

Electoral Representation Review – Boroondara City Council - Response Submission Boroondara Reconciliation Network – Balwyn – 7 May 2019

As Convenor of the Boroondara Reconciliation Network, I am writing on their behalf to support Option A in the VEC proposal for the City of Boroondara for multi-councillor wards consisting of three 3-councillor wards and one 2-councillor ward, making a total of eleven councillors. We believe that this arrangement would promote more responsive, accountable, transparent and representative governance.

Firstly, with more councillors representing each ward, the chances of council elections being manipulated by political organisations using ‘dummy’ candidates to get favoured candidates elected would be reduced. The quota required for election for each candidate in a multi-councillor ward to be elected would be much lower than the current fifty percent and therefore facilitate more plurality in representation. This would reduce the risk of councils being dominated by any particular political group. This, unfortunately, seems to have occurred in Boroondara with Indigenous Reconciliation policy. Despite overwhelming support for acknowledging country and Reconciliation actions shown by community surveys, in February 2017 the Council adopted, without consultation, a Code of Conduct that took away the requirement to acknowledge country at Council meetings and major civic events. This change of policy was applauded by the Institute of Public Affairs and was contrary to the recommendations of the M.A.V. and State Government suggesting that a majority of councillors were following a set political agenda rather than acting in accord with community expectations. Also, the Council’s Reconciliation Action Plan was abandoned without any review or consultation. We believe that the creation of Multi Councillor wards would create more diversity in the Council and therefore more flexibility and openness to community issues such as Reconciliation.

Option A, if adopted, has other advantages. If Boroondara had eleven councillors rather than the current ten, there would be a clear majority in favour of decisions and it would eliminate the possibility of deadlock. Also with more than one councillor representing each ward, there would be more incentive for councillors to respond to local concerns, knowing other councillors were aware of the problem. I believe this would greatly assist transparency and accountability. With more councillors reflecting and valuing diversity of opinion, there might even be more opportunity made available for residents to have questions answered at council meetings.

We also believe the creation of the new wards provides an opportunity to pay respect to Boroondara’s Aboriginal heritage by giving wards Indigenous names, bearing in mind that ‘Boroondara’ itself is a Woiwurrung word. There are many Woiwurrung words that would be very suitable for each new ward depending on its location. For example a ward containing Camberwell could be called Gayip (which means corroboree because there was a corroboree tree near the site of the civic centre); a ward containing Beckett Park, one of the highest points in the eastern suburbs, could be named Banool (meaning ‘hill’); a ward adjacent to the Yarra could be named Birrarung, the Woiwurrung name for the Yarra; a ward with Gardiner’s Creek could be given the creek’s Woiwurrung name, Kooyongkoot; a ward containing Hawthorn could be named Myrnong after the yam daisy which was harvested in the area. These are just examples and the traditional owners should be consulted for their suggestions once the boundaries of the four new wards are finalised. Such naming would be a wonderful way to help educate people about Boroondara’s Aboriginal history and connection.

The Boroondara Reconciliation Network believe that Option A therefore has much to recommend it and would help ensure that Boroondara is more in tune with community expectations.