

Local council ward boundary review

Preliminary Report

Baw Baw Shire Council

February 2024



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February 2024

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1	9 February 2024	Program sponsor	Final proofread and confirmed for publication
1.1	16 February 2024	Deputy Electoral Commissioner	Amendment to clarify wording, pages 12 & 14.

Acknowledgement of Country

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) acknowledges the Bunurong, Gunaikurnai and the Wurundjeri people as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters for which it is holding this review and pays respects to ancestors and Elders past, present and emerging. The VEC acknowledges their custodianship for many thousands of years and their continuing living culture.

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Executive summary

Under section 17 of the *Local Government Act 2020* (Vic) (the Act), the Minister for Local Government has asked the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) to conduct ward boundary reviews for 10 local council areas prior to the next general local council elections in October 2024.

For these 10 councils, the number of voters per councillor is forecast to be out of balance by October 2024, with the number of voters per councillor in one or more wards forecast to vary from the average number of voters per councillor for all of the wards by more than 10 per cent.

Baw Baw Shire Council is one of the 10 local council areas under review. The purpose of this review is to correct this forecast imbalance for the October 2024 local council election.

In its review, the VEC is looking at:

- the number of currently enrolled voters in each ward
- the forecast number of enrolled voters at the next election
- adjustments to the locations of existing ward boundaries.

At the end of the review, the VEC will recommend ward boundary changes to the minister, with the aim of all wards in Baw Baw Shire Council being within the legislated +/-10% tolerance at the time of the 2024 local council election.

This preliminary report presents proposed ward boundary adjustments for Baw Baw Shire Council.

More information about the background to the review is available on [page 6](#).

Ward boundary models

After considering research and the requirements of the Act, the VEC is presenting 2 models for public consultation. These models propose different options for ward boundary changes to Baw Baw Shire Council.

Details on these models, including maps, are available in [Appendix 1](#).

Next steps

The VEC is now seeking feedback on its preliminary ward boundary models. You can make a response submission to the preliminary models until 5 pm on Wednesday 6 March 2024. If any submitters ask to speak at a public hearing, the VEC will hold this online on Friday 15 March 2024. Following the hearing, the VEC will present its final recommendation to the minister on Wednesday 10 April 2024.

More information about the review process is available on the VEC website at vec.vic.gov.au

Background

About the 2024 ward boundary reviews

Under section 15(2) of the *Local Government Act 2020* (Vic), for a council that is divided into wards:

- a) each ward should have an approximately equal number of voters per councillor; and
- b) the number of voters per councillor in a ward should not vary from the average number of voters per councillor for all of the wards by more than 10 per cent.

On 22 February 2023, the VEC provided advice to the Minister for Local Government on councils that were projected to have at least one ward with the number of voters per councillor outside this +/-10% range at the time of the October 2024 local council elections.

This advice was based on:

- current enrolment and enrolment trends
- future population projections
- legislated changes to council entitlements for council-enrolled voters.

On 20 April 2023, in response to this advice and under section 17 of the Act, the minister asked the VEC to conduct ward boundary reviews for 10 local council areas before the October 2024 local council elections. These reviews aim to balance the number of voters per councillor for the wards of these 10 councils in time for the 2024 elections.

Baw Baw Shire Council is one of the 10 local council areas under review.

In its review, the VEC is looking at:

- the number of currently enrolled voters in each ward
- the forecast number of enrolled voters at the next election
- adjustments to the locations of existing ward boundaries.

A ward boundary review does not change a council's electoral structure, number of councillors, or ward names. A ward boundary review also cannot change the external boundaries of a local council, divide local councils, or amalgamate local councils.

At the end of the review, the VEC will recommend ward boundary adjustments to the minister, with the aim of all wards in Baw Baw Shire Council being within the legislated +/-10% tolerance at the time of the 2024 local council election.

The ward boundary review panel

Leading the VEC's review is a ward boundary review panel, which has 2 members:

- the Electoral Commissioner – Mr Sven Bluemmel (Chairperson)
- the Program Sponsor, Electoral Structure and Boundary Review Program – Ms Kirsty Williamson.

Administrative and technical support for the panel is provided by the VEC's team of electoral structure and boundary review experts as well as specialists from across the VEC.

Public engagement

Public information program

The VEC is conducting a public information and awareness program about the Baw Baw Shire Council ward boundary review. This includes:

- printed public notices in state-wide newspapers
- public information sessions to outline the review process and respond to questions from the community
- a media release to announce the start of the review
- information on social media channels
- website content on vec.vic.gov.au, including:
 - current information on the review process
 - fact sheets for each council under review and a submission guide.

Baw Baw Shire Council was also offered 2 optional methods to promote the reviews:

- printed public notices in local newspapers
- targeted social media advertisements for the council area.

Baw Baw Shire Council took up the option for local newspaper notices but not the option for targeted social media.

