



2015-16

**Council
Representation
Reviews**

Final Report

2015 Warrnambool City Council Electoral Representation Review

Wednesday 18 November 2015

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1 Recommendation

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

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

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

2 Executive summary

The *Local Government Act 1989* (the Act) requires the 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 representation review of Warrnambool City Council took place in 2004. At the time of the review, Warrnambool City Council was represented by seven councillors elected from seven single-councillor wards. Following the review, the VEC recommended that the municipality change to consist of seven councillors elected from the municipality as a whole.

Preliminary submissions

Preliminary submissions opened at the commencement of the current review on Wednesday 29 July 2015. The VEC received 12 submissions by the deadline for submissions at 5.00 pm on Wednesday 26 August.

Preliminary report

A preliminary report was released on Wednesday 23 September with the following options for consideration:

- Option A (preferred option)
Warrnambool City Council continue to consist of seven councillors elected from an unsubdivided municipality.

- Option B (alternative option)

Warrnambool City Council consist of seven councillors elected from two two-councillor wards and one three-councillor ward.

Response submissions

The VEC received 14 submissions responding to the preliminary report by the deadline for submissions at 5.00 pm on Wednesday 21 October.

Public hearing

The VEC conducted a public hearing for those wishing to speak about their response submission at 6.00 pm on Tuesday 27 October. Four people spoke at the hearing, including a joint submission by two speakers.

Recommendation

The VEC recommends Warrnambool City Council continue to consist of seven councillors elected from an unsubdivided municipality.

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

3 Background

3.1 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.

3.2 The VEC’s approach

Deciding on the number of councillors

The Act allows for a municipality to have between five 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.

3.3 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.

3.4 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 Ltd⁴ data; 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.

4 Warrnambool City Council representation review

4.1 Profile of Warrnambool City Council

The City of Warrnambool is located along the south-west coast of Victoria, bounded by Moyne Shire inland and the Southern Ocean. The municipality covers an area of 121 square kilometres; much of the land is used for rural agriculture, particularly dairy farming. Population growth, management of cultural and environmental heritage, and attracting investment to meet growing demand in existing industries have been identified as key drivers of change in the municipality, in line with neighbouring parts of Victoria's south coast region.⁵

The municipality has a population of 33,501.⁶ Table 1 lists population estimates in major localities. Almost 85 per cent of the municipality's population lives in the city of Warrnambool. The remaining 15 per cent are spread throughout a number of smaller settlements in the municipality. The number of voters is currently estimated to be 25,850. The council area has a population density of approximately 277 people per square kilometre, and approximately 3,693 voters per councillor.

Table 1: Current population estimates in major towns

Warrnambool	28,413
Dennington	1,557
Allansford	1,413
Bushfield	586
Woodford	408

The municipality has a median age of 38, which is younger than the median age of 43 for rural and regional Victoria generally. Between 2006 and 2011, the City of Warrnambool's population increased by 5.4 per cent, at an average rate of just over 1 per cent per year.⁷ Around 34 per cent of the population is 50 years or over, which is slightly lower compared to the regional percentage of 38 per cent. While the municipality has traditionally been popular as a retirement destination, it has also recently experienced growth in the number of people aged between 20 and 39 years.⁸ The younger workforce (aged 25–34) is slightly higher in the Warrnambool municipality than the average for regional Victoria.⁹ The municipality has moderate population

⁵ Victorian Government and local Councils, *Great South Coast: Draft Regional Growth Plan*, 2013, p.15.

⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Estimated Resident Population*, 2014.

⁷ Profile.id, *Warrnambool City: Community Profile 2011 Census Results*, p.12.

⁸ Warrnambool City Council, *Warrnambool Council Plan 2013-17*, 2014.

⁹ Profile.id, *Warrnambool City: Community Profile 2011 Census Results*, p.10.

mobility. Between 2006 and 2011, approximately 39 per cent of residents changed address (moving within Australia or overseas).

Just over 7 per cent of the municipality's population was born outside Australia, with predominantly English, Irish and Scottish ancestry. There is also a small percentage of residents with German, Dutch, Italian and Greek ancestry, and 3 per cent of people speak a language other than English at home. These statistics are lower than for regional Victoria generally.

