Banyule Ratepayers Action Group Inc.

SUBMISSION TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATION REVIEW

BANYULE CITY COUNCIL

SUMMARY

The Banyule Ratepayers Action Group Inc. supports the retention of the current seven wards with seven Councillors i.e. a single Councillor representing each ward.

We support minor ward boundary modifications to better reflect Councillor to voter ratios.

Although outside the scope of this review BRAG supports the retention of attendance voting for Banyule Council elections.

INTRODUCTION

The Banyule Ratepayers Action Group Inc. (BRAG) is an incorporated association under the Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012.

The purposes of the association are—
- Work for the Banyule community to achieve its expectations
- Integrity and honesty
- Encourage genuine, open and frank communications
- Renew and/or refresh urban assets through discouraging inappropriate development but encouraging high quality, appropriate development
- Subject Councillors and Council staff performance to public audit and make them publicly fully accountable for their decisions and recommendations
- Ensure that political parties do not control Council decision making by agitating for the election of competent people with real world experience outside of politics

The Banyule Ratepayers Action Group Inc. through its membership believes that it is well placed to make a submission to the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) for this important review.

BANYULE CITY

Banyule is located 15 kilometres north-east of Melbourne and covers an area of 62 square kilometres. Comprising 20 suburbs, the city is primarily a residential area, renowned for its open spaces and plentiful parklands, especially along the Yarra and Plenty River valleys.

There are industrial areas in Heidelberg West, Greensborough/Briar Hill and Bundoora, as well as institutions such as the Austin and Repatriation Medical Centre and the Simpson Army Barracks. Banyule also has a range of educational, health and
leisure facilities.
The Yarra River runs along the City’s south border while the west is defined by Darebin Creek.

Banyule offers a range of shopping centres from the large regional shopping complex at Greensborough, to local shopping villages/centres at Eaglemont, Ivanhoe, East Ivanhoe, Heidelberg, Macleod and Montmorency.

The population of Banyule is estimated at 130,237. This total population has only increased by 13,000 since the last review in 2007.

One of the key drivers of demographic change in Banyule is the age structure of the population and the growing number of empty nesters. The housing choices of this group will affect the demographic and residential makeup of the City over the next three decades.

In the southern end of the City there has been a significant growth due to apartments, particularly near the activity centres in Ivanhoe and Heidelberg.

CURRENT ELECTORAL STRUCTURE

Banyule City is a subdivided municipality with seven wards and a single Councillor representing each ward and therefore a total of seven Councillors. These wards are called Bakewell, Beale, Griffin, Grimshaw, Hawdon, Ibbott and Olympia.

COMMUNITIES OF INTEREST

There are a number of clear differences between the suburbs within Banyule City.

Heidelberg West area stands out from other parts of the municipality on a number of indices of disadvantage (located in Olympia Ward).

In contrast, Lower Plenty (Hawdon Ward), Eaglemont, Ivanhoe, Ivanhoe East (Griffin Ward), St Helena, Eltham North (Beale Ward) and Yallambie (Bakewell Ward) stand out as the wealthier suburbs. Lower Plenty particularly stands out in having larger parcels of land.

A very large bio medical precinct is located at the southern end of the City (Griffin Ward).

Heidelberg Heights and Bellfield (Olympia Ward) have in recent years become home to many younger professionals.

Rosanna, Macleod (Ibbott Ward) and Watsonia (Grimshaw Ward) have larger proportions of older voters, whereas Heidelberg West (Olympia Ward) has a significant Somali population.

Data from the 2016 Census indicate that Heidelberg West, Bellfield, St Helena and Eltham North have higher proportions of families with children, whereas Heidelberg, Heidelberg Heights, Rosanna, Macleod and Watsonia have larger proportions of older voters. Recent arrivals to Australia are found in larger proportions in the south-west.
of the municipality, particularly Heidelberg West, Bellfield and Heidelberg Heights. This diversity means that the Council must respond differently to the needs of some geographic areas of the municipality, through both its service delivery and its representation. The challenge is therefore to consider a structure which best aligns electoral representation to the needs and aspirations of the community.