Public consultation

The VEC now invites input to the ward boundary review of Baw Baw Shire Council via:

- response submissions to this preliminary report
- an online public hearing for anyone who makes a response submission and wishes to speak to the ward boundary review panel and expand on their submission.

Public submissions are an important part of the review process and the VEC will consider them alongside other factors during the review. These factors are outlined below.

Considerations in developing models

The models in this preliminary report comply with the Act and were developed through careful consideration of:

- research and analysis conducted by the VEC, including geospatial, electoral and demographic data.
- rates or patterns of population and voter change over time, and relevant forecasts of growth or decline based on forecast information provided by .id (informed decisions, a company specialising in demographics and forecasting).

When developing the preliminary models for Baw Baw Shire Council, the VEC considered:

- whether the adjusted wards would comply with section 15(2) of the Act (see below), and how long they are likely to comply
- whether meaningful and effective ward boundaries could be established and whether these would be easily identifiable to local communities
- the representation of communities of interest
- the voter distribution and physical features of the area, and the impact these may have on the shape and size of wards
- the scale of ward boundary changes, aiming for minimal change (where possible).

In addition to the above, the VEC's final recommendation will also consider matters raised in public response submissions.

Under section 15(2) of the Act, subdivided structures must aim for an approximately equal number of voters per councillor across all wards. This means the number of voters represented by each councillor in a ward should be within +/-10% of the average number of voters per councillor for all wards of that council.

During this review, the VEC aims to recommend ward boundary adjustments that help ensure a council's wards comply with section 15(2) at the time of the 2024 local council elections and, if possible, also comply based on voter numbers at the time the review is conducted. The VEC uses forecasts of population and voter change to assess compliance at the 2024 elections with as much accuracy as possible.

In some cases, population change and other factors impacting voter numbers mean it is not possible to adjust the ward boundaries of a council so that both 'current' (at the time of the review) and 'forecast' (at October 2024) voter numbers are within the legislated +/-10% tolerance. Where this happens, the VEC prioritises compliance at the October 2024 elections to ensure each vote will have approximately equal value at the 2024 elections. In some cases, the VEC's recommended model may set the current ward deviations outside the +/-10% tolerance. This is because the ward deviations are forecast to change over a short period of time and move within the +/-10% tolerance by the time of the 2024 local council elections.

One of the factors that may impact compliance with section 15(2) is the number of current and forecast voters with ratepayer-based voting entitlements, also known as council-enrolled electors. Voters' rolls include both state-enrolled electors (the majority of the roll) and a smaller number of council-enrolled electors. The Act introduced changes to ratepayer-based entitlement categories, which come into full effect at the 2024 local council elections. The VEC will take this change to the makeup of voters' rolls, and therefore compliance with section 15(2) of the Act, into consideration during this review.

About Baw Baw Shire Council

Profile

Baw Baw Shire is a large council in the Gippsland region of Victoria, located about 90 km east of central Melbourne. The shire covers an area of 4,025 km² and has a population of 57,626 (ABS 2022a). It is bordered by Mansfield and Yarra Ranges shire councils to the north, Wellington Shire Council and Latrobe City Council to the east, South Gippsland Shire Council to the south, and Cardinia Shire Council to the west.

The shire consists of 98 localities, ranging from major population centres to remote localities with very few or no residents at all. Warragul (19,134) and Drouin (14,764) are the 2 main population centres and account for nearly 60% of the shire's total population (ABS 2022a, ABS 2022c, ABS 2022d). There are several medium-sized townships, including Longwarry, Trafalgar, and Yarragon along the Princes Highway, and Neerim South to the north of Warragul. Many small townships and rural settlements service surrounding primary industries (DTP 2023).

The Traditional Custodians of the land in the Baw Baw Shire Council area are the Bunurong, Gunaikurnai and the Wurundjeri peoples. However, Traditional Custodians for the area north of Drouin and into the Great Dividing Range have not been formally recognised (VAHC 2023).

Landscape

Bordered by the Great Dividing Range to the north and the Strzelecki Ranges to the south, the shire stretches from Toongabbie in the east to Longwarry in the west. Most of the shire's population centres are located along the Princes Highway and the Melbourne-Bairnsdale railway line, which cross the south of the council area from east to west.

Four reservoirs provide water to both Melbourne and the Gippsland region, including the Thomson Reservoir, which provides around 60% of Melbourne's water storage capacity (Melbourne Water 2024). Much of the shire's north is designated as conservation reserves, state and national parks, or forest plantations. The Baw Baw National Park covers 135 km² of the Baw Baw Plateau.

Forests and plantations make up 50% of the total council area, or nearly 60% when including nature reserves (ABARES 2022). A third of the land is used for agriculture (ABARES 2022), most of which is in the southern half of the council. The Baw Baw Shire area is one of the most productive council areas in Australia for dairy and potatoes (DAFF 2022).