Applications for Registered Aboriginal Party status over parts of the municipality and surrounding areas have been made by the Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation, the Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation and the Kuyang Maar Aboriginal Corporation.¹⁰ Up to 1.5 per cent of the population in the municipality identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

The Warrnambool City Council area has a 65 per cent labour force participation rate, and marginally lower unemployment rate than Victoria as a whole. Health care is one of the largest industries in the area, and Warrnambool provides medical services to the surrounding coastal region. Social assistance, retail trade, agriculture, forestry, fishing, construction and accommodation services are also significant employers. The municipality's income distribution reflects that of rural and regional Victoria in general, with a relatively high proportion of low-income earners (39 per cent) and a low proportion of high-income earners (8 per cent).

The urban centre of Warrnambool is considered to be the principal service centre for south-west Victoria and has experienced gradual growth since the early 1990s.¹¹ A freight rail corridor runs from Warrnambool to Melbourne and Geelong, and the city hosts campuses of Deakin University and South West TAFE. Other major features of the city and municipality are the popular tourist attractions of the Great Ocean Road; coastal and wildlife reserves; and the Hopkins and Merri Rivers, as well as local heritage sites of Flagstaff Hill maritime village and Warrnambool Garrison.

¹⁰ Victorian Government, *Statewide Aboriginal Parties and Registered Aboriginal Party Applications at December 2014*, 2014.

¹¹ Profile.id, *Warrnambool City: Community Profile 2011 Census Results*, p.7.

4.2 Current electoral structure

The last representation review of Warrnambool City Council took place in 2004. At the time of the review, Warrnambool City Council was represented by seven councillors elected from seven single-councillor wards. Following the review, the VEC recommended that the municipality change to consist of seven councillors elected from the municipality as a whole.

4.3 Public information program

Public involvement is an important part of the representation review process. The Warrnambool City Council representation review commenced on Wednesday 29 July and the VEC conducted a public information program to inform the community, including:

- public notices of the review and the release of the preliminary report in local and state-wide papers
- media releases announcing the commencement of the review, the release of the preliminary report and the publication of this final report
- a public information session to outline the review process and respond to questions from the community
- coverage through the municipality's media, e.g. Council website or newsletter
- a helpline and dedicated email address to answer public enquiries
- ongoing information updates and publication of submissions on the VEC website and
- a *Guide for Submissions* to explain the review process and provide background information on the scope of the review.

See Appendix 3 for full details of the public information program.

5 Preliminary report

5.1 Preliminary submissions

The VEC received 12 preliminary submissions by the deadline for submissions at 5.00 pm on Wednesday 26 August.

Number of councillors

Submissions were almost evenly split on the appropriate number of councillors for the Warrnambool municipality, with just over half recommending increasing the number of councillors to nine. One submission did not comment on the preferred number of councillors. The Proportional Society of Australia's (PRSA) submission preferred either seven or nine councillors. The balance of submissions recommended retaining the current number of seven councillors.

Electoral structure

The submissions were also almost evenly split on whether the municipality should be subdivided (six submissions) or remain unsubdivided (five submissions). Two submissions did not comment on the structure of the municipality. Two submissions referred to introducing a process for direct election of the mayor, which is outside of the terms of reference of this representation review.

Retaining the current unsubdivided structure

Five submissions identified a preference for an unsubdivided structure (and of these submissions, all but one preferred to retain the current number of seven councillors). The main reasons for retaining the status quo put forward in these submissions were that the municipality was small in size so travelling long distances was not a factor in councillors' workloads and that the urban, compact nature of the municipality was suited to an unsubdivided structure.

A subdivided structure – three three-councillor wards

The most common preference in submissions favouring a subdivided structure, put forward by three submitters, was a model of three wards with three councillors each.

Submitters supported this model for various reasons. Two submissions stated that a subdivided model of three wards would provide greater representation for the outer areas of Allansford, Bushfield, Woodford and Dennington, areas which these submitters suggested were not adequately represented under the current unsubdivided model. One submission suggested that the municipality could be divided into north-west, central and eastern wards. Another submission stated that dividing the municipality into three wards would result in a mix of residential, retail, business, industrial and educational areas in each ward, and would be popular with the majority of Warrnambool residents.

