'Aboriginal Victoria: Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners', accessed 19 August 2019, <https://www.vic.gov.au/aboriginalvictoria/heritage/welcome-to-country-and-acknowledgement-of-traditional-owners/acknowledgement-of-traditional-owners.html>.

¹⁷ ABS, '2016 Census Quickstats, Campaspe (S)'.

generally.¹⁸ The top five languages other than English spoken in the Shire are Italian, Filipino, Tagalog, Mandarin and German.

The Shire's population is forecast to grow by an average of 0.2% per annum from 37,061 in 2016 to reach 39,080 by 2036.¹⁹ The population is expected to grow at a faster rate in Echuca and to a lesser extent in the town of Kyabram, while the population will remain static or in some cases decline in the rural sections of the Shire.²⁰

Current electoral structure

Campaspe Shire Council currently comprises nine councillors elected from five wards (two three councillor wards and three single-councillor wards). Prior to the last representation review in 2007, Campaspe Shire Council was composed of seven councillors elected from one two-councillor ward and five single-councillor wards.

Visit the VEC website at vec.vic.gov.au to access a copy of the 2007 review final report.

Preliminary submissions

At the close of submissions on Wednesday 10 July 2019, the VEC received three submissions for the representation review of Campaspe Shire Council. A list of people who made a preliminary submission can be found in Appendix 1.

Number of councillors

The three preliminary submissions had limited discussion regarding the number of councillors appropriate for Campaspe Shire Council. One submitter requested the number of councillors in Echuca Ward increase from three to four, but the submitter did not mention the total number of councillors in the Shire. The Proportional Representation Society of Australia (Victoria-Tasmania) Inc. (PRSA) supported either seven or the current nine councillors. The PRSA reasoned that seven councillors elected from an unsubdivided electoral structure was the fairest arrangement as it would ensure that all successful candidates need to reach the same quota of votes to be elected to council. The PRSA also supported nine councillors elected from three three-councillor wards to ensure candidates needed to reach the same quota of votes for election. According to the PRSA, wards with different numbers of councillors could result in 'very different quotas for election', making it 'easier to be elected in some wards than others'.

¹⁸ .id, 'Campaspe Shire: language spoken at home', id, accessed 19 August 2019, <https://profile.id.com.au/campaspe/language>.

¹⁹ Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (Victoria), *Victoria in Future: Population and household projections 2016 to 2056*, State Government of Victoria, Melbourne, 2019, p.14

²⁰ .id, 'Shire of Campaspe: drivers of population change', .id, accessed 19 August 2019, <https://forecast.id.com.au/campaspe/drivers-of-population-change>.

Electoral structure

Two submitters supported a subdivided electoral structure, without further discussion. The PRSA recommended against the current structure as a mix of multi- and single-councillor wards would require candidates to reach different quotas for election. The PRSA further commented that an unsubdivided structure presented advantages over the current electoral structure because it would require councillors to vote on all issues and encouraged councillors to take a whole-of-council approach to representing Campaspe Shire.

Preliminary report

A preliminary report was released on Wednesday 7 August 2019. The VEC considered public submissions and research findings when formulating the options presented in the preliminary report.

Number of councillors

The VEC found nine councillors continues to be appropriate for Campaspe Shire Council. Campaspe Shire (with 31,345 voters) is within the range of nine-councillor rural local council areas. The VEC further reasoned that reducing the number of councillors was unwarranted as overall, the Shire could expect modest growth in the next decade. The VEC's research did uncover a level of social disadvantage in the Shire based on its SEIFA score, which suggested there should be no reduction in the number of councillors. The VEC also observed that at 4,519 square kilometres, Campaspe Shire was one of the larger rural local council areas in Victoria. Large local council areas have tended to increase councillors' workloads, which the VEC considered to be cause for retaining the current number of councillors.

Correspondingly, research on relevant social characteristics in the Shire did not indicate the need to increase the current number of councillors. The population of residents with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage (at 2.4% or 874 people) is notably higher than the average for regional Victoria (at 1.6%). However, there is generally limited cultural and linguistic diversity in the Shire. The VEC observes that just under 3% of the population speak a language other than English. While the level of social disadvantage in the Shire is slightly higher than regional Victoria generally based on the SEIFA, the VEC's research did not indicate that the disadvantage is severe or widespread enough to prompt an increase in the number of councillors, and no preliminary submissions indicated a need for more councillors.

Overall, the submissions received and research conducted did not show marked growth or decline in the number and range of communities of interest, or any other special circumstances that would warrant deviating from the VEC's consistent state-wide approach to the number of councillors. For these reasons, the VEC recommended Campaspe Shire Council continue with nine councillors.

