

Electoral Representation Review - Boroondara City Council - Preliminary Submission
Ken Eley - Surrey Hills - 10 March 2019

From: [REDACTED]
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Boroondara representation
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Victorian Electoral Commission

To whom it may concern

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the representation review for Boroondara City council. I want an increase to 11 councillors and a shift to multi-councillor wards, as was proposed as the preferred model in 2008.

Boroondara is more homogeneous than Fitzroy or Brunswick where I used to live, but the current composition of council fails to represent the diversity of Boroondara's residents. Particularly poorly represented are young people who make up 24.4% of the population according to the 2016 Census. In addition, people of Chinese ancestry who comprise 15% of the population in that census, and also the 5-10% of the population who identify as LGBTIQI. I am not in one of these significant minorities, In fact I fit the archetype of our councillors - white, heterosexual, Australian born and older (in my 70s). But as a man, I have seen the enormous benefits that diversity of gender has brought to the workplace, government, social attitudes to violence and bullying, and to willingness to cooperate in a team. Only the introduction of multi-councillor wards can improve the representation of minorities. That would be more democratic and in my opinion lead to better decisions.

Having fewer and larger wards would also have the advantage of reducing the frequency of adjusting boundaries to adjust for shifting populations, and the need to keep enrolments in each ward close to the mean. When numbers differ significantly from the mean, democracy is compromised.

Larger wards also allow communities of interest to be united. An individual's area of direct interest covers much more than they live: at least it includes where one shops, where children attend school, where they attend their neighbourhood centre, socialise or do exercise.

As well as wanting to have multi-councillor wards with proportional representation, I think that the number of councillors should be odd, preferably 11. This is important for the obvious reason that if the council is equally split on an issue, and the mayor's casting vote is required, then the ward the mayor represents receives double representation. This is clearly undemocratic. However I think there is a subtler consequence of wider and important significance. Suppose a councillor belongs to a group, whether formal or otherwise, and that group has a known position on the issue in which the community is evenly split. If the number is odd, the councillor is under pressure to make a conscientious and rational decision rather than succumb to the position of their support base. There is also more incentive to find a compromise or alternative which satisfies both sides. I have seen this dynamic work effectively in a council with an odd number of councillors and three councillors per ward. If the number is even, then the councillor who has done their numbers can hide behind the casting vote of the mayor.

Ken Eley

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Bruce Kenneth Eley (aka Ken Eley)
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