



2015-16

**Council
Representation
Reviews**

Final Report

2015 Knox City Council Electoral Representation Review

Wednesday 3 June 2015

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Contents

1 Executive summary	4
2 Background.....	6
2.1 Legislative basis	6
2.2 The VEC’s approach	6
2.3 The VEC’s principles	8
2.4 The electoral representation review process.....	8
3 Knox City Council representation review	10
3.1 Profile of Knox City Council	10
3.2 Current electoral structure	12
4 Preliminary report.....	15
4.1 Preliminary submissions	15
4.2 Preliminary report	16
5 Public response	19
5.1 Response submissions.....	19
5.2 Public hearing.....	20
6 Findings and recommendation	22
6.1 The VEC’s findings	22
6.2 The VEC’s recommendation	26
Appendix 1: Public involvement	27
Appendix 2: Map	29

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 Knox City Council took place in 2007. The review recommended nine councillors elected from nine single-councillor wards.

Preliminary submissions

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

Preliminary report

A preliminary report was released on Wednesday 8 April with the following options for consideration:

- Option A (preferred option)
Knox City Council consist of nine councillors elected from three three-councillor wards.

- Option B (alternative option)
Knox City Council consist of nine councillors elected from nine single-councillor wards.
- Option C (alternative option)
Knox City Council consist of ten councillors elected from two three-councillor wards and two two-councillor wards.

Response submissions

The VEC received 39 submissions responding to the preliminary report by the deadline for submissions at 5.00 pm on Wednesday 6 May.

Public hearing

The VEC conducted a public hearing for those wishing to speak about their response submission at 6.30 pm on Wednesday 13 May. One person spoke at the hearing.

Recommendation

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) recommends Knox City Council continue to consist of nine councillors elected from nine single-councillor wards, with modified ward boundaries.

This electoral structure was designated as Option B 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 Knox City Council representation review

3.1 Profile of Knox City Council

The City of Knox is located in the outer eastern suburbs of Melbourne, approximately 25 kilometres from the Melbourne GPO. It is one of the most populous municipalities in Victoria, with nearly 155,000 residents living in 11 suburbs. Between 2011 and 2026, the population is forecast to increase by approximately 20,000 people, with a comparatively low average annual population growth rate of 0.72 per cent. The suburbs forecast to increase the most in population include Wantirna South, Boronia, Scoresby and Bayswater.⁵

The City of Knox is relatively homogeneous compared with other metropolitan municipalities, despite the high population. For example, the municipality has lower rates of socio-economic disadvantage than most other councils in Victoria. It is ranked 12th highest on the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) index for local government areas in Victoria.⁶ Low income households demonstrate a high level of full home ownership or mortgaged dwellings, with significantly lower numbers of renters than the Victorian average.⁷ The number of social housing households in the municipality is also moderately lower than the Victorian average.

The City of Knox has attracted migrants to the area, with people from the United Kingdom by far the largest nationality (8,000 people in 2011), and the next largest groups arriving from India (3,000 people) and China (2,700). However, the majority of new arrivals came between 1981 and 2000. The percentage of new arrivals to total population between 2006 and 2011 was 18.2 per cent—significantly lower than the Greater Melbourne average of 27.1 per cent. Mobility data also indicates that the majority of residents who moved address between 2006 and 2011 moved from other parts of Victoria or another part of the municipality.

The City is surrounded by large quantities of high quality regional public open space and significant waterways, including the foothills of the Dandenong Ranges, Dandenong Creek Valley, Corhanwarrabul and Monbulk Creeks, as well as Lysterfield and Churchill National Parks. Balancing development with the natural environment is a key priority and challenge for the municipality.⁸

⁵ Forecast.id. City of Knox: *Population and Age Structure (2011-2036)*.

⁶ The ABS refers to advantage and disadvantage in terms of 'people's access to material and social resources, and their ability to participate in society'. Knox City Council is ranked 12th on the SEIFA index out of 79 local government areas. A ranking of '1' represents the least disadvantaged.

⁷ Profile.id.

⁸ Department of Transport, Planning and Local Infrastructure.