Electoral structure

In this review, the VEC considered that the situation was substantially the same as its last review of Campaspe Shire Council in 2007 when it found that the Shire was characterised by geographically-defined communities of interest that merged around key service centres. The VEC noted that Campaspe Shire did not have a single major town but two larger sized towns (Echuca and Kyabram) which were different demographically and had different identities and interests. There were also notable townships in each of the central, eastern and western parts of the Shire, which formed geographic communities of interest and provided local services and supplies to their agricultural hinterlands.

At the preliminary stage of the review, the VEC considered that not much had changed in terms of the Shire's communities of interest, which meant that the current electoral structure remained an appropriate option. However, for the current structure to be viable, the VEC proposed two boundary adjustments to return Echuca and Waranga Wards to within the legislated voter-to-councillor ratio. The VEC chose to modify the eastern boundary of Echuca Ward by moving the present boundary towards the built-up area of the town. The VEC carefully considered the different characteristics in Echuca to inform this adjustment and found that the south-eastern area of Echuca was characterised by semi-rural living and was less densely populated. This made it a more appropriate part of Echuca to include in Kyabram-Deakin Ward than the western part of Echuca, which is residential in character and where there is significant residential land supply.²¹

The VEC also proposed an adjustment to Waranga Ward, which would move its northern boundary further north from Winter Road to Webb Road (also known as Kyabram-Rochester Road). It considered this modification to be an improvement to the current structure as the ward boundary would no longer cut through the centre of the town of Gigarre, placing the town wholly within Waranga Ward. In addition, the use of a main road would make a clearer boundary. An updated version of the current structure was presented as Option A in the preliminary report.

As part of the review, the VEC also considered relevant election statistics over the Shire's last three general elections (2008, 2012 and 2016). The VEC generally observed positive signs in the low informal vote and reasonably high voter turnout. However, the VEC also observed a pattern of uncontested and generally lower numbers of candidates for the single-councillor wards (Rochester, Waranga and Western Wards). The VEC recognised that this was not unusual in rural areas where incumbent councillors can be well-known and widely supported, but it also considered that this could be an undesirable and undemocratic feature of the current structure.

²¹ .id, 'Shire of Campaspe: drivers of population change', .id, accessed 19 August 2019, <https://forecast.id.com.au/campaspe/drivers-of-population-change?WebID=120>.

The VEC therefore explored other possible electoral structures. These included: a variation of the current structure by combining Rochester and Waranga Wards. Another variation combined Echuca and Western Wards. The VEC also modelled a three three-councillor ward structure (as suggested by the PRSA in its preliminary submission) to test the viability of this structure. Despite some benefits, each of these models presented significant drawbacks and were not considered further at the preliminary stage of the review.

Considering the Shire's uneven population growth and the potential problem of the single-councillor wards being uncontested or having 'just enough' candidates for a contested election, the VEC reasoned that an unsubdivided structure could present significant advantages. An unsubdivided structure would overcome the problem of some wards growing or declining beyond the legislated voter-to-councillor ratio and remove the need for necessary ward boundary adjustments. It would also reduce the likelihood of uncontested elections occurring and preventing voters from choosing their preferred elected representative(s). The VEC also considered that an unsubdivided structure may better respond to shared interests and challenges and encourage councillors to take a whole-of-shire approach to representing the Shire.

In weighing up the two options, the VEC considered that an unsubdivided structure was less likely than the present electoral structure to recognise the geographic communities of interest in Campaspe Shire. Removing all internal wards could, for example, lead to reduced representation from the smaller rural towns as most of the elected representatives could come from the more populated centres. For these reasons, the current structure with necessary modifications was presented as Option A in the preliminary report, and an unsubdivided structure was presented as Option B for further consultation.

Options

After careful consideration, the VEC put forward the following options:

- Option A (preferred option)
Campaspe Shire Council consist of nine councillors elected from five wards (two three-councillor wards and three single-councillor wards).
- Option B (alternative option)
Campaspe Shire Council consist of nine councillors elected from an unsubdivided electoral structure.

Public response

Response submissions

The VEC accepted submissions responding to the preliminary report from Wednesday 7 August 2019 until 5.00 pm on Wednesday 4 September 2019. The VEC received seven response submissions. Two submitters were residents of the Shire and one submitter was a resident from outside of the Shire. Other submitters included Campaspe Shire Council, Kyabram Deakin Residents Ratepayers and Development Group Inc., the Kyvalley Progress Association and the Proportional Representation Society of Australia (Victoria-Tasmania) Inc (PRSA). A list of people who made a response submission can be found in Appendix 1. Table 1 indicates the level of support for each option.

<i>Preferences expressed in response submissions</i>	
Option A	Option B
4	3

Number of councillors

Most response submitters did not directly comment on the overall number of councillors. There were two submitters that commented on the number of councillors. One submitter (Peter Williams of Echuca) commented that Campaspe Shire was at the lower end of the band of rural local council areas with nine councillors, and that seven councillors was adequate for the size of Campaspe Shire. In contrast, the Kyabram Deakin Residents Ratepayers and Development Group Inc. stated its support for nine councillors. The group reasoned that nine councillors was an 'appropriate number when comparing Campaspe Shire with other rural councils of similar size'. The PRSA's response submission also supported nine councillors.