Community

The population of Baw Baw Shire Council is projected to increase by nearly 30,000 residents by 2041, to reach over 87,000 (.id 2022b). Most of this growth is expected in Warragul and Drouin (DTP 2023), with moderate growth in the towns of Trafalgar, Yarragon, Longwarry, and Neerim South. The council is actively working to restrict growth in its rural towns because of environmental constraints, as well as difficulties in servicing these areas and a desire to maintain their rural character (DTP 2023).

The median age in the council at the last Census was 41, which was lower than the median of 43 for inner regional councils overall but higher than the Victorian average which is 38 years (ABS 2022a, 2022b). The main ancestry groups reported at the last Census were English, Australian, Scottish and Irish. Australia was the country of birth for nearly 82% of the shire's residents, similar to other inner regional Victorian councils, but higher than Victoria as a whole which is 65% (ABS 2022a, 2022b).

The top 5 employment industries are health care and social assistance, construction, education and training, retail, and agriculture, forestry and fishing. Dairy farming and forestry have been important industries for the shire, but the number of people employed in these industries has declined, particularly with the end of native forest harvesting from January 2024 (ABS 2017, VicForests 2023). Personal and household median weekly incomes are \$726 and \$1,495 respectively, similar to other inner regional councils but lower than the Victoria as a whole at \$803 and \$1,759 respectively (ABS 2022a, 2022b).

As in other regional councils, Baw Baw Shire Council has a high proportion of separate dwellings at 91.5%, compared to the rest of Victoria at 73%. There is also a rate of home ownership of 78% which is higher than average in Victoria of 68.3% (ABS 2022a). There is a slightly higher proportion of family households in the shire at 38.4% of total households than compared to Regional Victoria where family households make up 34.7% of total households (.id 2022b).

Current electoral structure

Baw Baw Shire Council has a total of 9 councillors and is divided into 3 wards with 3 councillors per ward (Central, East, and West wards).



Figure 1: Diagram of current electoral structure of Baw Baw Shire Council.

There are an estimated 46,101 voters in Baw Baw Shire Council, with an estimated ratio of 5,122 voters per councillor.

By October 2024, the voter-to-councillor ratio of East Ward is forecast to be outside -10%.

Visit the VEC website at vec.vic.gov.au for more information on Baw Baw Shire Council.

Last electoral structure review

The VEC conducted an electoral representation review of Baw Baw Shire Council in 2015. That review was carried out under the *Local Government Act 1989* (Vic), which was replaced by the *Local Government Act 2020* (Vic).

After conducting the review, the VEC recommended that Baw Baw Shire Council continue to consist of 9 councillors elected from 3 wards (3 wards with 3 councillors each)

Visit the VEC website at vec.vic.gov.au to access a copy of the 2015 representation review final report.

Preliminary findings and models

A major consideration for boundary adjustments across Baw Baw Shire Council during this review is how to best balance ward deviations given the population growth occurring in the west of the shire around Drouin and Warragul, while also ensuring adequate representation for all areas of the shire.

Ward boundary models for public feedback

The VEC considered a range of ward boundary adjustments for Baw Baw Shire Council and chose the strongest 2 models for public consultation.

The following 2 models are presented for community consideration:

- Model 1, which proposes changes to the boundaries of all wards.
- Model 2, which proposes changes to the boundaries of all wards, with different boundaries to Model 1.

Maps of the preliminary models are included in [Appendix 1](#).

Model 1

Model 1 creates a clear distinction between the more urban Central and West wards and the more rural East Ward. To achieve this, it reduces the urban wards to areas zoned predominantly for residential development. Of the 2 preliminary models, the wards proposed under Model 1 have the best chance of remaining within the +/-10% deviation until at least 2028.

In this model, Central Ward's southern boundary is shifted north to follow the Warragul locality boundary and East West Road between Butlers Track and Lardners Track. As a result, most of Warragul South is united in the more rural-based East Ward. This also strengthens the ward boundary by reducing the number of property boundaries used and avoids creating an odd shape for the new wards.

Changes to West Ward are more substantial, with areas in the north and south transferred to East Ward. In the north, the Tarago River becomes the new northern boundary for West Ward. South of Drouin, the West Ward boundary mainly follows the Drouin and Longwarry locality boundaries. The one exception to this is the small section of Drouin South north of Ringin Road that is included in West Ward to capture areas zoned for residential development within the ward.

Model 1 was considered to have a good balance between several competing factors, as follows:

- Existing ward boundaries are retained where possible, keeping Lardners Track as the boundary between West and Central wards and making minimal change to Central Ward overall.
- Proposed and adjusted boundaries follow many significant features such as waterways and locality boundaries resulting in geographically strong divisions and easily identifiable boundaries for the local residents.

- The model is robust as the projected number of voters in wards is predicted to be within the +/-10% range until at least 2028.

