

Local council electoral structure review

Final Report

Horsham Rural City Council

August 2023

Acknowledgement of Country

The electoral representation advisory panel acknowledges the Wotjobaluk, Wergaia, Jupagalk, Jaadwa and Jadawadjali peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters for which it held this review and pays respects to ancestors and Elders past, present and emerging. The panel acknowledges their custodianship for many thousands of years and their continuing living culture.

Report approval

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1	15 August 2023	The Honourable Frank Vincent AO KC
1	14 August 2023	Ms Máiréad Doyle

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Executive summary

An independent electoral structure review panel appointed by the Minister for Local Government has reviewed the electoral structure of Horsham Rural City Council.

The purpose of the review was to advise the Minister on the appropriate number of councillors and electoral structure, including ward names, for the council.

Under Victoria's *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act), Horsham Rural City Council must now have a single-councillor ward electoral structure.

The panel looked at:

- the appropriate number of councillors and wards for the council
- the location of ward boundaries
- appropriate ward names.

This report presents the panel's final advice to the Minister on the recommended new electoral structure of Horsham Rural City Council to meet the requirements of the Act.

More information about the background to the review is available on [page 6](#).

Recommendation

The electoral representation advisory panel recommends that Horsham Rural City Council adopt a 7 single-councillor ward structure – 7 wards with one councillor per ward.

The recommended names for the 7 wards in this electoral structure are Green Park Ward, Horsham North Ward, Kalimna Ward, May Park Ward, Oatlands Ward, Pine Lake Ward, and Wyn Wyn Ward.

This advice is submitted to the Minister for Local Government as required by the Terms of Reference of the electoral representation advisory panel and the Act.

A detailed map of the boundaries for the recommended electoral structure is provided as [Appendix 1](#).

Summary of approach

Developing electoral structure models

The panel considered a range of factors when deciding on its final recommendation including:

- research and analysis
- voter growth or decline over time
- public submissions (see below).

More information on the way the panel decided on the models is available on [page 7](#).

Preliminary report

The panel published a preliminary report on Wednesday 28 June 2023 with the following electoral structure models for public consultation:

- Model 1: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 7 councillors – 7 wards with one councillor per ward.
- Model 2: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 7 councillors – 7 wards with one councillor per ward with different ward boundaries to Model 1.
- Model 3: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 7 councillors – 7 wards with one councillor per ward with different ward boundaries to Model 1 and Model 2.

The full preliminary report is available on the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) website at vec.vic.gov.au

Response submissions

The panel received 17 submissions responding to the preliminary report. Of these, no submissions included maps.

A full analysis of response submissions received can be found on [page 15](#).

Public hearing

The panel held an online public hearing for those wishing to speak about their response submission at 10 am on Wednesday 26 July 2023. Two people spoke at the hearing.

Background

About the 2023–24 electoral structure reviews

In October 2022, the Minister for Local Government formed 2 electoral representation advisory panels to review and provide advice on the electoral structures of 39 local councils, under section 16 of the Act. If the Minister accepts the electoral structure recommended by the panel, any changes will take effect at the October 2024 local council elections.

The Act introduced several changes to local government representation, including the types of electoral structures local councils may have. All metropolitan, interface and regional city councils (including Horsham Rural City Council) must now have single-councillor ward electoral structures.

For Horsham Rural City Council, the electoral representation advisory panel examined:

- the number of councillors and wards
- where the ward boundaries should be
- the names of each ward.

The Act requires electoral structures to provide fair and equitable representation and facilitate good governance. Each ward must have an approximately equal number of voters per councillor (within +/-10% of the average). While conducting the review, the panel also noted the role of a councillor as specified under section 28 of the Act.

The electoral representation advisory panel

The panel that conducted the electoral structure review of Horsham Rural City Council had 3 members:

- The Honourable Frank Vincent AO KC (Chairperson*)
- Ms Liz Williams PSM
- Acting Deputy Electoral Commissioner Ms Máiréad Doyle.

* Please note that during the public hearing and the final decision meeting of this review, Ms Janet Dore sat as Acting Chairperson while the Honourable Frank Vincent took a period of leave. The content of the final report was endorsed by the Honourable Frank Vincent on his return from leave.

The purpose of the review is to advise the Minister on the appropriate number of councillors and electoral structure, including ward names, for the council. The panel is independent of councils and the Victorian State government.