In the 2007 review undertaken by the VEC they concluded at that time that the current ward structure captured on balance communities of interest and recommended to the Minister for Local Government that the current ward structure be maintained, albeit with some minor boundary changes albeit to better reflect Councillor to voter ratios.

In over 12 years the population of Banyule has increased by 12,000. Therefore BRAG Inc. sees no reason to alter the structure as this structure still captures on balance the communities of interest. However the wards do need to be slightly readjusted again to better reflect the Councillor to voter ratios.

**MAP**

The supporting map attached defines BRAG’s amended seven wards with the amended boundaries to better reflect the Councillor to voter ratios.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ward</th>
<th>Z</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bakewell Ward</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13,693</td>
<td>-3.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beale Ward</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14,694</td>
<td>+3.73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griffin Ward</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14,139</td>
<td>-0.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grimshaw Ward</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14,024</td>
<td>-1.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawdon Ward</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14,433</td>
<td>+1.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibbott Ward</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13,838</td>
<td>-2.31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olympia Ward</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14,337</td>
<td>+1.21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The changes proposed by BRAG Inc are minor alterations to the current boundaries and are arranged in a way to make it easy for ratepayers to understand. Where possible main roads
are the key boundaries as well as rivers. Communities of interest are maintained under BRAG Inc’s option. Ibbott Ward is enhanced with a major activity centre of Heidelberg falling under the responsibility of this Ward, with Griffin Ward retaining one major activity centre of Ivanhoe. This corrects the disproportionate responsibility of one ward councillor being in charge of two activity centres. Bakewell Ward becomes a northern ward which will largely mean it will be catering for concerns of Greensborough and issues resulting due to the North East Link. Griffin Ward picks up areas which it lost as part of the 2007 restructure in Ivanhoe. Hawdon Ward, Olympia Ward, Beale and Grimshaw Ward largely retain the character of the Ward structure meaning communities of interest are intact.

OTHER OPTIONS

BRAG Inc. did also investigate the following two options:

(a) A nine ward option with single Councillor for each ward
(b) A three ward option with three Councillors in each ward

(a) Nine Ward option

A nine ward with single Councillors option was investigated. However this option was discounted as in all alternatives communities of interest would have to be split up compared to the 7 ward option. This was also discounted due to the additional cost involved with 9 Councillors, with no perceived other benefits.

(b) Three ward option

A three ward option with three Councillors in each ward was also investigated. This option was discounted again as the communities of interest would not be appropriately catered for compared to either the 7 or 9 single ward options. This would cause richer densely populated areas like Heidelberg or Ivanhoe outvoting Somali populations in West Heidelberg as an example. This option would favour political parties rather than independents and BRAG Inc. saw this as a great disadvantage for local democracy.

COUNCIL ELECTIONS

BRAG Inc. recognises that it is not part of the brief of this review. However BRAG Inc. supports strongly the continuance of the attendance voting system for Banyule Council elections.

BRAG Inc. notes that at the last Council election in 2016:

- In neighbouring Darebin Council there were 3 wards of 3 Councillors to be elected which were all conducted by postal voting. A total of 60 candidates nominated.
- In Banyule by comparison there were 7 wards with a single Councillor to be elected in each ward by attendance voting. A total of 17 candidates nominated.
BRAG Inc. contends that it is more likely that the postal vote system supports a greater use of "dummy" candidates as these candidates do not have to face the people or man booths on Election Day.
RECOMMENDATION

The Banyule Ratepayers Action Group Inc. recommends to the VEC the following relating to the future structure of Banyule.

1. There should continue to be seven wards represented each by a single Councillor, therefore a total of seven Councillors.

2. The ward boundaries should be amended in accordance with the attached map to better reflect current Councillor to voter ratios but maintain communities of interest.

3. There should continue to be attendance voting for Council elections.