One potential drawback of Model 1 is the use of the Tarago River as a ward boundary between West and East Ward. While it is a strong physical feature, the river flows through the rural localities of Drouin West and Longwarry North and separates residents north and south of the river into different wards.

Another potential drawback of Model 1 is that, in the effort to create wards that will comply until 2028, the proposed wards are significantly different in size. While the number of voters in each ward is approximately equal, the largely rural East Ward comprises most of the council area to match the voter numbers and growth of the Central and West wards, which are dominated by the towns of Warragul and Drouin respectively.

The changes in Model 1 also impact a higher number of voters than compared with Model 2. Based on current enrolments, Model 1 results in 1,759 voters becoming part of East Ward – 1,690 of those from West Ward and 69 from Central Ward.

The panel also notes that the name of East Ward under Model 1 may no longer be entirely appropriate given that the ward touches both the east and west boundaries of the council. However, ward name changes are not a consideration of this review.

Model 2

Model 2 proposes the least changes to current boundaries, so that wards comply with legislation through to October 2024 without impacting as many voters as in Model 1.

In Model 2, the southern boundary of Central Ward is shifted north to follow the Warragul locality boundary. This results in all of Warragul South being in the proposed East Ward.

The only changes to the boundaries of West Ward are north of Drouin, where a new boundary is created following locality boundaries. Ada, Brandy Creek, Gentle Annie, and Jindivick all move from West Ward to East Ward and the southern boundaries of Jindivick and Gentle Annie form the new ward boundary. Although Brandy Creek and Jindivick are close to both Drouin and Warragul, their more rural characteristics suggest they have communities of interest in common with the less-urban East Ward.

The panel identified the benefits of Model 2 as follows:

- Existing ward boundaries are retained as much as possible. Lardners Track is retained as the boundary between West and Central wards, and minimal changes made to Central Ward overall. The boundary of West Ward south of Drouin is unchanged.
- Boundary changes proposed north of Drouin follow locality boundaries, which would be recognisable to local communities.
- Difference in ward size between West and East wards is less than for Model 1 (although East Ward remains much larger than either West or Central ward, which is unavoidable due to the population distribution across the council)
- Proposed changes impact fewer voters than in Model 1.

Based on current enrolments, the proposed boundary adjustments under Model 2 would impact 702 voters, fewer than would be impacted by the proposed boundary changes of Model 1. Of the voters impacted, 578 would be transferred from West Ward to East Ward, 109 from Central to East Ward and 15 voters from East to Central Ward.

The significant drawback of Model 2 is that this model is unlikely to remain within the legislated +/-10% range for as long as Model 1. While Model 2 is forecast to be within legislated range for the 2024 election it is unlikely to last until 2028. The forecast growth in Drouin and Warragul combined with the minimal-change approach of Model 2 would mean that another ward boundary review would likely be required before the 2028 local council elections.

As in Model 1, the panel notes that the name of East Ward under Model 2 may no longer be entirely appropriate given that the ward touches both the east and west boundaries of the council. However, ward name changes are not a consideration of this review.

Next steps

Response submissions

Any person or group, including the local council under review, can make a response submission to the VEC. Your submission should address the model or models proposed in this preliminary report.

You can make a submission:

	<p>Online</p> <p>Visit vec.vic.gov.au and make an account to use the online Public Submission Tool. You may save a draft submission to finish later.</p>
	<p>By email</p> <p>BawBaw.WardReview@vec.vic.gov.au</p>
	<p>By post</p> <p>Ward boundary review panel Victorian Electoral Commission Level 11, 530 Collins St Melbourne VIC 3000</p>

The panel must receive all response submissions before 5 pm on Wednesday 6 March 2024. If you post your submission, it must reach the VEC before the deadline. Late submissions will not be accepted.

Required information

To be considered, your submission must include your:

- full name
- contact phone number or email address
- postal or residential address.

To protect the integrity and transparency of the review process, the VEC will not consider submissions without this information. If you are submitting as a group or organisation, you must include a nominated contact person authorised to submit on behalf of your group.

The VEC will handle information provided by submitters in accordance with its privacy policy at vec.vic.gov.au/privacy

Public access to submissions

To ensure transparency in the ward boundary review process, your submission will be published on the VEC website at vec.vic.gov.au. The VEC will remove your signature and

contact details, including residential and postal addresses, from all public copies but must publish your full name (or group name) and locality (suburb or town).

Please note that any submission content that is potentially defamatory, offensive, obscene or that includes the personal information of people or organisations who are not a party to the submission may also be redacted before publication.

Public hearing

If you make a response submission, you can also ask to speak at an online public hearing to support your submission and expand on your views.

The online public hearing is scheduled for:

Time: 2 pm

Date: Friday 15 March 2024

The VEC encourages participation in the public hearing. If you wish to speak at the public hearing, you **must** indicate this in your response submission. The public hearing will not be held if there are no requests to speak.