Under the Act, the VEC is not responsible for reviewing council electoral structures but must provide administrative and technical support to the panel. The Electoral Commissioner (or their delegate) must be a member of each panel.

Public engagement

Public information program

On behalf of the panel, the VEC conducted a public information and awareness program to inform the public about the Horsham Rural City Council electoral structure review. This included:

- public notices in state-wide newspapers
- public information sessions to outline the review process and respond to questions from the community
- media releases announcing the start of the review with the release of the preliminary report
- information on social media channels
- updated website content on vec.vic.gov.au, including:
 - current information on the review process
 - submission guide and fact sheets for each council under review with background information
 - response submissions from the public.

Horsham Rural City Council was also offered but did not take up 2 optional promotion methods to promote the reviews:

- targeting social media advertisements at the council area
- notifying voters in the council area subscribed to the VEC's VoterAlert service about the start of the review and release of the preliminary report.

Public consultation

The panel encouraged public input to the review of Horsham Rural City Council via:

- response submissions to the preliminary report
- an online public hearing for anyone who made a response submission to speak to the panel and expand on their submission.

Public submissions are an important part of the review process and are considered alongside other factors addressed during the review. These are outlined below.

Developing recommendations

The panel's final recommendations comply with the Act and were developed through careful consideration of:

- research and analysis conducted by the VEC support team, including geospatial and demographic data

- rates or patterns of population and voter change over time, and relevant forecasts of growth or decline based on forecast information provided by .id (informed decisions, a company specialising in demographics and forecasting)
- input received during public consultation.

Deciding on the number of councillors

The Act allows local councils to have between 5 and 12 councillors, but neither the Act nor the Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2020 specify how the number of councillors is to be determined. As such, the recommendation put forward by the panel in this report is guided by the Act's intention for fairness and equity in voter representation and the consequent facilitation of good governance.

In examining the appropriate number of councillors for Horsham Rural City Council, the panel considered the following criteria:

- the population and number of voters in the council area, compared to other councils with a similar population size and number of voters in the same category (for example, other comparable metropolitan, interface and regional city councils)
- patterns of population change and voter growth or decline in the council area over time
- the current and past numbers of councillors
- the representation needs of communities of interest in the council area
- any matter raised in public submissions not already listed above.

Local councils with a larger number of voters will often have more councillors. Large populations generally have greater diversity, both in the type and number of communities of interest and issues relating to representation. However, the ideal number of councillors can also be influenced by the circumstances of each council, such as the:

- nature and complexity of services the council provides
- geographic size and topography of the area
- forecast population and voter growth or decline
- social diversity.

Deciding the electoral structure

Under the Act, regional city, metropolitan and interface councils must now have single-councillor ward electoral structures.

When developing single-councillor ward models for Horsham Rural City Council, the panel considered these criteria:

- whether the structure would comply with section 15(2) of the Act (see below), and for how long it would likely comply
- the appropriate number of councillors, as outlined above

- whether meaningful and effective ward boundaries could be established and whether these would be easily identifiable to local communities
- the representation of communities of interest
- the voter distribution and physical features of the area, and the impact these may have on the shape and size of wards
- past elections for the council, including:
 - numbers of candidates nominating
 - incidences of uncontested elections
 - rates of informal voting.
- other matters raised in public submissions not already listed above.

Under section 15(2) of the Act, subdivided structures must aim for an approximately equal number of voters per councillor in each ward. This means the number of voters represented by each councillor in a ward should be within +/-10% of the average number of voters per councillor for all wards.

During this review, the panel aimed to recommend a structure that would comply with section 15(2) at the time of the 2024 local council elections and, if possible, also comply based on voter numbers at the time the review was conducted. The panel used forecasts of population and voter change to assess compliance at the 2024 elections with as much accuracy as possible. In some cases, population change and other factors impacting voter numbers mean it is not possible to create compliant subdivided structures based both on voter numbers that were current at the time of the review and forecast voter numbers. In these instances, the panel prioritised compliance at the 2024 local government elections to ensure each vote will have approximately equal value at the 2024 election.

