



RESPONSE TO THE VICTORIAN ELECTORAL
REPRESENTATION REVIEW REPORT OF THE
GLENELG SHIRE COUNCIL

Dated: 9 April 2019

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This submission is the Glenelg Shire Councils response to the Victorian Electoral Commission's Preliminary Report titled "*Local Council Representation Review – Preliminary Report Glenelg Shire Council March 2019*".

Thank you for the opportunity to comment and provide a submission in response to the three options outlined in the preliminary report. It is noted that the matters for consideration in this review are broadly the following three issues:

- whether a local council has the appropriate number of councillors
- whether the local council should be un-subdivided, with councillors elected from the whole local council, or subdivided into wards
- if subdivided, the number of wards, ward boundaries and the number of councillors per ward

Preferred Option

The Glenelg Shire Council supports Option A (preferred option) where the municipality of the Glenelg Shire Council consists of seven councillors elected from an un-subdivided electoral structure. The rationale for this support is detailed below for each of the relevant aspects.

Number of Councillors

The findings from the 2007 review indicated that the preferred number of Councillors was seven. Overall, in the 12 years since this review, there has been little change in the size or geographical distribution of the population within the shire. The average number of voters per councillor is 2,510 which has not changed significantly and is mid-range when compared to similar Councils.

It is also noted that Country Victorian local councils with a similar size and number of voters generally also have seven councillors and that this aligns with the VEC principle for a consistent state-wide approach to the total number of Councillors.

In regard to future planning the Council is not forecasting any significant population growth or decline in the foreseeable future and the plus or minus 10% tolerance for voter to councillor ratio is highly unlikely to be affected.

Council is of the view that there are no special circumstances within the Glenelg Shire, or any communities of interest that are not currently provided with adequate representation. Whilst the Glenelg Shire has a diverse population, Council also notes that a change in the number of Councillors did not get any significant support throughout the public submission period which suggests that the community is currently satisfied with the level of representation. The Glenelg Shire Council has worked with seven Councillors for the past three elections and this has provided good representation for voters across the Glenelg Shire.

Subsequently for these reasons the Glenelg Shire Council supports the retention of the current seven Councillors and feels that this provides the best outcome for representation within the municipality.

Un-subdivided Structure

Councillors are of the view that the current un-subdivided electoral structure is currently working well for a unified community. This approach provides for a whole-of-shire approach and mitigates parochial interests. The current Council team is able to demonstrate a community wide direction whilst still being able to address local community issues when they arise. Councillors in an un-subdivided electoral structure must be mature to be able to be aware of the whole regions needs and need to work cooperatively to achieve outcomes

Council notes that a subdivided structure did receive some support from the preliminary submissions. Councillors are of the view that such a structure can enforce division with representatives feeling obliged to support individual area preferences over the best interests of the shire as a whole. Ward structures, especially where representatives must reside in those wards, require a number of appropriate candidates to run and there are risks of uncontested representation or possibly even no representation at all should no suitable candidates consider running for Council. Previous elections have seen a decline in candidates from areas outside of Portland.

An un-subdivided structure provides a wider choice of candidates for representation which can be limited in a ward structure. Voters can vote for any candidate and there is no confusion regarding ward boundaries. Additionally, an un-subdivided structure provides an ease of replacement should an elected Councillor be unable to fulfil their term through a countback system rather than subject voters to a by-election.

Glenelg Shire covers an area of 6,212 square kilometres and Councillors must cover a large area of the region. Whilst modern technologies and electronic communications assist Councillors remain accessible with residents throughout the municipality, there is still a significant amount of travelling involved. The population dispersion throughout the Glenelg Shire is noted and the workload of Councillors is currently able to be shared equally amongst all elected Councillors. This approach would be much more difficult within a subdivided structure.

The current structure has worked for the Glenelg Shire Council over the last three general elections of the Council (in 2008, 2012 and 2016) and is providing fair representation in the local Council area, creating a shared approach to issues and support for a whole municipality approach to the strategic direction of the Glenelg Shire Council.

Overall the Glenelg Shire Council supports an un-subdivided electoral structure as the best system that supports effective voting and representation.

Conclusion

The Glenelg Shire Council supports the Commission's preliminary preferred "Option A" consisting of seven Councillors elected from an un-subdivided electoral structure.

Council believes that this option is in the best interest of the Shire's constituents and provides fair and equitable representation for the members of the community who are entitled to vote at a general election of the Council.



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MAYOR