Anyone can attend a public hearing, but you will only be able to speak if you expressly asked to speak in your response submission. If you ask to speak, the VEC will contact you to arrange a time for you to speak at the hearing. You will have 10 minutes to address the public hearing panel. The members of the public hearing panel may ask you questions.

Visit the VEC website at vec.vic.gov.au for more information on public hearings.

Final report

Following the public hearing, the VEC will consider all evidence and prepare a final report for the Minister for Local Government containing recommended ward boundary adjustments for the local council.

The final report is scheduled to be provided to the minister on Wednesday 10 April 2024. The minister will consider the final reports, including any determination to make the reports publicly available. Any change to the ward boundaries of Baw Baw Shire Council following this review is expected to apply at the October 2024 local council elections. Under the Act, the final council electoral structure will be set by an Order in Council published in the Victoria Government Gazette.

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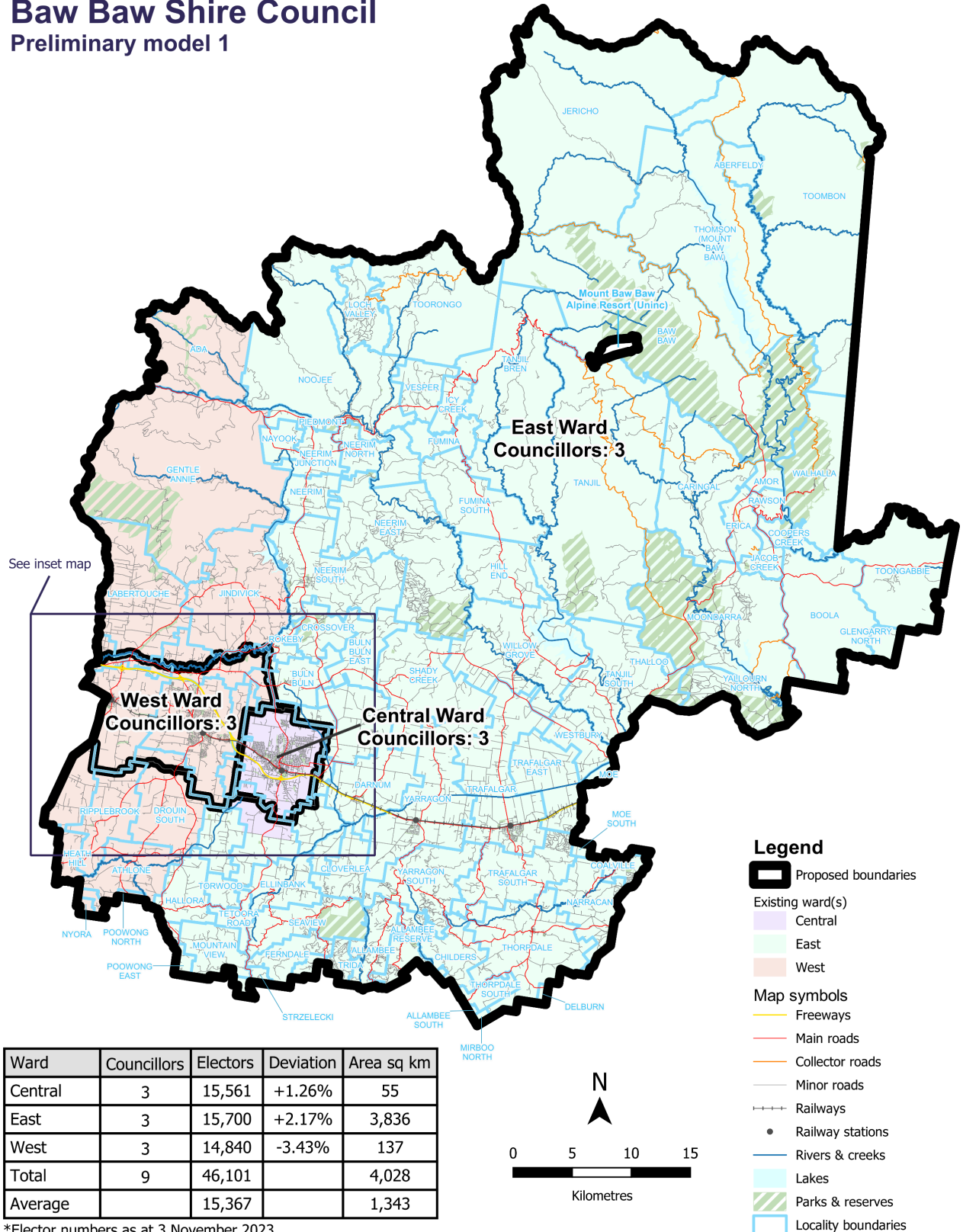
Appendix 1: Model maps