One of the factors that may impact compliance with section 15(2) is the number of current and forecast voters with ratepayer-based voting entitlements, also known as council-enrolled voters. Voters' rolls include both state-enrolled electors (the majority of the roll) and a smaller number of council-enrolled electors. The Act introduced changes to ratepayer-based entitlement categories, which come into full effect at the 2024 local council elections. The panel took this change to the makeup of voters' rolls, and therefore compliance with section 15(2) of the Act, into consideration during this review.

Deciding on ward names

The panel has taken the following approach to naming wards.

1. Retaining existing ward names if these were still relevant to the area covered by the ward.
2. When a new name was required, the panel based this on features such as:
 - places (registered under the *Geographic Place Names Act 1998*) in the ward
 - compass directions

- native flora or fauna.

Use of Aboriginal language

The panel recognises that there should first be meaningful consultation with local Aboriginal communities and groups before a ward is named using Aboriginal language. Meaningful consultation is a significant process that the panel was not able to undertake within the timeframes of the current review program.

The panel also recognises that many of the place names in current use across Victoria are based on Aboriginal language. As such, the panel has only put forward new ward names using Aboriginal language if:

- it is the name of a place within a ward
- it is currently in common use

and

- the name is registered under the *Geographic Place Names Act 1998*.

Unregistered names using Aboriginal language have not been put forward by the panel as new ward names. While the panel supports the adoption of names based on Aboriginal language, this requires appropriate consultation.

Accordingly, for the panel to consider an Aboriginal language ward name that is suggested in a public submission to the review, the name submitted needs to comply with the above guidelines.

About Horsham Rural City Council

Profile

Horsham Rural City Council is a regional council located in western Victoria, about 300 km north-west of Melbourne. The council area covers 4,267 km² with broadacre agriculture the main land use. It is surrounded by 5 shire councils: West Wimmera, Hindmarsh, Yarriambiack, Northern Grampians and Southern Grampians shire councils. Horsham township is the main population centre and home to nearly three-quarters of all its people. It is the largest urban centre in the Wimmera Southern Mallee region and serves as a regional service centre for an extensive rural area.

The Traditional Custodians for this area are the Wotjobaluk, Wergaia, Jupagalk, Jaadwa and Jadawadjali peoples.

Landscape

The municipality has a semi-arid climate. Summer temperatures can reach over 40 degrees and regular frosts are experienced in winter. Average annual rainfall is around 450 mm. About 70% of the area is dryland broadacre cropping and 27% of the area is covered by native vegetation and waterways (WCMA 2023).

Distinct natural features are Dyurrite (Mount Arapiles) and Burrunj (Black Range State Park), the Wimmera and Mackenzie rivers, Burnt Creek, and the Natimuk Douglas Saline Wetland Depression (WCMA 2023). Rivers, creeks, streams, wetlands and lakes are among the municipality's most valuable natural assets, and the Wimmera River is the largest watercourse in the municipality. The Natimuk Douglas Saline Wetland Depression is a former course of the Murray River and consists of more than 30 natural saline and freshwater lakes, with its wetlands providing significant nesting sites for migratory birds (DTP 2023).

At the 2021 Census, Horsham Rural City Council had a total population of 20,429 people (ABS 2021a), with 16,289 people, or over three quarters of the population living in Horsham regional city (ABS 2021b). Natimuk is the second largest town, with a population of 421 (ABS 2021c). The council also has about 25 small localities scattered throughout, each with less than 200 residents.

Agriculture is a key land use, and the main agricultural industries are cropping, wool and sheep meat, and the region is a major producer and exporter of hay (WCMA 2023).

The main road transport corridor in the region is the Western Highway, which connects Horsham with Melbourne (via Ballarat) and Adelaide. Other important road and rail corridors include the Henty Highway, which runs north–south and provides access to the Port of Portland and the Wimmera Highway provides a regional east–west link (DTP 2023). The Henty, Wimmera and Western highways all pass through Horsham regional city, as does the Wimmera River and its tributary, Burnt Creek.

Community

The population of Horsham Rural City Council was 20,429 at the 2021 Census, an increase of 2,684 since 2001 when the population was 17,745 people (ABS 2021a). This trend of modest growth is expected to continue, with population increasing in the regional city, partially offset by a decrease in rural areas.

Residents of the council have a median age of 41 (ABS 2021a). Compared to the Victorian average, and as a proportion of the total population, there are less people in the 20-54 year old age brackets and more aged 55 years and over. The percentage of people in the 0-20 year old age bracket is similar to all of Victoria (ABS 2021a).