Communities of interest

The VEC's research finds that communities of interest in the City of Knox are primarily geographic, and include the individual suburbs, industrial and commercial precincts such as shopping centres and commercial/social hubs, and the various 'green zones' that provide a natural urban growth barrier to Melbourne's expanding suburbs.

Suburbs

The City of Knox provides the urban growth boundary for Greater Melbourne by way of its numerous green spaces and location at the foothills of the Dandenong Ranges. It includes a number of lower-population suburbs nestled alongside these green wedges, as well as a number of higher growth suburbs that encompass both industrial and commercial precincts. Population growth to 2036 is expected to be reasonably well spread across the municipality, although research indicates the suburbs of Wantirna South, Rowville and Boronia will experience the most growth. The least growth will occur in suburbs closest to the green zones (i.e. Lysterfield, The Basin and Upper Ferntree Gully).⁹

Industrial and commercial precincts

The City of Knox has a number of industrial and commercial precincts located across the municipality. For example, Caribbean Business Park is located in the south west of the municipality in the Scoresby/Rowville area, currently in Tirhatuan Ward. Bayswater has a large industrial estate bounded by Dandenong Creek Road, Dorset Road, Power Road and Woodmason Road, currently in Baird Ward. The Knox Hospital and Wantirna Health precinct are located in the north-west of the municipality, currently in Collier Ward. Commercial hubs, including local shopping and services are located in Rowville, Ferntree Gully, Wantirna South, Bayswater and Boronia. Diagram 1 shows the location of these precincts.

⁹ Profile.id models an increase in dwellings between 2011 and 2036 as follows: Wantirna (2,975 dwellings), Rowville (2,648 dwellings) and Boronia (2,612 dwellings).

Knox City Council Business and Industrial Zones

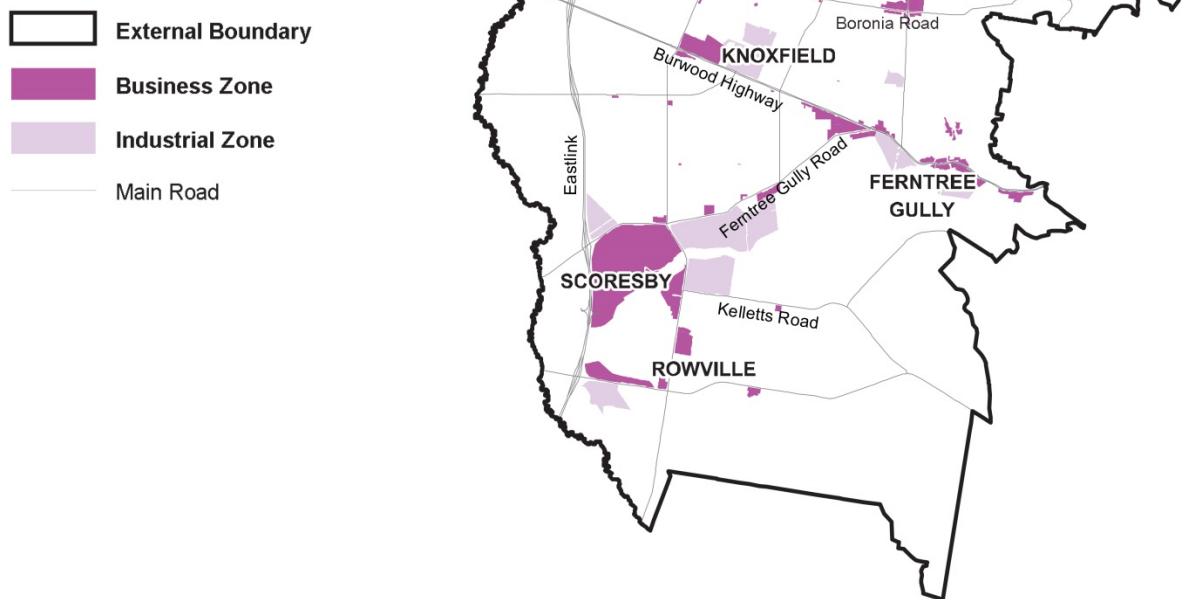


Diagram 1: Knox industrial and business zones

Urban growth boundaries and green zones

The City of Knox has a number of important green zones that provide an urban growth boundary for Melbourne’s expanding suburbs. The eastern side of the municipality provides an important urban growth boundary between the suburbs and vegetated hillsides of the Dandenong Ranges. The Dandenong Valley regional parklands in the west provide an important green wedge between the City of Knox and other outer Melbourne suburbs. Lysterfield Park and Churchill National Park border the south of the municipality.