The following maps are included in this report:

Map	Page
Model 1 – with proposed changes to the boundaries of all wards.	19
Model 2 – with proposed changes to the boundaries of all wards, with different boundaries to Model 1.	22

Baw Baw Shire Council

Preliminary model 1

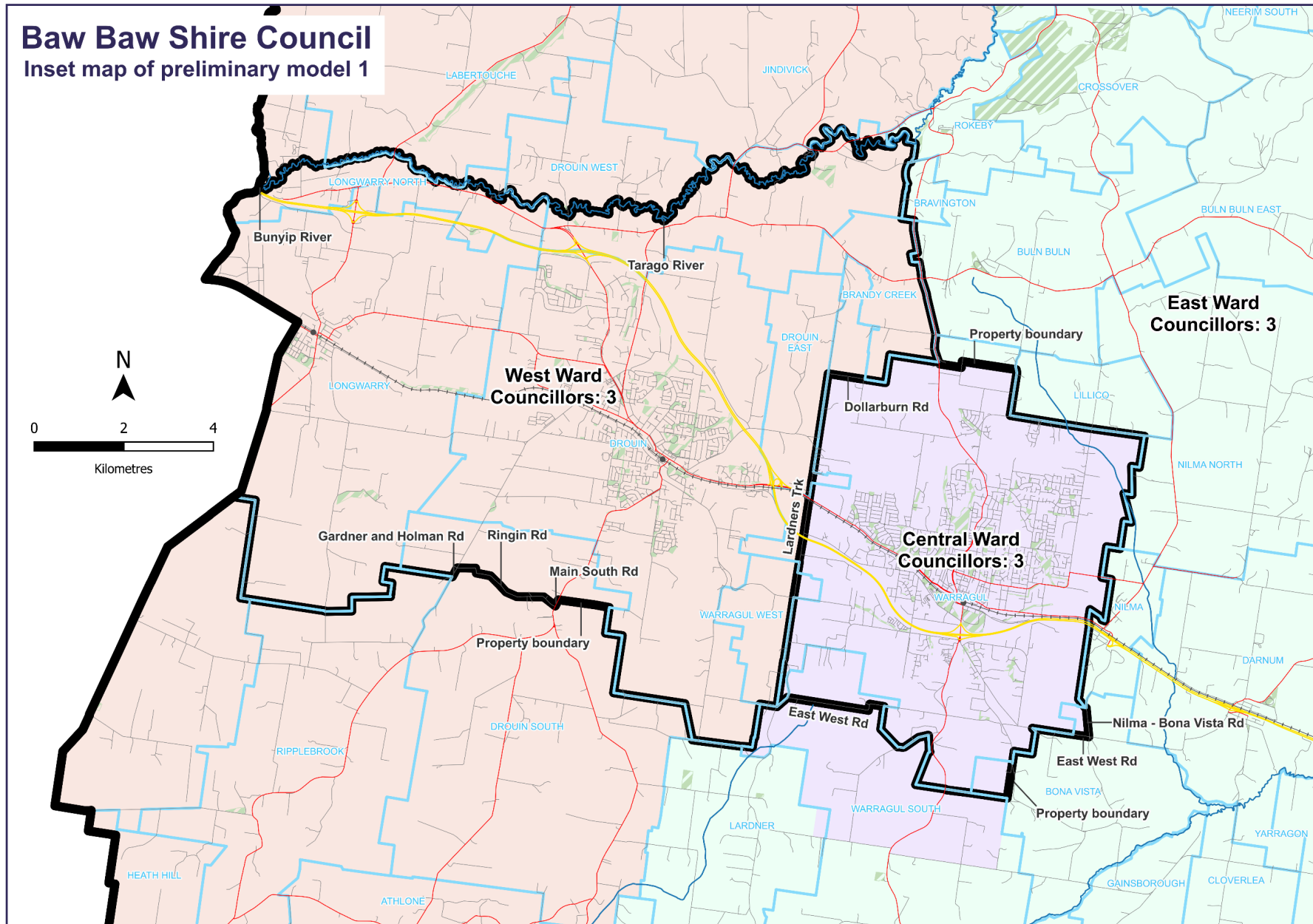


*Elector numbers as at 3 November 2023
 †The deviations of all wards are projected to be within +/-10% by the time of the 2024 local government elections.

