

Representation Review - Banyule City Council - Preliminary Submission

Don Stokes - Heidelberg - 22 Jul 2019

Victorian Electoral Commission: Local Council Electoral Representation Review.

Banyule City Council. June 2019

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Victorian Electoral Commission regular electoral representation review of the City of Banyule.

Banyule has a high number of voters per councillor and an uneven distribution of voters per councillor, and is therefore subject to a ward boundary change.

I support the implementation of multi member wards and proportional representation as a means to elect councillors in the City of Banyule.

I propose that Banyule is divided into 3 wards, each with 3 councillors.

My principal reasons are that multi member wards will:

- Increase the pool of candidates
- Mean a move to proportional representation, contributing to a more democratic council by enabling the representation of a wider range of views and facilitating a richer debate in council deliberations
- Meet the need to attract a more diverse range of councillors with a wider range of skills and expertise
- Allow ward boundaries to be more permanent. 3, multi-member wards would average out population variations, resulting in more stable ward boundaries than with 9, single member wards,

Banyule City Council has a history of a lack of diversity amongst councillors, and of incumbent councillors 'running' candidates as a means of harvesting preferences, ensuring their electoral survival. This process is not transparent, with voters typically unaware of where their votes end up.

A consequence of this process is that incumbent councillors cement their tenure to the extent that it is often futile for new candidates to run for election.

I believe these problems could be addressed by Banyule adopting multi-councillor wards, as it would increase the pool of candidates through opening up opportunities for more people to run.

Multi- councillor wards would also offer greater representation of smaller groups of residents within the City of Banyule by attracting a more diverse range of councillors with a wider range of skills and expertise, and by providing residents with a choice of councillors to represent them.

I believe this approach would lead to higher quality decision making that better reflects the views of the community; and would enhance the Council's capability to deal with the increasingly complex matters that fall within its responsibilities.

If the VEC does find in favour of Multi-member wards, I believe that Banyule should be divided in a way that achieves maximum socio economic and cultural diversity in each ward as possible.

I note that the Minister for local Government has been developing the Local Government Bill 2019 for some 4 years, but has only recently realised that the adoption of multi-member wards would disadvantage candidates of the major parties, and allow independents and candidates of minor parties a more even chance of election.

The result of this realisation is that he has unilaterally declared that all Victorian councils will be single member ward councils from the completion of the review process.

I believe that this decision is undemocratic and heavy handed, and ask that the VEC remain true to the democratic principles of the review and resist political interference from the Minister.