3.2 Current electoral structure

The last representation review for Knox City occurred in 2007. Following the review, the VEC recommended the electoral structure of Knox City Council consist of nine councillors elected from nine single-councillor wards. This structure was identified as sufficient to provide fair and equitable representation for the various communities of interest across the municipality. Despite one of the highest voter-to-councillor ratios of any metropolitan council, the City of Knox was identified as not having high levels of disadvantage or complex needs in the population. Similarly, there was no significant projected growth to justify increasing the number of councillors.

A subdivision review was conducted in 2012 because the number of voters for Taylor Ward deviated by more than 10 per cent from the average. A small area was transferred from Taylor Ward to Tirhatuan Ward to correct the imbalance.

As at January 2015, Collier Ward's enrolment deviated by more than 10 per cent below the average number of councillors across the municipality as a whole, while Taylor Ward was approaching 10 per cent above the average. For the current review, at a minimum, ward boundaries need to be adjusted to ensure that enrolments fall within the 10 per cent tolerance for the Council's next general election, as required by legislation.

Public information program

Public involvement is an important part of the representation review process. The Knox City Council representation review commenced on Wednesday 11 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>Knox Leader</i>	Tuesday 10 February	Tuesday 14 April

Media releases

A media release was prepared and distributed to local media at the commencement of the review on Wednesday 11 February. A further release was distributed at the publication of the preliminary report on Wednesday 8 April.

Public information session

A public information session for people interested in the review process was held at 7.00 pm on Wednesday 18 February at the Civic Centre, Knox City Council, 511 Burwood Highway, Wantirna South.

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

Number of councillors

All preliminary submissions recommended Knox City Council retain nine councillors. The submissions from Knox City Council and the Proportional Representation Society of Australia (PRSA) highlighted that increasing the number of councillors to ten would put significant pressure on the decision-making processes for election of the Mayor and ongoing council business. Knox City Council further argued that increasing the number of councillors to eleven would reduce the average number of voters per councillor to 10,576—which is a low voter-to-councillor ratio when compared to other eleven-councillor metropolitan councils.¹⁰ Importantly, the Council further argued there were adequate aged care services and facilities to support an ageing population in the City of Knox, and low unemployment and a relatively high SEIFA index mitigated the need for an increase in the number of councillors.

Electoral structure

The preferred electoral structure for Knox City Council differed among the five submitters with four submitting in favour of introducing multi-councillor wards and one in favour of retaining the current structure.

Preference for multi-councillor wards

The four submitters favouring the introduction of multi-councillor wards all recommended a structure consisting of three three-councillor wards. Key advantages of this structure were identified as allowing voters to choose which communities of interest they belong to and the introduction of proportional representation. Submissions argued that current ward boundaries are largely nominal, and there are local issues and communities of interest that cross these boundaries. It was further argued that communities of interest are better captured by larger wards with multiple councillors. The representation of voters in the instance of a ward councillor being absent from a council meeting was also noted as an advantage.

Two submissions suggested merging existing single-council wards to create three larger wards across the municipality—‘West Ward’ (including Scott, Collier and Dinsdale Wards), ‘East Ward’

¹⁰ For example, Monash City Council has 11,088 voters per councillor.

(including Baird, Chandler and Dobson Wards), and 'South Ward' (including Tirhatuan, Friberg and Taylor Wards).

Preference for single-councillor wards

The submission from Knox City Council recommended retaining nine single-councillor wards. The Council argued that the single-councillor ward electoral structure provided more effective local representation and accountability, the current wards appropriately captured communities of interest and provided logical ward boundaries, and that there is community acceptance of the single-councillor ward electoral model. The Council's submission accepted that modifications to ward boundaries were necessary to correct imbalances in the ratio of voters per councillors, but maintained that the high level of community confidence in the structure meant every effort should be made to retain the current boundaries.