The PRSA, which preferred either the current seven-councillor unsubdivided model or three three-councillor wards, outlined the advantages of the proportional representation vote counting method that could be achieved in unsubdivided municipalities and multi-councillor wards.

A subdivided structure – three wards

Two submissions identified a preference for a subdivided model with three wards, but did not specify the number of councillors in each. These submissions both suggested that the wards should be geographically based on the northern, central and eastern parts of the municipality.

A list of people who made a preliminary submission can be found in Appendix 1.

5.2 Preliminary report

A preliminary report was released on Wednesday 23 September. The VEC considered public submissions and research findings when formulating the options presented in the preliminary report.

Number of councillors

Several submissions to the review had favoured increasing the number of councillors to nine. As outlined in the preliminary report, the City of Warrnambool has similar voter numbers to Wangaratta Rural City and the City of Wodonga, municipalities which both have seven councillors. Based on comparison to similar councils in the regional urban category 1, the VEC considered the current number of seven councillors was the most appropriate.

Several submissions argued that the number of councillors should be increased to nine on the basis that this would assist in the management of conflicts of interest. This issue is addressed later in this report (see 'Issues outside the scope of the review' on page 16).

Based on its small geographic size, relatively homogenous socio-demographic profile, and current and projected population, the VEC considered that the current number of seven councillors would be adequate for fair and equitable representation in the Warrnambool municipality.

Electoral structure

The VEC put forward two options for consultation, including both an unsubdivided and a subdivided model, reflecting the key themes in public submissions as well as analysis of demographic and spatial data.

The VEC's preferred option was to retain the current unsubdivided model. The VEC considered that the small geographic size of the municipality—with its concentrated population in the urban centre—makes it reasonable to expect all councillors to operate on a municipality-wide basis.

The geography and socio-economic and demographic profile of the municipality were considered to make it well-suited to an unsubdivided structure.

To reflect the preference for a ward model expressed in many submissions, the VEC also modelled a subdivided option with three multi-councillor wards. The VEC built on the concept of three wards as outlined in submissions, and modified the boundaries to keep more of the urban area of Warrnambool together, while also providing separate geographic representation for north-western and eastern parts of the municipality.

Issues outside the scope of the review

The VEC noted that many of the issues raised in submissions could not be resolved through a representation review. The VEC noted that conflicts of interest, for example, occur from time-to-time under all electoral structures and are not a consequence of a municipality being subdivided or unsubdivided. Deciding to declare a conflict of interest is a matter for each councillor and the council's administration in advising and supporting their elected members.

Options

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

- Option A (preferred option)
Warrnambool City Council continue to consist of seven councillors elected from an unsubdivided municipality.
- Option B (alternative option)
Warrnambool City Council consist of seven councillors elected from two two-councillor wards and one three-councillor ward.

6 Public response

6.1 Response submissions

The VEC accepted submissions responding to the preliminary report from Wednesday 23 September until 5.00 pm on Wednesday 21 October. The VEC received 14 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
8	2

** While it was not a formal option put forward by the VEC, three submitters maintained support for a three-ward model of three councillors. One submitter did not support either option.*

Submissions in support of Option A

Submitters in support of Option A noted that, in their view, the current system worked well and there were no significant reasons to change. These submissions argued against Option B, suggesting that it would divide the community along artificial boundaries. For example, some of these submitters were concerned that the subdivided ward system of Option B could limit the range of candidates based on what street they live on, rather than their representative credentials. Legally, there is no limitation on which ward a candidate can stand in. However, for these submitters there was a perception that the ward model was restrictive in this sense.

Supporters of the current structure stated that it provided more choice for community members when voting and also gave residents access to a wider range of councillors. Some submitters stated that the unsubdivided structure promoted a municipality-wide approach to issues.