Electoral structure

Most response submitters supported the current electoral structure with the VEC's modified boundaries (Option A). These supporters included Campaspe Shire Council, Kyabram Deakin Residents Ratepayers and Development Group Inc., Kyvalley Progress Association and Adam Newman from Wollert (outside of the Shire). Three submitters supported Option B instead. These included the PRSA, Mr Williams of Echuca and Don McKenzie of Kyabram. Mr Williams also proposed an alternative two-ward structure.

Support for Option A

Supporters of Option A argued that the current structure recognised Campaspe Shire's geographic communities of interest and that it was more likely than an unsubdivided structure (Option B) to ensure that the smaller communities (outside of the large population centres) are

able to elect local representatives. These submitters expressed concern that Option B would leave smaller rural communities, as well as communities at the further ends of the Shire, without representation as all councillors could come from the main population centres of Echuca and Kyabram.

The Kyvalley Progress Association, which represents the small community of Kyvalley outside of Kyabram, stated that councillors from the larger towns in the Shire would be more inclined to support their own areas than the smaller communities in the Shire and those located at the far end of the Shire. The Kyabram Deakin Residents Ratepayers and Development Group Inc. similarly stated that an unsubdivided structure 'would most probably result in a slow death to communities outside of Echuca'. In its submission, Campaspe Shire Council commented that the current structure took into consideration the large size of the Shire. The Council stated that the current structure also considered 'resident populations across 15 communities' and a 'diverse and changing economy including agriculture, food processing, tourism and healthcare'.

Campaspe Shire Council and the Kyabram Deakin Residents Ratepayers and Development Group Inc. also commented on the proposed boundary adjustments. Both submitters mentioned that the boundary modifications in Option A were necessary and that they would improve boundaries and recognise communities of interest in these areas.

Support for Option B

Supporters of Option B were unanimous that the Shire would receive better representation from an unsubdivided structure as councillors would be 'compelled' to be equally informed about all areas of the Shire. In their respective submissions, Mr Williams and Mr McKenzie told the VEC that the Shire's councillors have been parochial – focusing on their own wards at the expense of representing the whole Shire. Mr McKenzie stated that the councillors in the three-councillor wards tended to 'totally dominate' and that the single-councillor ward areas were disadvantaged as their councillors had to 'do deals with other councillors' for their issues to be considered. He further stated that the current council was often perceived as 'dysfunctional' and that there was 'Councillor infighting, bullying and total lack of good Corporate Governance'.

Mr Williams commented that the boundaries in Option A were 'very artificial' and did not represent communities of interest. He argued that Echuca Ward should elect four councillors. Mr Williams also proposed a two-ward structure comprised of a northern ward and a southern ward.

The PRSA emphasised that an unsubdivided structure would ensure that elections in Campaspe Shire would completely rely on proportional representation. The PRSA opposed the current structure which included single-councillor wards. The PRSA argued that an unsubdivided structure would better ensure the majority of councillors have been elected by the affirmative

votes of an absolute majority of voters, remove the need to readjust boundaries based on population change, and provide citizens with the maximum choice of councillors to approach.

Public hearing

The VEC conducted a public hearing for those wishing to speak about their response submission at 5.30 pm on Tuesday 10 September 2019 at Campaspe Regional Library, 310 Hare Street, Echuca. A list of people who spoke at the hearing can be found in Appendix 1.

There were four people who spoke at this public hearing. They included Peter Williams (supporting Option B), Donald McKenzie (Option B), Deputy Mayor Councillor Vicki Neele who spoke on behalf of Campaspe Shire Council (Option A) and Bev Williams of Kyvalley Progress Association (Option A).

Changing to an unsubdivided electoral structure

At the outset, Mr Williams stated that he had previously served as a councillor of Campaspe Shire Council. He stated that the boundaries in the current electoral structure were 'artificial' and explained that for the Western and Kyabram-Deakin wards to have the legislated average number of voters to a councillor, they needed to include voters who were 'naturally' more associated with Echuca, which, he argued, disenfranchised these voters in and closer to Echuca. Reiterating his submission, Mr Williams proposed an alternative structure comprised of a north ward and south ward to reflect the broad focus on Echuca in the northern part of the Shire.

Mr Williams also stated the small communities of the Shire would receive appropriate representation in an unsubdivided structure because they would have enough people to vote a local candidate into the Council. He believed residents and ratepayers did not care where their councillors lived, that they would support a good candidate who could communicate their issues and concerns, and that the 'best candidates would rise' in an unsubdivided structure.