4.2 Preliminary report

A preliminary report was released on Wednesday 8 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 either nine or ten councillors would be appropriate for Knox City Council. This was based on voter-to-councillor ratios in comparable councils and the lack of compelling reasons for a greater number of councillors, such as high levels of projected growth or complex community needs. It was discussed that increasing the number of councillors to ten would provide comfortable management of the predicted, albeit slow, growth. The preliminary report noted, however, that this would increase the possibility of tied votes at council meetings. Increasing the number of councillors to eleven was considered, but determined inconsistent with the VEC's own guidelines.

Electoral structure

The VEC modelled three possible options for the electoral structure of Knox City Council based on submissions and research.

Option A (preferred option): nine councillors elected from three three-councillor wards

A structure consisting of three three-councillor wards was put forward as the VEC's preferred option, representing a significant change for the City of Knox. However, a number of key advantages to this model were identified. Firstly, the VEC noted this model would increase the longevity of the electoral structure, lasting until the Council's next scheduled review prior to the 2028 local government elections. Knox City Council has been subject to either a full electoral representation review or a subdivision review before each of the last two general elections (2008

and 2012), meaning some voters have changed wards on multiple occasions for each council election. This structure is less vulnerable to population shifts, which would decrease the likelihood of voter-to-councillor ratios breaching the 10 per cent deviation before the next scheduled review.

Secondly, Option A captured whole suburbs into wards rather than dividing them between wards, which occurs under the single-councillor ward model. The three ward structure provides an opportunity to keep activity and commercial areas together, creating more logical ward boundaries, which was identified in a number of preliminary submissions as important. Although the VEC took into account submitters' recommendations to group contiguous wards to create new, larger wards, the boundaries were then adapted to keep together whole suburbs and activity/commercial areas. This included the suburbs next to the Dandenong foothills in the east, combining the low growth suburbs of The Basin and Upper Ferntree Gully with the high growth areas of Boronia, as well as the commercial and industrial areas in the north-west of the municipality. Thirdly, Option A contains the growth occurring across the City of Knox, ensuring no further incremental disruption to communities of interest or voters, as is the current trend.

Option B (alternative option): nine councillors elected from nine single-councillor wards

The VEC provided a nine single-councillor model as Option B, which included modified ward boundaries to address the legislative breach of voter numbers. The proposed boundaries under this option transferred a total of 5,500 voters from existing wards.

Option B recognised the historical preference for single-councillor ward electoral structures detailed in Knox City Council's submission and argued by some sections of the community. The VEC also noted the arguments that the structure has provided fair and equitable representation for voters since 1997.

However, one of the identified limitations of the model is the longevity of the structure. While population growth in the City of Knox is slower than other metropolitan councils, maintaining a single-councillor ward structure without modifying ward boundaries for a whole review period was viewed as unlikely. Based on projected deviations in 2024, Tirhatuan, Baird and Chandler Wards come close to deviating from the average number of voters per councillor across the municipality by more than the 10 per cent tolerance accepted under the Act. An unforeseen change in voter numbers could cause these wards to breach the accepted tolerance, triggering a subdivision review. This would continue the trend, apparent since 2008, of ward boundaries becoming unviable ahead of each general election. The issue of longevity and the general preference shown by preliminary submissions for a change to three three-councillor wards were key factors in making this structure an alternative, rather than the preferred option.

Option C (alternative option): ten councillors elected from two three-councillor wards and two two-councillor wards

The VEC also provided a model comprising ten councillors elected from two three-councillor wards and two two-councillor wards as its second alternative option (Option C). Like Option A, Option C adequately contained population growth, thereby providing stability in relation to the ward boundaries. It also captured geographic communities of interest (e.g. suburbs), followed logical boundaries and reduced the size of the wards compared with Option A. The model also kept the suburbs at the foot of the Dandenong Ranges together. The preliminary report detailed that a key limitation of the model was the introduction of an even number of councillors, potentially leading to an increased need for the mayoral casting vote and/or increased pressure on council decision making.

