



2015-16

**Council
Representation
Reviews**

Final Report

2015 Wodonga City Council Electoral Representation Review

Wednesday 10 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 Wodonga City Council took place in 2004. The review recommended an increase to seven councillors elected from the municipality at-large.

Preliminary submissions

Preliminary submissions opened at the commencement of the current review on Wednesday 18 February. The VEC received three submissions by the deadline for submissions at 5.00 pm on Wednesday 18 March.

Preliminary report

A preliminary report was released on Wednesday 15 April with the following preferred option for consideration:

Wodonga City Council consist of seven councillors elected from an unsubdivided municipality.

Response submissions

The VEC received one submission responding to the preliminary report by the deadline for submissions at 5.00 pm on Wednesday 13 May.

Public hearing

The VEC scheduled a public hearing for those wishing to speak about their response submission at 6.00 pm on Monday 18 May. There were no requests to speak so the hearing was not held.

Recommendation

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) recommends Wodonga City Council continue to consist of seven councillors elected from an unsubdivided structure.

This electoral structure was designated as the preferred option 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 Wodonga City Council representation review

3.1 Profile of Wodonga City Council

The City of Wodonga was formed in 1994 by the amalgamation of the Rural City of Wodonga and part of the Shires of Chiltern and Yackandandah. The City of Wodonga is approximately 433 square kilometres and includes the main urban centre of Wodonga, a number of industrial precincts and significant rural hinterland areas. Wodonga is bounded by Towong Shire in the south-east and Indigo Shire in the south and south-west. The Murray River and the Victoria-New South Wales border form the northern boundary of the City of Wodonga. The municipality is closely connected to the City of Albury on the New South Wales side of the border and the two municipalities form the Greater Albury-Wodonga Region. The majority of the population reside in the urban centre. Major suburbs in the City of Wodonga include Baranduda, Belvoir, Federation Park, Martin Park, Melrose, Wodonga and West Wodonga.

In 2013, the population of the City of Wodonga was approximately 37,345 people.⁵ The City has a relatively young population with a median age of 34.8, compared with the rural and regional average median age of 41.6. Young people up to the age of 17 are the most populous age group (26.1 per cent), followed by 18 to 34 year olds (23.7 per cent). Both groups are significantly higher than the rural/regional Victorian average. There are several educational facilities available in the City of Wodonga, including a regional campus of La Trobe University (approximately 1,000 students) and the Wodonga Institute of TAFE.

A key point of difference between the City of Wodonga and other rural/regional Victorian councils is the opposite trend in terms of population ageing. In 2026, the largest age group is forecast to be people aged between 15 and 34 (29.1 per cent), followed by people aged up to 14 years (21.6 per cent). In comparison, people aged 70 years and over will comprise only nine per cent of the total population. The population is forecast to increase to 51,145 by 2026, at an average annual growth rate of 1.8 per cent.⁶ The suburbs forecast to grow most significantly in population by 2031 include White Box Rise (annual growth rate of 11.03 per cent) and North Leneva (annual growth rate of 12.01 per cent).

The City of Wodonga has a higher percentage of people born overseas (13.5 per cent) compared with other rural and regional municipalities in Victoria (10.6 per cent). England, Germany, New Zealand, the Netherlands and Scotland are identified as the top countries of origin. The municipality also has a slightly higher percentage of residents identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (1.9 per cent) than the average (1.5 per cent).

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Estimated Resident Population, Regional Population Growth, Australia, 3218.0.

⁶ *ibid.*

Communities of interest

Wodonga City Council has a relatively large Indigenous population. Around 1,834 indigenous people live in the wider Albury-Wodonga area and 700 of these reside within the City of Wodonga. Geographic communities of interest include the large industrial precinct in the north, which provides major employment in the region. The Australian Army has a military area in the east of the municipality and, in the west, sits an education precinct that includes a La Trobe University campus and the Wodonga Institute of TAFE. A large green field development is planned for the area that includes North Leneva, White Box Rise and Baranduda.⁷

3.2 Current electoral structure

The last representation review for Wodonga City Council occurred in 2004. Prior to the 2004 review, the City of Wodonga’s electoral structure was comprised of five councillors elected from the municipality at-large. The review recommended an increase to seven councillors elected from the municipality at-large. The VEC, in consultation with the community, identified that increasing the number of councillors to seven would bring Wodonga City Council in line with comparable councils and was appropriate for its growing population demands and geography—a jurisdiction with a single, dominant centre in a relatively small area. The need to increase diversity of representation on the Council was also identified by a number of submitters.