Mr McKenzie noted he had held the position of Chief Executive Officer at two northern Victorian Councils as well as several other senior roles in the region over many years. Like Mr Williams, Mr McKenzie argued that an unsubdivided structure would improve the quality of candidates and councillors. Mr McKenzie told the VEC that changing to an unsubdivided structure was urgent and necessary to help unify the Shire and reduce parochialism. Mr McKenzie explained that Campaspe Shire was diverse with 'differing communities of interest and identities' and with the population being drawn to adjoining towns and councils, such as Greater Shepparton and Greater Bendigo City Councils, which made it difficult to unite the community of Campaspe Shire. Mr McKenzie supported an unsubdivided structure or the PRSA's proposal of three three-councillor wards.

Mr McKenzie further stated that constituents in the single-councillor wards were disadvantaged as the elections tended to return councillors unopposed. He commented that potential

candidates in the single-councillor wards were less likely to stand against a longstanding councillor and because they knew the challenges that they would face representing their ward when two of the other wards had three councillors. He believed that a subdivided structure had led to a “divide and rule” syndrome in the Council.

Mr McKenzie felt that an unsubdivided structure would bring out more candidates who could appeal to voters across the shire. He believed that councillors elected from an unsubdivided structure would also take a more ‘business-like approach’ to representation and governance, were more likely to see themselves as a board of directors and would be more unified in their approach to governing the Shire. This would deliver better outcomes to the Shire on-the-whole.

Maintaining the current structure

The Deputy Mayor, Councillor Vicki Neele, spoke on behalf of Campaspe Shire Council’s submission and told the VEC that Echuca was nearly 100 kilometres from Rushworth and that an unsubdivided structure could lead to a focus on the main population centre of Echuca where there was the largest population and the highest profile. Cr Neele explained that this would result in the loss of representation for the smaller communities and for communities that were located further away from Echuca. She also noted that most of the Council’s staff were from Echuca, which added to her concerns.

Regarding the Shire’s communities of interest, Cr Neele told the VEC that generally the key towns have schools and or hospitals, and in that sense were communities in their own right. She also spoke about the Shire’s different industries and Echuca’s focus on tourism and hospitality, compared to other areas such as Kyabram with a focus on dairying.

Cr Neele commented that the councillors elected from the current structure brought an ‘innate knowledge’ about the communities in their wards. She commented that the councillors’ knowledge of local areas would be lost in the decision-making in an unsubdivided structure as councillors may not have a good understanding of many local areas in the Shire. Cr Neele was concerned that an unsubdivided structure could also lead to a situation where there would be no councillor who could be held accountable for the smaller communities at the further ends of the Shire.

Cr Neele told the VEC that she could not agree with the comment that councillors were unaware and uninterested in the issues and activities of the other wards. She believed that the current councillors tried to be across the issues of the whole Shire. She also stated that councillors frequently travelled long distances to maintain contact with their communities and that the councillors accepted that this was part of their work. This was particularly the case for the Mayor who attended events across the Shire. Cr Neele told the VEC that she was concerned that the travel would increase for councillors under an unsubdivided structure.

Cr Neele explained that local contact was important for the Shire's residents particularly so given the large size of the Shire. She noted that in an unsubdivided structure, there was a risk that voters would have 'absolutely no personal connection' with any of the councillors they see on a ballot paper.

Speaking on behalf of the Kyvalley Progress Association, Ms Bev Williams expressed concern that the small rural communities could be overlooked in an unsubdivided structure. She supported the current structure over an unsubdivided structure as the current arrangement was more likely to deliver local representatives. Ms Williams told the VEC she did not want Echuca to 'take over' and for the rural areas to 'miss out'. She explained that the Shire was different in terms of its industries and that she also had concerns that there would be loss of representation for rural communities in the Shire.

Ms Williams told the VEC her ward councillors (in Kyabram-Deakin Ward) were generally available and approachable. She also commented that in the past, the Council had more arrangements in place for the smaller communities to meet with all the councillors, but these no longer take place. She stated, for example, that the Council's Chief Executive Officer previously attended Kyvalley's Australia Day celebrations. She also noted that the Mayor had not yet visited Kyvalley, which added to her belief that an unsubdivided structure could lead to even less interest in the Council towards the smaller communities.

Water issues

Two speakers at the public hearing told the VEC that water issues and drought had led to job losses in farming and manufacturing. In support of Option B, Mr McKenzie stated that the decline of the dairy industry and 'major issues of water' needed to be addressed. He firmly believed that changing the electoral structure was necessary as it would help address these serious issues more comprehensively.

Cr Neele commented that the traditional dairy industry has been 'suffering hugely' due to the water issues, leading to farmers selling their water rights and changes to land-use in some areas. Cr Neele also mentioned the closure of several local milk factories in the Shire, which have also affected the Kyabram area. She argued that these wider events and issues have contributed to challenging times and were likely to have contributed to the consistently lower than average scores following Campaspe Shire's community satisfaction surveys.