Options

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

- Option A (preferred option)
Knox City Council consist of nine councillors elected from three three-councillor wards.
- Option B (alternative option)
Knox City Council consist of nine councillors elected from nine single-councillor wards.
- Option C (alternative option)
Knox City Council consist of ten councillors elected from two three-councillor wards and two two-councillor wards.

5 Public response

5.1 Response submissions

The VEC accepted submissions responding to the preliminary report from Wednesday 8 April until 5.00 pm on Wednesday 6 May. The VEC received 39 response submissions. A list of people who made a response submission can be found in Appendix 1. Table 2 indicates the level of support for each option.

Table 2: Preferences expressed in response submissions

Option A	Option B	Option C
6	33	0

Councillor numbers

All response submissions favoured either Option A or B, demonstrating support for retaining the existing number of councillors (nine) on Knox City Council. There were no submissions that supported Option C, which proposed increasing the number of councillors to ten.

Electoral structure

Six response submissions indicated a preference in favour of Option A. The most common arguments in support of Option A were that the multi-councillor wards would increase voter representation (especially through the introduction of proportional voting) and better capture of communities of interest. One submitter highlighted that larger wards with multiple councillors would enable a more diverse cross section of the community to 'have a voice' and would allow a ward to still be represented on council despite a councillor being absent from a meeting. Submitters in support of Option A also identified the current single-councillor ward boundaries as largely nominal and primarily based on equal representation of voters, with the potential to fragment and isolate councillors, supporting individual agendas.

The submission by the Proportional Representation Society of Australia preferred Option A on the basis that the model would reduce the occurrence of uncontested elections with only 12 candidates required to nominate rather than 18. This, it was argued, would greatly simplify and facilitate the identification of wards by voters.

The option of retaining the current electoral structure of nine councillors elected from single-councillor wards was preferred in 33 response submissions. The VEC noted that 30 of these submissions were from residents of Rowville. The most common argument expressed by this group of residents was the 'direct line of accountability' between constituents and their elected

councillor. Decreasing the number of wards from nine to three, they argued, would mean that councillors would need to be across issues in a much larger geographic area, and would not get to know their constituents personally. There was concern that councillors would be inundated with requests from areas they are not familiar with, and the likelihood of councillors ‘fobbing off’ requests was high and would weaken accountability under a three-ward structure. Some submissions alluded to the idea that introduction of a three-ward structure was change for change’s sake.

Knox City Council’s submission indicated strong support for retaining the current structure. The submission provided many of the arguments already made by other submitters favouring Option B, including increased councillor accessibility and transparency and better representation of all distinct geographic areas across the municipality. The Council’s submission also argued that a single-councillor ward model encourages higher candidate numbers at elections due to lower campaign costs, whereas multi-councillor wards and increased ward sizes would narrow candidature, disadvantaging low-income earners and other minority groups that may consider standing as candidates for election.

The Council’s submission also highlighted significant community acceptance of the single-councillor ward electoral structure, built over 18 years of existence. The structure’s consistency with Council’s community capacity building and place management strategy was also raised, which provides distinct locally-recognised communities of interest as its foundation. The Council articulated there was no strong argument to change from nine single-councillor wards to three multi-councillor wards.

One submitter who favoured Option B noted in their submission that both multi-councillor ward options (Options A and C) allowed for fair division of the whole municipality. However, on balance, the wards under these models would be too large and could cause conflict between councillors in the same area.

Of the 39 response submissions, no submitters indicated a preference in favour of Option C. A small number of submitters expressed views against the option, noting that the proposed electoral structure did not allow for a majority of councillors in two wards and that, while the structure allowed for fair division of the whole municipality, the proposed ward divisions were too large and could cause conflict between councillors elected to represent the same areas.

5.2 Public hearing

The VEC conducted a public hearing for those wishing to speak about their response submission at 6.30 pm on Wednesday 13 May at the Civic Centre, Knox City Council, 511 Burwood Highway, Wantirna South. Councillor Peter Lockwood, the current Mayor of Knox City Council speaking on behalf of the council, was the only speaker at the public hearing.