3.3 Public information program

Public involvement is an important part of the representation review process. The Wodonga City Council representation review commenced on Wednesday 18 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 1.

Table 1: Public notices

Newspaper	Notice of review	Notice of preliminary report
<i>Herald Sun</i>	Wednesday 4 February	Wednesday 1 April
<i>Albury Wodonga News Weekly</i>	Wednesday 18 February	Wednesday 15 April
<i>Albury Border Mail</i>	Saturday 21 February	Saturday 18 April

⁷ Wodonga City Council, Discussion draft Leneva-Baranduda growth area framework plan, 2012.

Media release

A media release was prepared and distributed to local media at the commencement of the review on Wednesday 18 February. A further release was distributed at the publication of the preliminary report on Wednesday 15 April.

Public information session

A public information session for people interested in the review process was held at 6.00 pm on Monday 23 February in the Council Chamber, Level 2, Wodonga Council, 104 Hovell Street, Wodonga.

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 three preliminary submissions by the deadline for submissions at 5.00 pm on Wednesday 18 March. A list of people who made a preliminary submission can be found in Appendix 1.

Number of councillors

Two submissions were in favour of retaining seven councillors and one submission favoured increasing councillor numbers to nine.

Wodonga City Council's submission argued for retaining the current number of councillors on the basis that the municipality had the second lowest number of voters per councillor of the seven regional city councils across Victoria. The Council further argued that the estimated number of voters per councillor in the year 2026 would still have the second-lowest number of voters per councillor even before growth was calculated in comparable areas. The Proportional Representation Society of Australia (PRSA) supported seven councillors, recommending an odd number of councillors if councillor numbers were to increase.

Robert Anderson submitted in favour of increasing councillor numbers to nine based on the projected growth expected in the municipality in the next five to 10 years.

Electoral structure

The preferred electoral structure for Wodonga differed between submitters. Wodonga City Council argued that, despite population growth, the council area remains geographically unchanged from a small, single, dominant centre that is typically suited to an unsubdivided electoral structure—a key argument made by the VEC for recommending the structure in its 2004 representation review of the Council. The PRSA indicated that seven councillors from an unsubdivided structure would be appropriate.

Mr Anderson recommended a three three-councillor ward structure with ward names of Whitlam, Haines and Mungabareena, but did not provide specific boundaries.

4.2 Preliminary report

A preliminary report was released on Wednesday 15 April. The VEC considered public submissions and research findings when formulating the options presented in the preliminary report.

Number of councillors

The VEC considered that seven councillors is the appropriate number of councillors for Wodonga City Council. As the Council highlighted in their submission, the municipality is at the lower end of the voter-to-councillor ratio when compared with other regional city councils and, even with the projected population growth, would remain well within acceptable range when compared with similar rural city councils.

Table 2: comparable councils outlined in Wodonga City Council submission

Municipality	Population (2011 Census)	Current estimate of voters [#]	Number of councillors	Number of voters per councillor
Greater Geelong*	210,363	177,363	12	14,780
Greater Bendigo	100,617	83,641	9	9,293
Ballarat*	93,501	76,304	9	8,478
Latrobe	72,396	55,234	9	6,137
Greater Shepparton*	60,449	44,309	7	6,330
Wodonga*	35,519	28,574	7	4,082
Warrnambool*	32,029	25,850	7	3,693

* The municipality is currently undergoing 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.

Electoral structure

The VEC considered that an unsubdivided structure was the most appropriate structure for Wodonga City Council as the municipality contains a single, dominant centre and is relatively small in size.

The VEC did note that one submitter preferred a subdivided structure, and in response undertook modelling to ascertain the viability of a ward-based structure. However, the geographic composition of the municipality—a single, dominant centre with sparse population in other areas—precluded developing logical boundaries that met legislative requirements.