Cr Neele also stated that the Council had five new councillors following the last election who are still finding their way which may also have contributed to the Council's community satisfaction survey results.

Findings and recommendation

The VEC's findings

The VEC proposed two options in its preliminary report. Both options would provide fair and equitable representation in accordance with the Act. Each option however, had certain advantages and disadvantages, which were discussed in the preliminary report. In the final stage of the review, the VEC carefully considered both options in relation to its own research, the submissions received, the evidence given at the public hearing and on balance, considered Option A to provide more advantages for Campaspe Shire Council.

Numbers of councillors

Determining the number of councillors for Campaspe Shire Council was not a substantially disputed element of this review. The VEC recommends continuing with nine councillors for Campaspe Shire Council. The Shire is currently at the lower end of the band of rural local council areas with nine councillors and it is forecast to continue growing at a modest rate. It is also one of Victoria's large rural local council areas and for these reasons as well as others outlined in the preliminary report, the VEC recommended nine councillors. Overall, the VEC's analysis and information provided in the submissions did not identify any special circumstances that would justify altering the number of councillors.

Electoral structure

In the final stage of the review, the VEC received arguments from those who supported Option A and those who supported Option B. Having considered the arguments, the VEC recommends retaining the existing electoral structure (Option A). The VEC notes, however, that there were strong arguments supporting both options at the final stage of the review. The VEC also notes that a small number of submissions were received, which added to the challenge of assessing the relative merits and risks associated with each option.

Option B: an unsubdivided structure

The VEC considered Option B a valid option. In the submissions received, the VEC heard that Campaspe Shire's councillors were 'minding their own patch' and there was some evidence that the shire-wide activities and processes, which had previously encouraged the councillors to take a wider view to representation had waned in recent times. In its reviews of other local councils, the VEC has observed the establishment of governance policies and processes (such as portfolio and committee systems) that helped ensure ward councillors take a whole-of-shire view to their representation. However, these types of policies and processes were not apparent in the evidence submitted to this review. Therefore, the VEC considered that there were advantages to

an unsubdivided structure for Campaspe Shire Council. Option B would more likely compel councillors to take a shire-wide view to representation, which seemed to be lacking at present.

The VEC also reasoned that an unsubdivided structure presented benefits as it could lead to better representation of the Shire's farming interests, as those votes would not be divided and diluted by internal wards. The serious water issues affecting regional communities including Campaspe Shire also suggested that the Shire's communities were facing a common challenge that could be better represented by councillors elected from an unsubdivided structure.

Supporters of Option B did not support Option A for several reasons. One reason was outlined by Mr McKenzie who stated it was not possible for proper consideration to be obtained for the wards with only one councillor because the three-member ward councillors dominated the Council. The VEC considered that the councillors in the three-councillor wards could better support their work of representing their wards on the Council, as they can support each other. However, the VEC also noted that the councillor for the single-member Waranga Ward is the current Mayor and has served two terms as Mayor, which did not suggest that the single-councillor ward representatives were not being heard on the Council.²²

Mr McKenzie also drew attention to the below average results from the Shire's community satisfaction surveys, which he considered to be evidence that the electoral structure needed to change. At the public hearing, the VEC heard different views on the reasons behind the below-average community satisfaction survey results for Campaspe Shire Council and it considered that there may be various factors contributing to the satisfaction survey results. The VEC found that it was difficult to determine whether the level of dissatisfaction with the Council's performance and services would be resolved by a change in the electoral structure.

The VEC considered that there were strong arguments in favour of Option B, as an unsubdivided structure promotes and encourages councillors to take a council-wide view to representation. However, it was unclear to the VEC whether a change in the electoral structure would deliver the desired improvement in the Council's performance, which were outlined by supporters of Option B.

Despite some compelling reasons to support Option B, the VEC reasoned that changing to an unsubdivided structure presented potential drawbacks for representing communities of interest. An unsubdivided structure was less likely to recognise the Shire's geographically-defined communities of interest.

²² Campaspe Shire Council, 'Mayor Elect and Deputy Mayor Elect Announced', Campaspe Shire Council Media Release, 5 November 2018, accessed 19 September 2019, <https://www.campaspe.vic.gov.au/council/news-and-media/media-releases/2018/11/05/mayor-elect-and-deputy-mayor-elect-announced-2/>.

The VEC also believed that there were significant risks for fair and equitable representation in an unsubdivided structure for the communities outside of the towns of Echuca and Kyabram. Over the past three general elections, the majority of candidates have been located in the two principal towns. At the 2016 election, there were eight candidates from the town of Echuca and six candidates from Kyabram, while the three single-councillor wards were unopposed.²³ The VEC considered that an unsubdivided structure could lead to a situation where most if not all councillors are elected from the more populated areas around Echuca and Kyabram.