During the hearing, Councillor Lockwood argued that the current nine single-councillor ward structure has served the City of Knox well since its introduction in 1997. The panel heard that the structure is preferred by the Council on the basis that it promotes greater accountability of councillors and enjoys high levels of community support, allowing constituents to have confidence in bringing forward issues to local councillors. The panel also heard that the current wards reflect the geographic communities of interest well, given the City of Knox is comprised of a number of different areas and suburbs with unique characteristics. Councillor Lockwood outlined that the current ward boundaries were originally drawn around the various shopping and activity precincts across the municipality to create a 'village feel', with this structure feeding into Council's community development approach.

Councillor Lockwood raised concerns about higher costs of campaigning if larger multi-councillor wards were introduced. When asked about the increasing use of alternate methods of campaigning that are lower cost, such as social media, Councillor Lockwood considered this as a possibility in the future, but highlighted that there was little to show that social media is an effective method for engaging constituents at Knox City Council elections and elections more generally.

In response to a follow up question, Councillor Lockwood conceded that it was possible that the preference for single-councillor wards was based on familiarity and acceptability of the current structure by councillors. Councillor Lockwood expanded on the answer by saying that prior to the current structure being established in 1997, multi-councillor wards were in place and there was a reluctance to change the structure at that time. However, he explained, multi-councillor wards have not been experienced by seven of the nine councillors of the current Council.

The panel also asked whether the projected population deviations in Option B were problematic in that at least one subdivision review was likely to be required before the next scheduled review and a number of voters would therefore change wards again. Councillor Lockwood outlined that the view of the council was that, if the boundaries needed changing, this was acceptable. Councillor Lockwood acknowledged that this has the potential to create confusion among voters, although there are many people who would not know which ward they are situated in and, in his view, it would not be seen as a significant issue for the council.

6 Findings and recommendation

6.1 The VEC's findings

The VEC consulted on three options, including its preferred option of nine councillors elected from three three-councillor wards. This report has summarised the process the VEC completed to gather information, including public submissions, to develop and report on the options under consideration. The VEC now provides its findings to the Minister.

Number of councillors

As part of its electoral representation review, the Act requires the VEC to recommend the appropriate number of councillors for Knox City Council. The Act allows for a municipality to have between 5 and 12 councillors. When determining councillor numbers, the VEC also takes into account any significant geographic and demographic circumstances that may increase councillor workloads, such as significant population growth, geographic distribution, and socioeconomic disparities of high-needs communities.

Currently, Knox City Council has the highest number of voters per councillor of any nine councillor metropolitan council. However, the VEC has determined that slower rates of population growth accompanied by fewer complex social factors, when compared with other metropolitan councils with nine councillors, means that an increase in the number of councillors for the City of Knox is not required. While increasing the number of councillors to ten is highly feasible and would better manage the population growth that is forecast, nine councillors is equally satisfactory. In fact, increasing the number of councillors to 10 may lead to more regular use of a mayoral casting vote, and potentially put pressure on Council's decision-making processes.

Electoral structure

The Act also requires the VEC to recommend an appropriate structure within the municipality. The VEC considers whether the municipality should be unsubdivided or subdivided into wards and, if subdivided, the positioning of ward boundaries and the number of councillors to be elected for each ward, to provide fair and equitable representation for voters.

The three options put forward by the VEC in the preliminary report include the preferred option of nine councillors elected from three three-councillor wards, and the alternative options of nine single-councillor wards (Option B) and ten councillors elected from two three-councillor wards and two two-councillor wards (Option C). All options were considered to meet the VEC's main principles for an electoral representation review.

The VEC's preferred option in the preliminary report (Option A) was a structure comprised of nine councillors elected from three three-councillor wards. The VEC preferred this option on the basis that the model would maintain longevity, without further ward boundary changes required, until the next representation review period. This model was also recommended by five out of the six submitters at the preliminary submission stage.

However, consultation with the community through the response submission and public hearing processes highlighted strong support for retaining the current structure, on the basis that it provides effective representation for residents of the City of Knox. Despite ongoing vulnerability to population change and regular boundary adjustments to maintain proportionality between the single-councillor wards, the current ward structure was perceived to increase councillor accountability and has been a successful model since 1997.