Map prepared by:
 Victorian Electoral Commission

Data use:
 Layers for alignment:
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Data for Model 1

Ward	Electors*	Deviation†	Area# (square km)
Central	15,561	+1.26%	55
East	15,700	+2.17%	3,836
West	14,840	-3.43%	137
Total	46,101	n/a	4,028
Average	15,367	n/a	1,343

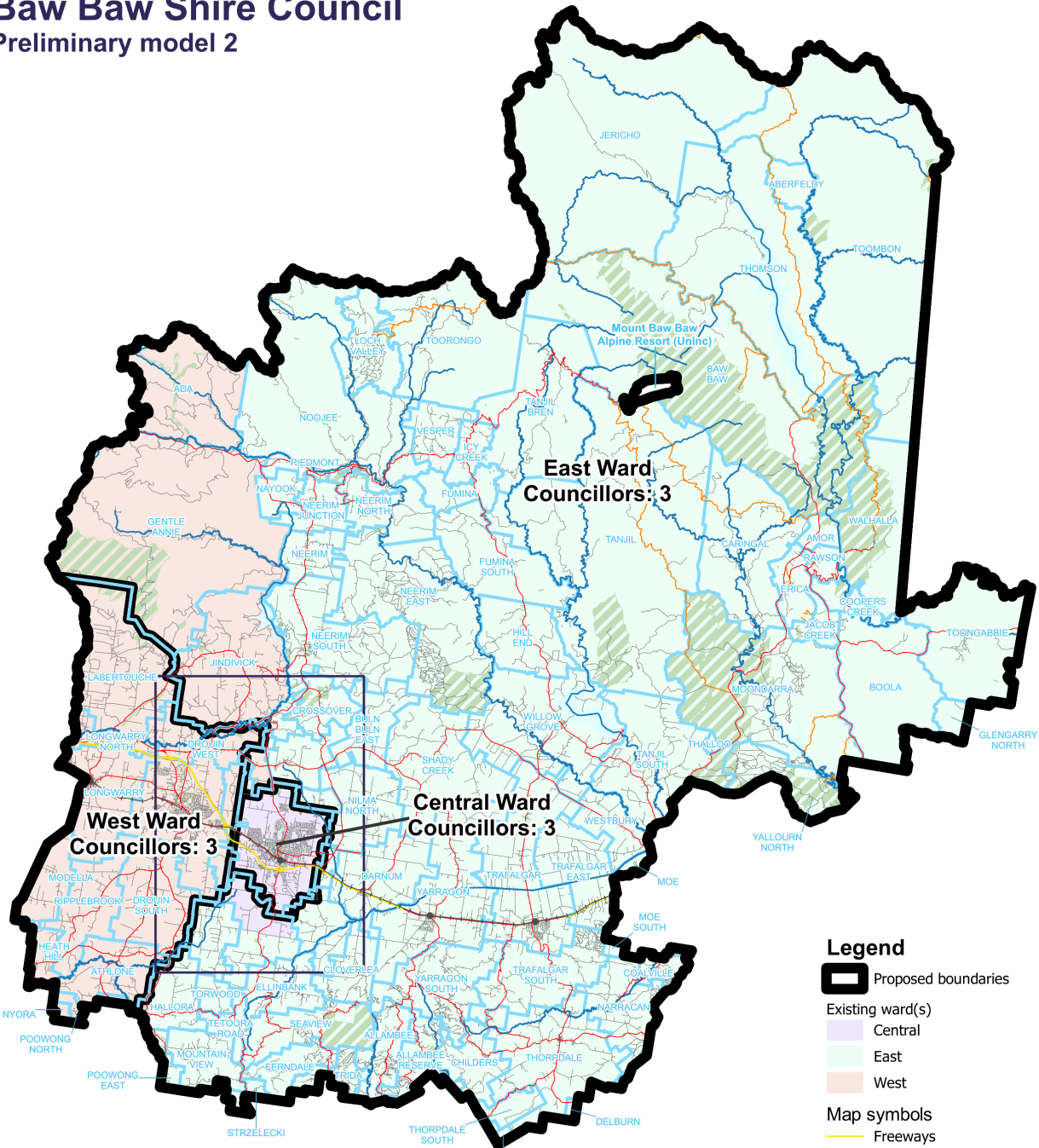
*Elector numbers at 3 November 2023

†The deviations of all wards are forecast to be within +/-10% by the time of the 2024 local council elections. The current deviation of some wards may be set outside +/-10% at the time of the review to offset forecast change between the review and the 2024 election.

#Ward area (square km) and total council area is measured at level of accuracy required for electoral boundaries. This may vary slightly from other data sources (for example, the ABS).

Baw Baw Shire Council

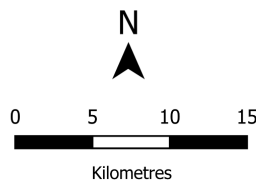
Preliminary model 2



Legend

- Proposed boundaries
- Existing ward(s)
 - Central
 - East
 - West
- Map symbols
 - Freeways
 - Main roads
 - Collector roads
 - Minor roads
 - Railways
 - Railway stations
 - Rivers & creeks
 - Lakes
 - Parks & reserves
 - Locality boundaries

Ward	Councillors	Electors*	Deviation†	Area sq km
Central	3	15,536	+1.1%	53
East	3	14,615	-4.89%	3,638
West	3	15,950	+3.79%	337
Total	9	46,101		4,028
Average		15,367		1,343



*Elector numbers as at 3 November 2023

†The deviations of all wards are projected to be within +/-10% by the time of the 2024 local government elections.