Moreover, the Shire's uneven population growth could leave the smaller communities, particularly in the south – where populations tend to be older and the numbers are slowly decreasing – without adequate representation. The VEC also noted that while Rochester and Kyabram are reasonably close and 'on the way' to Echuca, towns like Rushworth in the south are not as naturally connected to Echuca.

While an unsubdivided structure has its merits, the VEC reasoned that in an unsubdivided structure, candidates may need to campaign across larger areas, elected representatives may also have less understanding of local issues and voters are also less likely to know all the candidates on their ballot paper. The current structure was therefore considered more advantageous than Option B for representing communities of interest in the Shire.

Two-ward structure (north and south wards)

At the public hearing, Mr Williams also supported dividing the Shire in half with a north ward focused on Echuca and a south ward for the rest of the Shire. The VEC considered the proposed structure and recognised that there may be a shared community of interest between the communities in Western and Echuca wards given their proximity. The VEC has observed some councillors in Echuca Ward have been from Western Ward over the past three elections. Nonetheless, for this structure to meet the legislated voter-to-councillor ratio, the north ward would need to encompass a large area including Echuca, and the south ward would need to encompass a similarly large area containing the balance of the Shire. The VEC considered that this electoral structure was unlikely to provide fair and equitable representation. It represented an 'urban/rural' divide between Echuca and the rest of the Shire. In addition, the structure did not support the VEC's principles to reflect and recognise communities of interest.

Option A: current structure with modified boundaries

The VEC found that the Shire continued to be characterised by geographic communities of interest, which would be better represented in a subdivided structure. These communities include the principal town of Echuca, formed by its location at the top of the Shire by the Murray River,

²³ 2016 General Election Results available at: Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC), 'Campaspe Shire Council Profile', accessed 19 September 2019, <https://www.vec.vic.gov.au/ElectoralBoundaries/CampaspeProfile.html>.

and its focus on tourism and the Port of Echuca. Echuca is forecast to continue growing at a faster rate than the rest of the Shire. The VEC notes that the second largest town of Kyabram located to the east of the Shire is also different demographically, with an older population and a broad focus on agriculture and dairying.

There are also other notable townships in the central, western, eastern and southern parts of the Shire such as Lockington and Gunbower, Rochester, Stanhope, Tongala and Rushworth, which have distinct identities based on their locations. As the VEC found in its review in 2007, the Shire's river system (Murray, Goulburn and Campaspe rivers) and the Waranga Basin have historically provided communities in Campaspe Shire with water and contributed to the different identities in these townships.²⁴ These townships also provide services and employment to their surrounding rural areas. The current electoral structure would continue to recognise these service centres and differentiate the urban area of Echuca from the various different rural areas in the Shire, ensuring that local rural communities would be represented.

While the VEC received evidence that the current council could do more to encourage its councillors to take a whole-of-council approach to representation, the submissions also highlighted the importance of electing councillors who understood local areas and local matters. The VEC considered that wards were more likely to deliver local and more accessible representatives for these communities.

Campaspe Shire Council falls under the category of large rural council areas in Victoria and the VEC acknowledges that its councillors are likely to engage in a substantial amount of travel to represent their constituents. While an unsubdivided structure could facilitate councillors sharing the task of travel, particularly to the further ends of the Shire, the VEC heard that wards have generally supported the councillors to maintain contact with their constituents and contain their workloads, which were positive features of the current structure.

The serious water issues affecting the regions and Campaspe Shire suggested to the VEC that the Shire's communities were facing a common challenge, which would support changing to an unsubdivided structure. The VEC noted that the current structure appeared to provide a balance of urban and rural interests on the Council, with the current elected councillors located in all areas in the Shire with a range of town and farming backgrounds.²⁵ The continued election of dedicated representatives from across the Shire under the current electoral structure could help to ensure all communities are represented on this issue.

Regarding the pattern of uncontested elections or 'just enough' candidates in the Shire's single-councillor wards, the VEC considered that Campaspe Shire's generally low rate of

²⁴ Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC), *Preliminary Report, Electoral Representation Review, Campaspe Shire Council*, VEC, 2007, p. 10.

²⁵ Campaspe Shire Council, 'Councillors'.

informal voting and high voter turnout over the past three elections did not suggest serious issues with the current arrangement.