The ancestry of residents in the council area is predominantly Australian (42.3%) and English (41.7%), followed by Scottish (11.1%), German (10.3%), and Irish (10.2%). In comparison, the overall rate of Victorians indicating Australian (27.2%) and English (29.2%) ancestry is significantly lower, indicating that Horsham Rural City Council is probably less diverse than the state averages (ABS 2021a).

The country of birth for residents in the council (compared to Victoria) are Australia 87.0% (65.0% for Victorians), England 1.1% (2.7%), India 0.9% (4.0%), Philippines 0.7% (1.1%), New Zealand 0.5% (1.5%) and Thailand 0.3% (0.3%). Residents who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people account for 1.8% of the total population, or 361 people in the 2021 Census (ABS 2021a).

English is the only language spoken at home for 89.9% of residents, while 5.5% of households use a non-English language, including Karen (spoken by 0.6% of residents), Malayalam (0.4%), Italian (0.3%), Mandarin (0.3%), and Nepali (0.2%) (ABS 2021a).

Home ownership levels are high with 71.3% of residents owning a house outright or with a mortgage, compared to 68.3% for all Victorians, while about 25% of residents are renting, close to the average of 28.5% for all of Victoria (ABS 2021a).

In Horsham Rural City Council, 61.0% of people aged 15 years and over are in the labour force, which is similar to the state as a whole. The top 5 occupations were professionals (17.8%), managers (16.3%), technicians and trades workers (14.2%), community and personal services workers (12.5%), and clerical and administrative workers (11.1%), with the main industries of employment being hospitals (8.8%), other social assistance services (3.1%), other grain growing (2.9%), secondary education (2.7%), and local government administration (2.5%) (ABS 2021a).

In terms of weekly incomes, the council sits below the state median rates for individuals (\$772 compared to \$803 for all Victorians), families (\$1,850 compared to \$2,136) and households (\$1,381 compared to \$1,759) (ABS 2021a).

Current number of councillors and electoral structure

Horsham Rural City Council currently has an unsubdivided electoral structure with a total of 7 councillors.

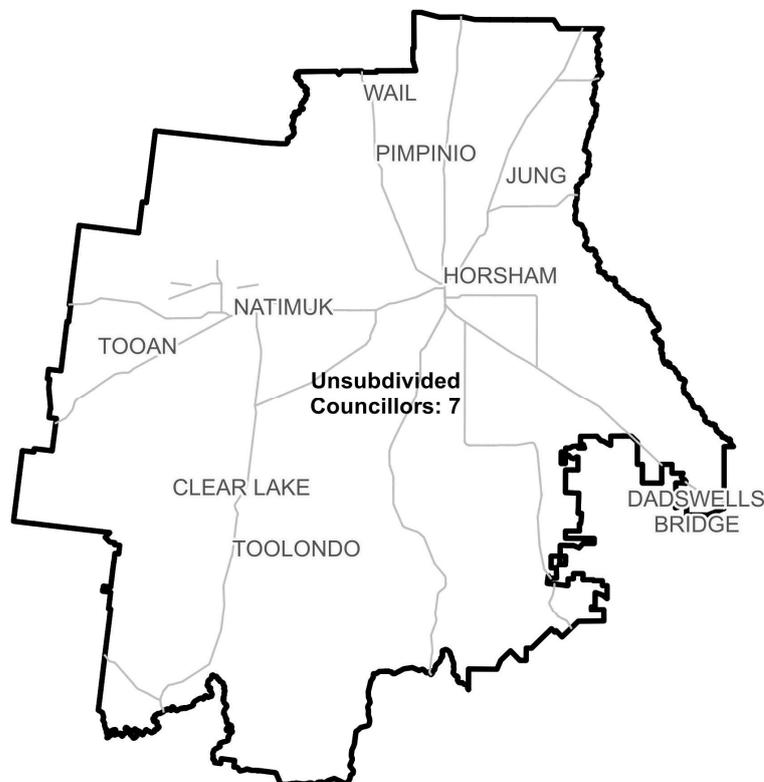


Figure 1: Diagram of current electoral structure of Horsham Rural City Council.

There are about 15,753 voters in the council area, with an approximate ratio of 2,250 voters per councillor.