Submissions in support of Option B

Submissions in support of Option B maintained that ratepayers in the outlying areas of the municipality were under-represented. One of these submissions noted that most of the current councillors were from the urban area of Warrnambool, and argued that a subdivided model would encourage more candidates, as it would be easier to get elected under the three-ward option than the unsubdivided model with seven councillors. One of these submissions stated that the municipality is too large for councillors to get to know all the issues and needs of local constituents, and that councillors would be more accountable under the subdivided ward option.

Maintaining support for a three-ward model with three councillors in each ward

Although it was not put forward by the VEC as a preliminary option for this review, a number of submitters maintained support for a three-ward model with three councillors per ward. These submitters focused predominantly on the argument that a multi-councillor model with these wards would ensure representation for the smaller towns in the rural parts of the municipality as well as allowing for projected population growth. One of these submitters suggested that the growth in the municipality was reflected in the expansion of local industries in the dairy, agriculture, education and health services sectors.

The VEC evaluated reasons for increasing the number of councillors in its preliminary report and determined that the current number of councillors (seven) was sufficient. A model involving three three-councillor wards would increase Warrnambool City Council to nine councillors in total and was not supported by the VEC.

6.2 Public hearing

The VEC conducted a public hearing for those wishing to speak about their response submission at 6.00 pm on Tuesday 27 October in the Reception Room, Civic Centre, Warrnambool City Council, 25 Liebig Street, Warrnambool. A list of people who spoke at the hearing can be found in Appendix 1.

Speaker in support of Option A

A representative of the Warrnambool City Council spoke in support of the current structure, stating that the model worked well. The representative said the municipality had more in common with a large, urban municipality than with regional areas, and benefited from the whole-of-City strategic approach facilitated by the unsubdivided structure. On the question of population growth, the Council's representative noted that there had been population increase in recent years, but that the growth had peaked, and the rate was becoming more even. The Council's representative noted that under the former subdivided single-councillor model, ward boundaries became less meaningful as the municipality grew and also required more frequent subdivision reviews.

Speaker in support of Option B

The speaker in support of Option B had originally argued in favour of increasing the number of councillors to nine, but following the release of the VEC's preliminary report, which maintained the current number of seven councillors, was now prepared to support Option B. This speaker also suggested that the projected growth in the municipality would be best catered for under Option B. He stated that, in recent years, growth in the municipality had outstripped the growth projected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. He was also concerned that current councillors

were elected from the urban area of Warrnambool, which he considered to be unrepresentative of the municipality as a whole. The speaker maintained that while an unsubdivided municipality can facilitate a municipality-wide strategic approach, this could also be achieved under a ward structure if there were strong representatives. The speaker was not concerned at the possibility of uncontested elections in the areas with smaller rural townships, as there had been strong numbers of candidates in recent municipality elections.

Speakers in support of a three-ward model with three councillors in each

Two speakers jointly addressed the public hearing in support of a model which was not put forward by the VEC. These speakers maintained their support for increasing the number of councillors to nine, with a subdivided structure of three wards with three councillors per ward. These speakers argued strongly that the increase in the number of councillors was warranted on the grounds of projected population growth and evidence of the expansion of local industries. These speakers also suggested that increasing the number of councillors would assist in managing conflicts of interest and also increase representation of women as candidates and councillors.

These speakers conceded that the option had not been put forward in the preliminary report. Considering the two options that were under consideration, the speakers preferred Option B ahead of Option A.

7 Findings and recommendation

7.1 The VEC's findings

The VEC has taken into account the key themes expressed in submissions to the representation review, as well as internal research and analysis to develop its final recommendation. The recommendation complies with the legislative equality requirement, acknowledges communities of interest and was supported in several submissions.

Number of councillors

Responding to population growth

A key consideration in this review is whether the rate of population growth projected for the municipality justifies increasing the number of councillors from seven to nine.