At the public hearing, Cr Neele, noted that Western Ward had a by-election several months before the 2016 general election, and that the successful candidate was returned unopposed at the 2016 general election, which Cr Neele pointed out was not unusual. Moreover, there was some evidence to suggest that some, if not all, single-member ward councillors have had significant support in their communities. The candidate for Rochester Ward polled over 80% of first preference votes in the 2012 general election.²⁶

On balance, while the current structure has some deficiencies, it also has advantages for fair and equitable representation, particularly in continuing to provide representatives elected from across the Shire. Similarly, while an unsubdivided structure may lead to better shire-wide representation, it is less likely than the current electoral structure to recognise the Shire's geographic communities and can lead to a loss of representation for areas outside of Echuca and Kyabram. For these reasons, the VEC considered Option A to be more advantageous than Option B.

Modifications to Echuca and Waranga wards

As outlined in the VEC's preliminary report, to retain the existing structure, it was necessary for the VEC to revisit the current boundaries. The VEC found that two wards (Echuca and Waranga wards) required boundary adjustments to return these wards to the legislated voters-to-councillor ratio. The first boundary change affects 720 voters in Echuca Ward. They will be included in Kyabram-Deakin Ward following the modification. The second boundary modification affects 416 voters in Kyabram-Deakin Ward, and they will be included in Waranga Ward after the modification.

The boundary changes are visible in the updated model of the current structure (see Appendix 2). Overall, the VEC received no opposition to these proposed modifications in the response submissions and at the public hearings.

²⁶ VEC, 'Campaspe Shire Council Profile'.

The VEC's recommendation

The Victorian Electoral Commission recommends that Campaspe Shire Council consist of nine councillors elected from five wards, with adjustments to the current boundaries (two three-councillor wards and three single-councillor wards).

This recommendation is submitted to the Minister for Local Government as required by the *Local Government Act 1989*. The model was designated as Option A in the VEC's preliminary report for this review.

Please see Appendix 2 for a detailed map of this recommended structure.

Appendix 1: Public involvement

Preliminary submissions

Preliminary submissions were made by:

Baker, David

Proportional Representation Society of Australia (Victoria-Tasmania) Inc

Wellington, Lorraine

Response submissions

Response submissions were made by:

Campaspe Shire Council

Kyabram Deakin Residents Ratepayers and Development Group Inc

Kyvalley Progress Association

McKenzie, Donald

Newman, Adam

Proportional Representation Society of Australia (Victoria-Tasmania) Inc.

Williams, Peter

Public hearing

The following individuals spoke at the public hearing:

McKenzie, Donald

Neele, Vicki (Deputy Mayor Councillor) for Campaspe Shire Council

Williams, Bev for Kyvalley Progress Association

Williams, Peter

Appendix 2: Map

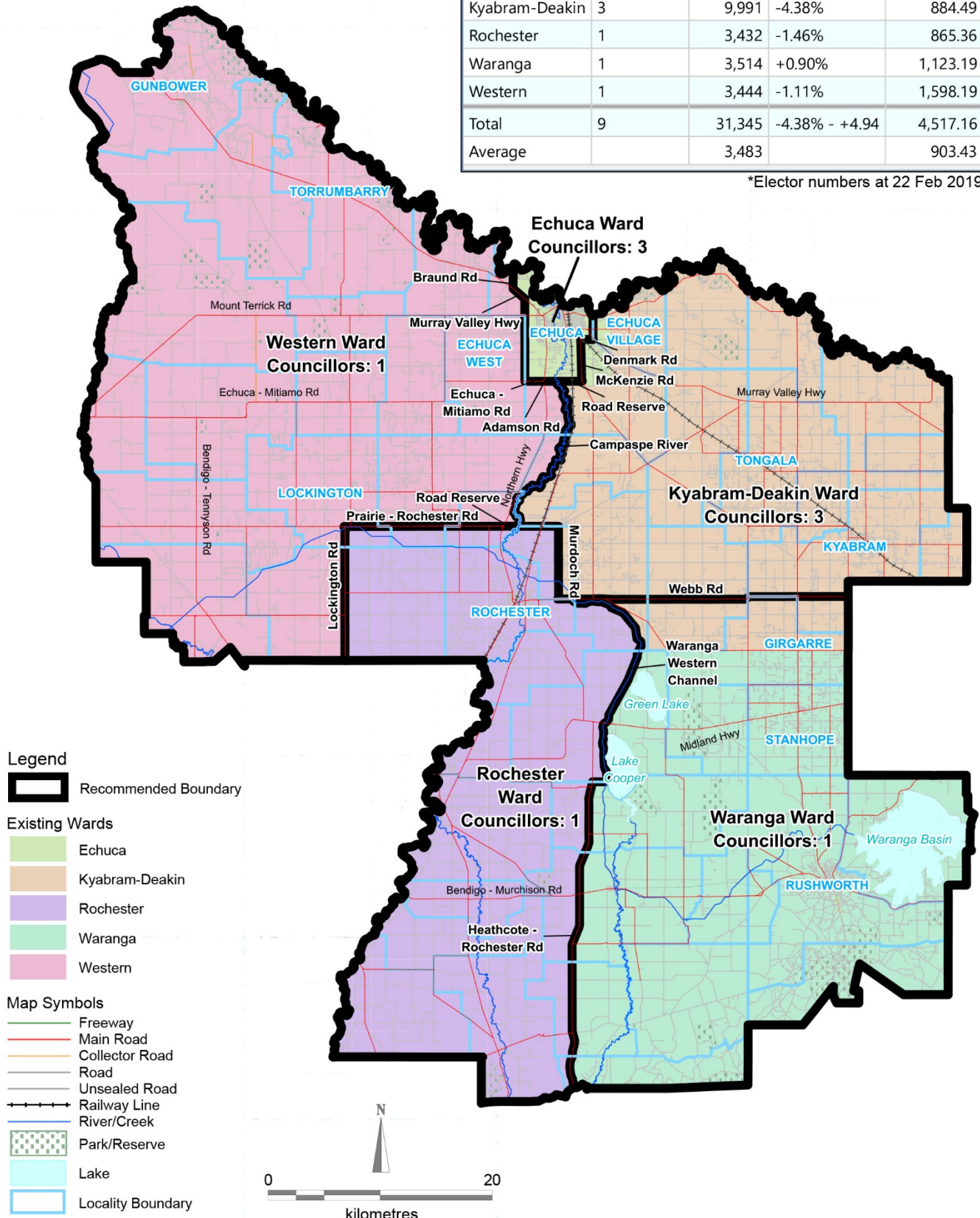
The map is provided on the next page.