While public input is highly valued as part of the review process, the VEC also has the responsibility of ensuring that voters are fairly and equally represented. Given the strong preference in submissions for retaining the current structure, the VEC seriously weighed the merits and limitations of both Option A and Option B when reaching its decision.

Option A

As discussed, Option A was put forward by the VEC as its preferred option in the preliminary report, based on preferences outlined in the preliminary submissions and longevity of structure. Another benefit of the model was the better capture of whole suburbs. Under the current ward structure, all wards contain two or more suburbs. For example, the current Baird Ward incorporates parts of the suburbs of Boronia, Ferntree Gully and Bayswater, and the current Friberg Ward contains parts of the suburbs of Knoxfield, Ferntree Gully and Rowville. The VEC considered that divisions of suburbs have been compounded by regular modifications to ward boundaries since 1997 in order to comply with the numbers requirements of the Act.

There was a view that moving to a multi-councillor structure allowed the introduction of the proportional representation method of counting, which is viewed by some as a fairer model of representation. However, the VEC determined that both the preferential and proportional methods have their advantages and disadvantages, and the preferential method was not disadvantaging the voters in the City of Knox.

Overall, Option A had the advantages of longevity of structure, almost certainly mitigating the need to conduct a subdivision review before the next review period in 2027-2028.

Option B

While the preliminary submissions almost exclusively preferred a multi-councillor model, response submissions returned an almost exclusive support for the current single-ward councillor model.

Key arguments for retaining the current structure, primarily from the 30 Rowville residents who made response submissions, were generally based on the model's efficacy in maintaining close ties between councillors and their constituents. There was some concern that introduction of a multi-councillor ward structure would decrease councillor accessibility and in some cases, responsibility. The VEC considers that while this may be a concern, councillors can also be accessible under a multi-ward structure.

The VEC also considered adequate capture of communities of interest and fair and equitable representation.

Capturing communities of interest adequately was a key theme in the public responses to the VEC's preferred and alternative models. Knox City Council argued that the 12 different and distinct suburbs that comprise the municipality represented communities of interest. The Council also argued that the current wards were originally drawn to capture shopping centres and activity precincts, with the purpose of creating a village feel for different areas within Knox, feeding into Council's community development strategy.

However, there was generally a weak and sometimes conflicting analysis by the submitters of both Options A and B around what constitutes communities of interest in the City of Knox. Submitters in favour of Option A outlined suburbs as the main communities of interest, although they did not provide a great amount of detail as to why these were significant. While the boundaries in Option B do generally capture shopping and activity precincts well within their current boundaries, whole suburbs are divided between wards, engendering conflicting conceptualisations of how the current ward boundaries reflect geographic communities of interest.

The VEC concluded that the current wards, with ward modifications, still reflect the activity centres and communities of interest that the original ward boundaries, devised in 1997, aimed to capture. It is important to note that the diversity between suburbs in Knox is less marked than other metropolitan councils due to its relative homogeneity. In the absence of strong arguments and definitions as to what constitutes a community of interest in the City of Knox, the VEC considers that the ward boundaries for Option B are sufficient and will provide a sense of consistency for the majority of voters.

The VEC also considered participation in council elections by candidates. At the public hearing, Councillor Lockwood argued that uncontested wards are an anomaly in Knox, with only two

wards going uncontested since the structure was implemented. However, further analysis undertaken by the VEC showed six uncontested wards at general elections since the current single-councillor ward structure was implemented in 1997. This is an average of one uncontested ward per election, albeit affecting different wards each time.

While the occurrence of uncontested wards at elections mean that voters in that ward are not given an opportunity to choose their representative, the VEC has identified that Knox City Council elections have, more broadly, delivered an average of four candidates per ward at each general election since 1997. This suggests that, although uncontested elections are undesirable for delivering fair and equitable representation, voters across the whole of the council have had a reasonable choice of candidates under the current structure.