Visit the VEC website at vec.vic.gov.au for more information on Horsham Rural City Council.

Last electoral structure review

The VEC conducted an electoral representation review of Horsham Rural City Council in 2015. This review was carried out under the *Local Government Act 1989 (Vic)*, which was replaced by the *Local Government Act 2020 (Vic)*.

After conducting the review, the VEC recommended that Horsham Rural City Council continue to consist of 7 councillors elected from an unsubdivided electorate.

Visit the VEC website at vec.vic.gov.au to access a copy of the 2015 representation review final report.

Horsham Rural City Council has maintained this structure since amalgamation in 1994.

Preliminary report

A preliminary report was released on Wednesday 28 June 2023. The panel considered research findings and the requirements of the Act when formulating the models presented in the preliminary report.

After careful consideration, the following electoral structure models were put forward for public consultation:

- Model 1: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 7 councillors] – 7 wards with one councillor per ward.
- Model 2: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 7 councillors – 7 wards with one councillor per ward with different ward boundaries to Model 1.
- Model 3: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 7 councillors – 7 wards with one councillor per ward with different ward boundaries to Model 1 and Model 2.

The full preliminary report is available on the VEC website at vec.vic.gov.au

Response submissions

The panel received 17 response submissions to the preliminary report from the public by the deadline of 5 pm on Wednesday 19 July 2023. You can find a list of people or organisations who made a response submission in [Appendix 2](#).

The table below provides an overview of preferences in response submissions. You can read an analysis of submissions below this table.

Table 1: Preferences expressed in response submissions					
Model 1 (7 single-councillor wards)	Model 2 (7 single-councillor wards)	Model 3 (7 single-councillor wards)	No preferred model indicated	Other (unsubdivided)	Out of scope
1	0	5*	4	8*	1

*Two submitters indicated support for more than one option.

One submitter preferred Model 1, arguing that of all the models, it had the most sensible and logical boundaries. No submissions favoured Model 2. Model 3 was the first preference of 3 submitters, with an additional 2 nominating it as their second preference after an unsubdivided structure.

Several submitters felt the current unsubdivided structure did not provide representation for particular communities in the council area. They hoped the change might lead to improved representation. Two submissions did not comment at all on which model was preferred and were concerned only with the naming of wards. One submission was out of scope.

Of the 14 submissions that commented on the electoral structure, 8 were highly critical of the change from an unsubdivided to a single-councillor ward structure. These submissions identified various flaws and negative consequences single-councillor wards would have for the council. They presented arguments on the benefits of maintaining the current unsubdivided structure, which is no longer permitted under the Act. For example, Dianna Blake of Horsham argued that the population of Horsham is not large enough to warrant single councillor wards. Likewise, Jennifer Smith of Horsham described how the council, as the least populous of Victoria's regional cities, would struggle to field a sufficient number candidates, and suggested this would be partially alleviated by an unsubdivided structure. Additionally, the Horsham Rural City Council submission pointed out that an unsubdivided structure was more likely to achieve the Victorian Government's candidate diversity targets for the 2024 council elections than would be the case with a single-councillor ward structure.

Model 1

In support of Model 1, the Ballarat and District Branch of the Victorian Greens described it as the most suitable for the council, having sensible and logical boundaries and uniting communities of interest more so than the other models. On the importance of having a structure

whereby “councillors can represent a cohesive group of voters” and ward boundaries that corresponded with “community demographics” Model 1 was considered the best option to achieve these aspects of representation.

Many submissions were critical of Model 1. The submission from the 7 current Horsham councillors reiterated the disadvantages of the model outlined in the preliminary report, particularly in relation to the 2 large wards covering the rural area of the council. They believed an unfair burden would be placed on the 2 councillors elected from Lake Wyn Wyn and Pine Lake wards. It was also suggested the urban boundaries were arbitrary and did little to capture urban communities of interest.

In favour of maintaining an unsubdivided electoral structure, the councillors identified the needs and benefits of having “councillors with diverse backgrounds and life experience” as part of council decision-making. They argued this would be difficult to achieve under any of the proposed models as single-councillor wards make it more difficult for people from diverse backgrounds to get elected. Former Horsham Rural City Council councillor Mark Radford from Quantong was also critical of the change to single-councillor wards and was concerned models 1 and 2 would likely result in councillors from and focused mainly on the town of Horsham, leading to imbalances in council deliberations.

