

Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to Banyule's representation review. In this submission I have tried to follow the logical steps which have lead me to my conclusion. I hope you will take the time to follow my reasoning.

I make 3 main recommendations

1. **Banyule should have 9 councillors.** This is to achieve a voter / councillor ratio in line with other councils in Melbourne.
2. **Council Should be subdivided.** Unsubdivided councils are largely reserved for rural councils. A subdivided council is more consistent with similar councils.
3. **Banyule should be subdivided into 3 wards with 3 councillors each.** Multi Member wards have provided better democracy to the vast majority of victorian councils and Banyule is deficient in the benefits that multi member wards can bring.

I have also included a suggested map which I include only as an example of a possible structure, however I will also go into my reasoning behind the map. First I will address each question addressed by the review.

The VEC will consider :

1. the number of councillors
2. whether the electoral structure of the local council should be subdivided into wards or unsubdivided
3. if subdivided:
 - the number of wards
 - how many councillors should be elected for each ward
 - what the ward boundaries should be
 - what should be the name of each ward

Number of councillors.

1st recommendation: Banyule Council should have 9 councillors.

Appendix 1 of the submission guide clearly shows that Banyules voter to councillor ratio is greater than any other Metropolitan Melbourne council. The other three councils which have 7 councillors have more than 20 000 fewer voters than Banyule. It has twice the voters per councillor than Nillumbik our neighbour which also has 7 councillors. It is reasonable to say that Banyule should have a voter / councillor ratio more in line with other councils. This reduces the workload on councillors and allows for better representation. In the interests of avoiding deadlocks, ideally councils should have an odd number of councillors. If Banyule were to go to a 9 councillor structure then we would have a voter/ councillor rate of approximately 11 000. This is broadly in line with Glen Eira which has a similar voting population and puts Banyule much closer to a median ratio. We have seen arguments in the past that this would lead to higher rates bills for residents, however the cap on rate rises should limit this fear. Banyule is already increasing its rates as high as allowed by legislation.

Should the council be subdivided?

2nd recommendation: Council should be subdivided

Arguments can be made that a single ward council would result in a purely proportional representation in council. The reality is that elections are likely to be flooded with candidates with little means for electors to differentiate them. It would also give a higher chance for voters in low population areas to be ignored by councillors. Most metropolitan councils which have gone to multi member wards have at least 3 wards. A single ward council is unlikely to be supported in Banyule.

How many wards and how many councillors for each ward?

3rd recommendation: Council should be subdivided into 3 wards with 3 councillors each.

If we accept recommendations 1 and 2 then the next logical step is to ask should we move to 9 wards each with an individual councillor or 3 wards with three councillors each. Both systems are successfully used throughout Victoria so the question is what would best suit Banyule.

Arguments for individual wards

- Councillors are able to concentrate on their own 'patch'.
- Councillors are not competing with each other. Perhaps this leads to less division in council.
- Geographically separate 'communities of interest' are serviced by smaller wards.
- The local government minister has indicated that single member wards will become compulsory.
- Reduce the number of candidates meaning that ballot papers are less 'messy'

Arguments for multi member wards

- Proportional voting will lead to a more diverse council makeup. (for example single member wards have 33.9% women while multi member wards have 41.7% women. Banyule council has had a long history of very low numbers of female councillors)
- Voters interests cannot be represented by an accident of geography.
- Voters much more likely to find a councillor sympathetic to their needs.
- Councillors are accountable to more voters.
- Encourage candidates who have a vision for the whole community.
- Increased number of candidates. (Banyule had two uncontested wards and a further two wards contested only by candidates who did not seem to want to win. This means that 4 of the 7 wards at the last council election were effectively uncontested.)
- The proportional nature of voting should lead to some stability while not unduly making it impossible for fresh blood to reinvigorate council.

How does this apply to Banyule?

Councillors vote on issues covering the entirety of the council area. Encouraging them to only be aware of their 'own patch' leads to ill informed decisions. Much is made of the 'communities of interest' however these communities cannot be segregated by geography. In the age of facebook groups, people have found themselves forming groups without the restriction of ward boundaries. The transition towns movement is just one example of a subset of the community forging a common interest across the council area.

Council attributes much of its success to the councillors under the current system working as a team. This raises the question of whether working as a team is in the best interests of the electorate. Council in its current form can be said to be working as a cartel - making decisions and deals behind closed doors so that the voting public is not presented with a choice. This acts to inhibit the residents from feeling that they can impact on council and its make up. This can be seen most clearly from the last council election where of 7 elected councillors, 2 were elected unopposed and a further 2 were elected with only token competition. It has been suggested that these token candidates ran only to protect the sitting councillor.

Diversity is valuable in council as it adds different voices and different world views. These views can and should tug in different directions so that community members can see that they are being represented. Women in council is only one way that we can measure diversity. Given that women make up half the population we should expect to see around half of councillors be female. Banyules history in this matter is woeful. It is tempting to take heart in the election of councillor Champion however, it is instructive to hear how she describes how she became elected. "I did as I was told."

(Council meeting 15 July 2019 2 hr 57 min

<https://www.mixcloud.com/banyulecouncil/ordinary-meeting-of-council-15-july-2019/>).

This is not a method I think council should rely on to correct historic imbalance. Banyule council has a problem with attracting a diverse range of candidates and would greatly benefit from lowering the bar of entry to encourage engagement.

Of course the elephant in the room is that the Local Government Minister has indicated that he will veto any move toward a multi member ward. I remind the VEC and the minister that he has not yet passed the local government act and until he has, the VEC should continue to work under the current laws. The VEC has a 12 year review cycle that is designed to limit the interference of the minister in these decisions and I would hope that the VEC can continue it's work independently.

What the ward boundaries should be.

There are any number of answers to this question. No solution will be perfect, for example the current structure attempts keep like minded communities together yet it splits Montmorency in half. Any line in the map is inherently divisive yet with fewer lines we can hope to bring the community together. I have created a map using the excellent boundary

builder program. I can see that this is not the only way of achieving the 3 ward structure and I hope that a disagreement with the map design does not detract from my above reasoning.

Notable features of the design.

1. Most boundaries are retained
2. Montmorency now in one ward
3. Ward 1 now encompasses residents linked to the Banyule flats and Yarra as it travels east.
4. Yallambie split by the army barracks.
5. More councilors will be responsible for some of the biggest challenges facing this council of the next 12 years. ie Rosanna Rd, North East Link and the Suburban Rail Loop.

Names of the wards

This largely cosmetic choice is best answered by the community after consultation. I have deliberately not named the new wards as I do not wish to unduly influence this decision.