Like many municipalities in Victoria, Warrnambool City Council is experiencing growth. As some submitters and speakers at the public hearing noted, population growth is evident around the municipality with the expansion of local industries and new dwellings. The pattern of growth is particularly evident towards Dennington and around the Merri River, as well as the area between Mortlake Road (Hopkins Highway) and Staffords Road. The overall population growth within the municipality is expected to be just over 14,000 people by 2036.¹² Evidence suggests that following a recent rise in growth between 2006 and 2009,¹³ the rate is now projected to stay fairly stable between 2016 and 2031.¹⁴

Despite the pattern of moderate growth, in comparison with councils of a similar profile and voter population, the municipality of Warrnambool has a reasonable voter-to-councillor ratio. As outlined in the VEC's preliminary report, the City of Warrnambool has similar voter numbers to Wangaratta Rural City and the City of Wodonga, municipalities which both have seven councillors. While the Rural City of Mildura has a similar voter-to-councillor ratio and nine councillors, it is also significantly larger in geographic size than the City of Warrnambool. Based on current and projected population growth, as well as comparison to councils of a similar size, the VEC is satisfied that seven councillors is adequate to achieve fair and equitable representation in the municipality of Warrnambool.

¹² .id, *Population and household forecasts: 2011 to 2036*, 2014, forecast.id.com.au/warrnambool/population-summary?WebID=140

¹³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Regional Population Growth, Australia* (3218.0). Compiled and presented in profile.id.

¹⁴ Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, *Victoria in Future 2015: Warrnambool Profile*.

Representing communities of interest

Another key element of this review is to consider whether distinct communities of interest might also warrant an increase in councillor numbers. Warrnambool is characterised by a mix of urban and rural areas within the municipality, with a wide range of land use from dairy farming and other agriculture, industrial development, and tourism. As the VEC heard through submissions and the public hearing, the municipality also sees a significant influx of tourists over the summer months, and the Council also has unique responsibilities related to port infrastructure and coastal management.

Submitters painted a clear picture of distinct communities in Warrnambool ranging in local character from the country to the coast. Speakers at the public hearing provided valuable insights into the nature of the municipality as a whole and the important contribution local industries make to the Victorian economy. Council representatives indicated that there is also a growing population of migrant workers supporting local industry in the City, with up to 2,000 workers expected by 2020.

While it is clear that there are distinct communities of interest in Warrnambool and positive signs of economic activity, the City is still relatively small in size geographically. Travel distances are therefore not a factor impacting workloads significantly. Likewise, the new areas of growth and influx of workers supporting local industries are not occurring at a rate which would suggest additional councillors are needed. Council's representative attested that the municipality's significant responsibilities (in terms of coastal management and tourism industry) are handled in a strategic manner through its business and operational planning processes. This view suggests that these responsibilities do not warrant additional councillor numbers at this time.

The VEC noted some submitters' concern that not all councillors participate in all decisions of Council, sometimes needing to excuse themselves from certain decisions due to conflicts of interest. This is not a factor that the VEC can take into account when determining the appropriate number of councillors for a municipality, and is a matter for council to be managed on a case-by-case basis.

The VEC is guided by the legislative equality requirements of the voter-to-councillor ratio, communities of interest and comparison to similar councils throughout Victoria as a relevant benchmark for councillor numbers. An increase in councillor numbers may also be justified where there are special circumstances such as a migrant or refugee community warranting distinct representation, or long travel distances as occurs in some rural Victorian municipalities. While there are clear communities of interest in Warrnambool, the VEC concluded there were no special circumstances warranting specific representation. On these grounds, the VEC considers that seven remains an appropriate number of councillors for the Warrnambool municipality.

Electoral structure

The VEC put forward two options for Warrnambool City Council in its preliminary report, including the current unsubdivided structure and a model of three multi-councillor wards, reflecting the many submissions which called for ward-based representation.

Representation of outlying townships

A key consideration for the VEC when considering a fair and equitable electoral structure for Warrnambool City Council has centred on arguments in favour of separate ward representation based on the needs of smaller towns in the agricultural areas outside the major town centre. A number of submissions to this review provided significant geographic detail on potential ward boundaries. The broad theme in these submissions was that the municipality could be divided into eastern, central and western wards. There was a strong message in these submissions that the outlying towns of Allansford, Dennington and Bushfield needed more direct representation. The VEC heard further evidence in submissions and at the public hearing about the sense of under-representation for the outlying areas.

Over 80 per cent of the municipality's population lives in the urban area of Warrnambool. Under the VEC's Option B, there would be no guarantee of direct representation of the outlying areas due to the mix of urban and rural populations in each ward.