For example, a structure that separated rural and urban areas of the municipality, while keeping the main community of interest in one ward (i.e. the city), required creating one six-councillor urban ward and one single-councillor semi-rural ward, shown in Diagram 1.

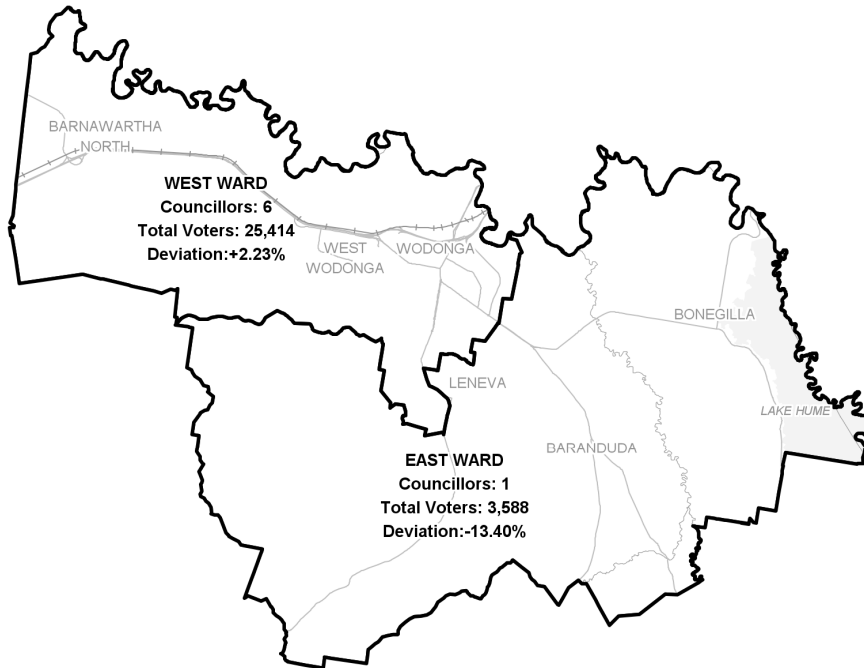


Diagram 1: subdivided structure; one six-councillor ward and one single-councillor ward

A two-ward structure with one three-councillor ward and one four-councillor ward was also modelled. However, this required dividing the city centre in half—effectively dividing the residential and industrial area in the north of the council area, which are both significant geographic communities of interest, shown in Diagram 2.

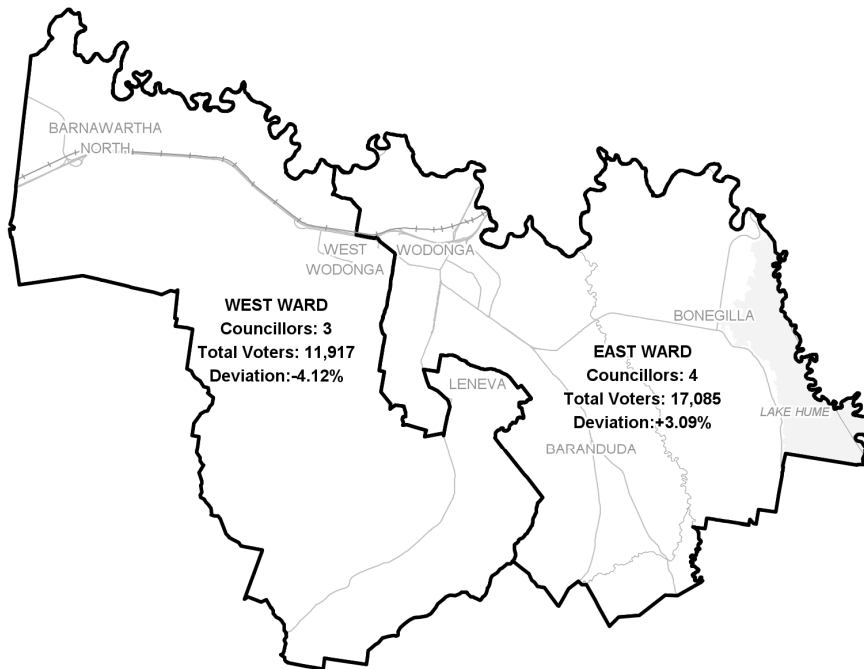


Diagram 2: subdivided structure; one three-councillor ward and one four-councillor ward

Preferred option

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

Wodonga 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 15 April until 5.00 pm on Wednesday 13 May. The VEC received one response submission from the PRSA that supported the preferred option, repeating the arguments presented in the preliminary report.