Campaspe Shire Council

Map of Recommended Option
Nine Councillors, Five Wards

Ward	Councillors	Electors*	Deviation	Area sq km
Echuca	3	10,964	+4.94%	45.93
Kyabram-Deakin	3	9,991	-4.38%	884.49
Rochester	1	3,432	-1.46%	865.36
Waranga	1	3,514	+0.90%	1,123.19
Western	1	3,444	-1.11%	1,598.19
Total	9	31,345	-4.38% - +4.94	4,517.16
Average		3,483		903.43

*Elector numbers at 22 Feb 2019



- Legend**
- Recommended Boundary
 - Existing Wards
 - Echuca
 - Kyabram-Deakin
 - Rochester
 - Waranga
 - Western
 - Map Symbols
 - Freeway
 - Main Road
 - Collector Road
 - Road
 - Unsealed Road
 - Railway Line
 - River/Creek
 - Park/Reserve
 - Lake
 - Locality Boundary

Map prepared by:



Data use:



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Planning

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Appendix 3: Public information program

Advertising

In accordance with the Act, public notices of the review and the release of the preliminary report were placed in the following newspapers:

Newspaper	Notice of review	Notice of preliminary report
<i>Herald Sun</i>	Thursday 6 June	Wednesday 7 August
<i>Echuca Riverine Herald</i>	Wednesday 12 June	Wednesday 7 August
<i>Rochester Campaspe News</i>	Tuesday 11 June	Tuesday 6 August
<i>Waranga News</i>	Wednesday 12 June	Wednesday 7 August
<i>Kyabram Free Press</i>	Wednesday 12 June	Wednesday 7 August

Media releases

A media release was prepared and distributed to local media to promote the commencement of the review on Wednesday 12 June 2019. A further release was distributed with the publication of the preliminary report on Wednesday 7 August 2019. A final media advisory was circulated on the publication date of this final report.

Public information session

A public information session for people interested in the review process was held on Thursday 13 June 2019 at the Campaspe Regional Library, 310 Hare Street, Echuca.

Submissions guide

A submission guide was developed and made available on the VEC website, or in hardcopy on request, throughout the review timeline. The submission guide provided information about the review, the review timeline and how to make submissions to the review.

Online submission tool

An online submission tool was developed and made available during the submission periods of the review. The tool allowed people to make a submission from the VEC website. During the preliminary submission stage, users also had the opportunity to map out their preferred subdivisions through the online submission tool using Boundary Builder. Boundary Builder included real elector numbers so that users could see if their preferred structures and numbers of councillors met the plus-or-minus 10% rule.

VEC website

The VEC website delivered up-to-date information to provide transparency and facilitate public participation during the review process. All public submissions were published on the website.

Email and social media engagement

The VEC delivered an information email campaign targeted at known community groups and communities of interest in the local council area. This included a reminder email at each milestone of the representation review process.

The VEC also published sponsored social media advertising that was geo-targeted to users within the local council area. This included advertising at both the preliminary submission and response submission stages. The total reach of these posts was 5,114 during the preliminary submission stage and 5,984 during the response submission stage.

Council communication resources

The VEC provided the Council with a communication pack that included information on the review in various formats. While the council is encouraged to distribute this information and raise awareness about the review, the VEC is an independent reviewer and all communications resources include reference and links to the VEC website and core materials.

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