City-wide strategic approach

In contrast to the call for subdivision, the VEC heard through submissions and the public hearing that many of the issues affecting the Council could benefit from a municipality-wide approach facilitated by an unsubdivided electoral structure.

Public submissions and presentations at the public hearing provided valuable local perspectives about the nature of the municipality as a whole. The focus for residents and Council representatives appeared to be strongly on the industrial and commercial nature of the municipality, with a strong local economy and potential in tourism, international agricultural trade relationships and major events. Warrnambool City Council's representative at the public hearing made it clear that the commercial and economic drivers of the municipality, including agricultural industry in the rural areas, were an important part of the Council's planning and considerations.

Rather than being strictly geographically defined, these commercial and economic drivers impact and contribute to the municipality as a whole, and are therefore suited to representation under an unsubdivided model. In addition, the small geographic size and concentration of population in the urban centre makes it reasonable to expect all councillors to serve all constituents throughout the municipality.

As in many municipalities with a mix of urban and rural populations, there is a connectedness and interdependence between the major town centre and the surrounding mixed land use areas which lends itself to an unsubdivided council structure where councillors are focussed on a municipality-wide, strategic view. As some submitters noted, it is possible for a council to achieve good representation and meet planning, growth and commercial objectives through a council-wide strategic approach, and not necessarily through separate ward representation.

Encouraging candidates

During the public hearing, supporters of the subdivided model also argued that separate wards would encourage candidates to run, and in particular, would promote gender diversity with more female candidates and councillors. Both subdivided and unsubdivided models enable fair and equitable representation for voters, communities of interest and industries in the municipality. In terms of candidacy, some supporters of ward-based representation argue that the smaller sized wards can be easier for campaigning and representing constituents once elected. However, the small geographic size of the Warrnambool municipality again makes it reasonable to expect candidates and councillors to be able to campaign and represent the municipality as a whole.

With the interconnectedness between industries and small geographic size of Warrnambool City Council, fair and equitable representation can continue to be achieved under the current structure in Warrnambool without specific, separate wards. The VEC retains its preference to recommend an unsubdivided structure for the municipality.

7.2 The VEC's recommendation

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

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

Appendix 1: Public involvement

Preliminary submissions

Preliminary submissions were received from:

Frank Conheady

Stephen Crichton

Brian Dalton

Andrew S Fawcett

John Harris

Mark Jones

Frank L J McCarthy Snr

Cr Michael Neoh

Proportional Representation Society of Australia (Victoria-Tasmania) Inc

James Purcell, MLC

Duncan Stalker OAM and Vern Robson (joint submission)

Warrnambool City Council

Response submissions

Response submissions were received from:

Ayron Atkinson

Jack Daffy

Andrew Fawcett

John Harris

Christopher Hart

Sam Maloney

Frank McCarthy

Keith McKechnie

Annie McNamara

Elizabeth Owen

Proportional Society of Australia (Victoria-Tasmania)

Duncan Stalker OAM and Vern Robson (joint submission)