5.2 Public hearing

The VEC scheduled a public hearing for those wishing to speak about their response submission at 6.00 pm on Monday 18 May in the Council Chamber, Level 2, Wodonga Council, 104 Hovell Street, Wodonga. There were no requests to speak so the hearing was not held.

6 Findings and recommendation

6.1 The VEC's findings

The VEC consulted on one option for Wodonga City Council—seven councillors elected from an unsubdivided structure. This report has summarised the process the VEC completed to gather information, including public submissions, to develop and report on the option under consideration. The VEC now provides its findings for recommendation to the Minister.

Number of councillors

The VEC considers that seven councillors is the appropriate number for Wodonga City Council. As the Council's submission highlights, the municipality is at the lower end of the voter-to-councillor ratio when compared with other regional city councils. Even with increased population growth, the projected number of voters per councillor is expected to be 4,682 in 2024, which is still below Greater Shepparton's current voter-to-councillor ratio. Increasing the number of councillors to nine would decrease the number of voters per councillor to 3,174, which is significantly lower than the City of Warrnambool—currently the regional city with the lowest voter-to-councillor ratio.

Apart from voter-to-councillor ratios, the VEC takes into account special circumstances that may potentially increase councillor workloads, such as cultural and linguistic diversity within the community, major socio-economic disparity, ageing populations, and large geographic areas within the municipality. The VEC's research indicates that there are no special circumstances for the City of Wodonga that warrant an increase in numbers.

The municipality has a small geographic area composed of a single dominant city that is well serviced by both Wodonga and Albury. Demographically, the municipality has a lower percentage of low income households (21.7 per cent) compared with regional Victoria (25.4 per cent). The population is significantly younger than the rural/regional average, and is expected to retain that trend. In 2026, the largest age group is forecast to be people aged between 15 and 34 years (around 29 per cent of the population) compared to people aged 70 years and over, who will comprise around nine per cent of the population.⁸ Workforce participation in the municipality is significantly higher than other regional/rural areas, and while unemployment is higher, this is not unusual where workforce participation rates are also high.

Electoral structure

The VEC considers that an unsubdivided structure is the most appropriate structure for Wodonga City Council. The VEC undertook modelling to ascertain the viability of a subdivided structure,

⁸ *Victoria in Future 2014*, op. cit.

however, the geographic composition of the municipality—a single, dominant centre with sparse population in other areas—meant that developing logical boundaries that met legislative requirements was not possible. The VEC notes that forecast residential growth in the south-east of the City, between Baranduda and North Leneva, means that a ward structure may be viable in the future.

6.2 The VEC's recommendation

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) recommends Wodonga City Council continue to consist of seven councillors elected from an unsubdivided structure.

This electoral structure was designated as the preferred option 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:

Robert Anderson

Proportional Representation Society of Australia (Victoria-Tasmania) Inc

Wodonga City Council

Response submissions

Response submissions were received from:

Proportional Representation Society of Australia (Victoria-Tasmania) Inc

Appendix 2: Map

Wodonga City Council

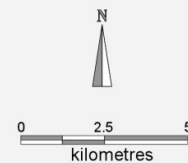
Map of Recommended Option
Seven Councillors, Unsubdivided

Ward	Councillors	Electors	Area sq km
Unsubdivided	7	29,002	434.63
Total for all Electorates	7	29,002	434.63
Electors per councillor		4,143	



Legend

- Proposed Boundary
- Existing Wards**
- Unsubdivided
- Map Symbols**
- Freeway
- Main Road
- Collector Road
- Road
- Unsealed Road
- Railway Line
- River/Creek
- Park/Reserve
- Lake
- Locality Boundary



Map prepared by the Victorian Electoral Commission
Vicmap spatial data provided by Department of Environment and Primary Industries
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