Map prepared by:

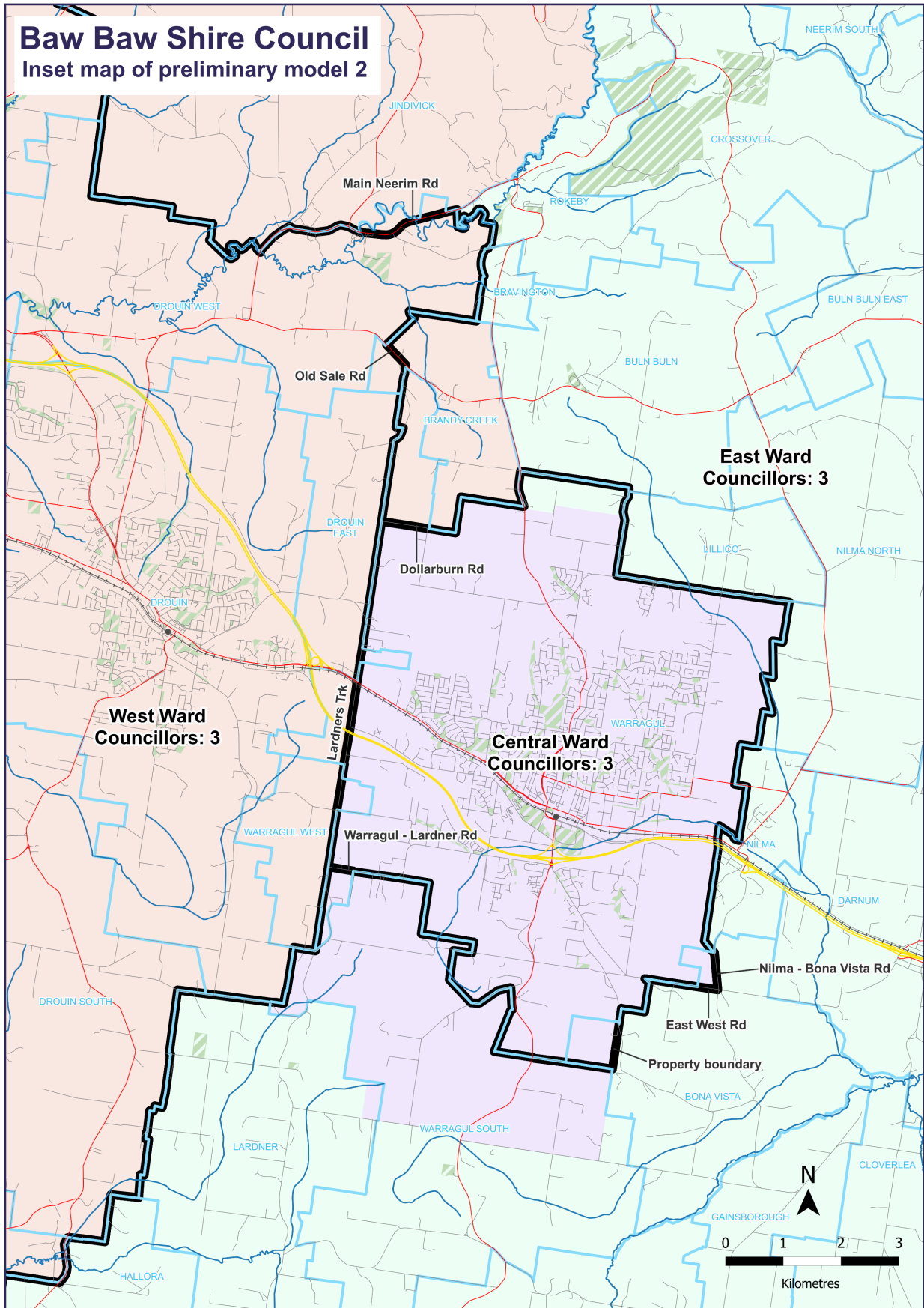


Data use:



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Data for Model 2

Ward	Electors*	Deviation†	Area# (square km)
Central	15,536	+1.1%	53
East	14,615	-4.89%	3,638
West	15,950	+3.79%	337
Total	46,101	n/a	4,028
Average	15,367	n/a	1,343

*Elector numbers at 3 November 2023

†The deviations of all wards are forecast to be within +/-10% by the time of the 2024 local council elections. The current deviation of some wards may be set outside +/-10% at the time of the review to offset forecast change between the review and the 2024 election.

#Ward area (square km) and total council area is measured at level of accuracy required for electoral boundaries. This may vary slightly from other data sources (for example, the ABS).

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