One of the reasons the VEC initially preferred Option A was longevity, particularly that the structure would comfortably last until the next scheduled electoral representation review prior to the 2028 local government elections. Long term sustainability of the single-councillor ward structure has been problematic; the municipality has undergone either a full representation review or a subdivision review before each of the last two general elections, meaning some voters have been in different wards for each election. Projected deviations indicate that by 2024, Tirhatuan, Baird and Chandler Wards will be 8 per cent or higher, potentially requiring a subdivision review before the next scheduled electoral representation review.

However, while Option A would more comfortably manage these projections, the VEC is confident that the proportionality of ward boundaries will remain fairly stable at least until the 2024 election, and possibly until the next representation review before the 2028 election. The VEC considers that Option B will continue to contain the majority of the population for most, if not all, of the review period.

Summary

On balance, both Option A and Option B are viable models for Knox City Council and the merits and limitations of both options have been fully analysed. Option A guarantees containment of the projected population growth, thereby avoiding a subdivision review at a later point. It also captures the two main communities of interest outlined in multiple submissions (e.g. whole suburbs and activity centres).

However, Option B enjoys considerable support from the public and the model continues to work well in the City of Knox. While the wards are more vulnerable to population change and the longevity of the boundaries cannot be guaranteed until the next scheduled representation review, current projections indicate that the proposed boundaries will contain growth within the tolerance until, at least, 2024. The municipality has comparatively slower projected growth rates than other metropolitan councils and a relatively homogenous and stable population, with no significant

identified issues that would necessarily benefit from an increase in the number of councillors or the introduction of multi-councillor wards.

Based on these arguments, the VEC considers there are insufficient reasons to change from the current structure of nine single-councillor wards.

6.2 The VEC's recommendation

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) recommends Knox City Council continue to consist of nine councillors elected from nine single-councillor wards, with modified ward boundaries.

This electoral structure was designated as Option B 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:

Ainsley Symons

Knox City Council

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

Stephen Morey

Stephen Raymond

Response submissions

Response submissions were received from:

Qassem Aimaq	Margaret Lancefield
Ricky Aow	David Lucas
Tracy Baulman	Geoff Monaghan
Geoffrey Bonella	Holger and Sharron Niewalda
Kenneth S Butson	Bruce Paterson
Patricia Daly	Mirjana Pillig
Louis Devienne	PRSA
Jennifer Donato	Annaliese Scarman
Kara Duncan	Carole Smith
Simon Duncan	Trevor Spain
Rod Gilbert	Stephen Raymond
Andrew Gunter	Anna Rice
Gwenn and Sjeff van Hees	James Tennant
Shirley Heron	Raymond Vancam
Vivien Holyoake	John Watson
Rosemary Jenkins	Sherman Wong
Knox City Council	David Wood

Public hearing

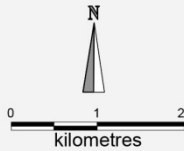
The following individuals spoke at the public hearing:

Councillor Peter Lockwood (Mayor, Knox City Council)

Appendix 2: Map

Knox City Council

Map of Recommended Option
Nine Councillors, Nine Wards



Ward	Councillors	Electors	Deviation	Proj Deviation*	Area sq km
Baird	1	12,941	+0.12%	+8.00%	9.15
Chandler	1	12,066	-6.65%	-7.95%	12.38
Collier	1	13,394	+3.62%	-0.46%	13.13
Dinsdale	1	12,446	-3.71%	-5.52%	8.74
Dobson	1	13,676	+5.80%	+2.44%	14.91
Friberg	1	13,728	+6.20%	-4.63%	9.23
Scott	1	12,223	-5.44%	+1.97%	9.26
Taylor	1	13,991	+8.24%	-2.97%	17.86
Tirhatuan	1	11,870	-8.17%	+9.13%	19.19
Total	9	116,335	-8.17% - +8.24	-7.95% - +9.13	113.85
Average		12,926			12.65

* Projected to 2024



Legend

- Proposed Boundary
- Existing Wards**
 - Baird
 - Chandler
 - Collier
 - Dinsdale
 - Dobson
 - Friberg
 - Scott
 - Taylor
 - Tirhatuan
- 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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