Warrnambool City Council

Heidi Wisniewski

Public hearing

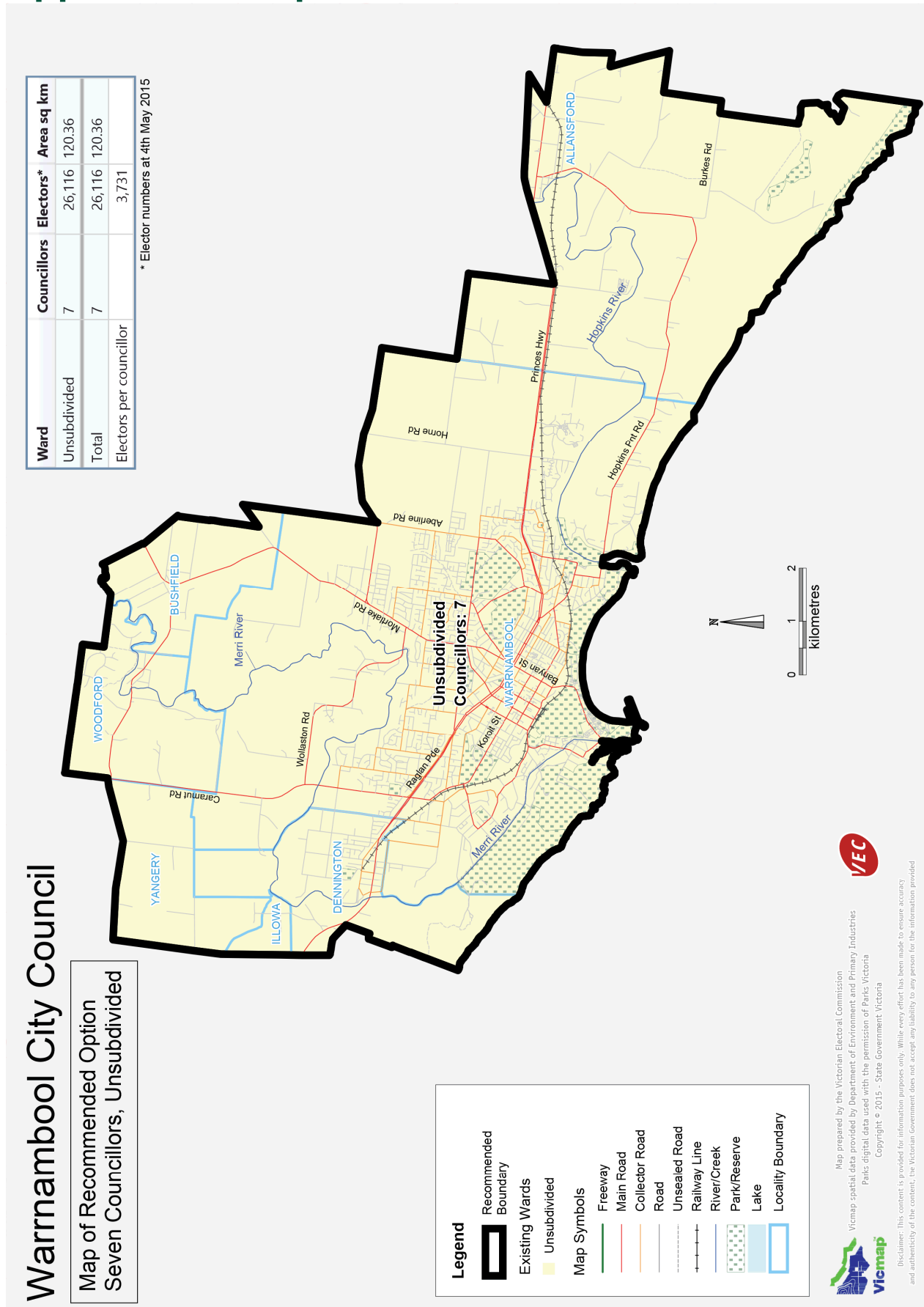
The following individuals spoke at the public hearing:

Bruce Anson, Chief Executive Officer, Warrnambool City Council

John Harris

Duncan Stalker OAM and Vern Robson (joint submission)

Appendix 2: Map



Warrnambool City Council

Map of Recommended Option
Seven Councillors, Unsubdivided

Legend

- Recommended 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
Public digital data used with the permission of Parks Victoria
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Appendix 3: Public information program

Advertising

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

Newspaper	Notice of review	Notice of preliminary report
<i>Herald Sun</i>	Wednesday 15 July	Wednesday 9 September
<i>Warrnambool Standard</i>	Saturday 1 August	Wednesday 23 September

Media releases

A media release was prepared and distributed to local media at the commencement of the review on Wednesday 29 July. A further release was distributed at the publication of the preliminary report on Wednesday 23 September. A final release was circulated on the publication date of this final report.

Public information session

A public information session for people interested in the review process was held on Wednesday 5 August in the Reception Room, Civic Centre, Warrnambool City Council, 25 Liebig Street, Warrnambool.

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.

Victorian Electoral Commission
Level 11, 530 Collins Street
Melbourne VIC 3000

131 832

warrnambool.review@vec.vic.gov.au