Model 2

No submitters described Model 2 as their preferred model and the same criticisms made against Model 1 were also made against Model 2.

Model 3

This model gained support partly because of the necessity for change. For instance, Mark Radford preferred the current structure, which had served the community well for almost 30 years, but of the 3 options favoured Model 3 and saw potential advantages in having councillors represent both rural and urban voters. Similarly opposed to the change from unsubdivided electoral structure, Brian Basham of Horsham felt Model 3 “accurately reflects the nature of the municipality”.

Terry O’Donnell from Jung supported Model 3 and argued it would allow for the “true integration of Horsham” as it had “always been a blended municipality.” O’Donnell noted that it was essentially up to the people of Horsham to determine where their representatives were from, first by nominating as candidates and second by residents casting their votes.

Stephanie Barber of Horsham and Kristen Barber of Pimpinio shared similar sentiments in their respective submissions. They felt the current model was not working and argued Model 3 could improve the advocacy of area-based needs. Stephanie Barber suggested Horsham North had for a long time been overlooked by council and felt that through dedicated representation of the area residents would have more of a voice. Barber also suggested resources and funding would be more evenly shared across the municipality under Model 3. However, questions were raised about whether sufficient numbers of candidates would stand at elections under any of the 3 models.

Various arguments were presented in opposition to Model 3. For instance, Neill Sharer of Dadswell Bridge could not see how combining rural and urban areas in the same ward would benefit rural residents and argued candidates from sparsely populated areas would be unable to compete with an urban candidate.

The Ballarat and District Branch of the Victorian Greens described Model 3 as a 'radial' approach, with all wards meeting at a central point, and argued such an arrangement would fail to unite communities of interest. They also raised, as did the current councillors, the possibility that no rural resident would be elected under Model 3 as there would be a significantly larger proportion of voters from urban areas in all or most of the wards.

Mark Radford commented the division of Natimuk township along the main road could be problematic. However, Natimuk would not be divided in Model 3, though this may not be clear in the preliminary report. The boundary departs the main road and runs around the southern side of the township placing Natimuk in Lake Wyn Wyn Ward.

Other options

Strong opposition to changing from the current unsubdivided structure was made evident through the public submission process, where 6 submissions argued against the change generally and an additional 2 argued for maintaining the current structure. Many saw no convincing reason to subdivide the council. Peter Jenkin from Horsham suggested the creation of boundaries to create single-councillor wards ran against common sense and appeared to be driven more by an ideological goal or to satisfy bureaucratic decisions. Submitters referred to the 2015 VEC representation review for the council, in support of arguments against single-councillor ward structures, such as the potential for uncontested elections, the increased likelihood of by-elections, the arbitrary nature of some boundaries, the costs associated with future representation reviews, and reduced diversity of councillors under single-councillor wards.

Nonetheless, 4 submitters felt the current electoral structure was not working well, some of whom proposed electoral structures different to the models presented in the preliminary report. Shayne Keenan from Horsham argued 5 single-councillor wards would be the most appropriate and with 2 less councillors save ratepayers an estimated \$70,000 to \$80,000 per year. Keenan also approved of the voter-to-councillor ratio this change would result in.

Christopher Vincent from Haven, while not stating a preference for any of the models or proposing a different one, was supportive of the proposed changes and argued under the current structure rural candidates cannot gain as many votes as urban candidates, which discourages people from standing as a candidate.

Ward names

The panel received 3 submissions from the public about possible ward names that use Aboriginal language. The panel includes these for the Minister's information but notes that it was not possible to verify whether appropriate consultation took place with relevant Aboriginal groups about the proposed names.

- Kalimna
- Kalimna Park
- Murra Warra

Public hearing

The panel held an online public hearing for those wishing to speak about their response submission at 10 am on Wednesday 26 July 2023. Two people spoke at the hearing.

You can find a list of people who spoke at the hearing in [Appendix 2](#).

The first speaker, Shayne Keenan, reiterated the arguments made in a written submission to support having 5 councillors, including the savings to council that would result. Keenan suggested the current structure favoured some communities over others and believed Horsham North had not had representation for over 40 years. While not totally committed to 5 councillors and somewhat comfortable were there to be 7, Keenan did not indicate a preferred model but supported the creation of wards and the need for a Horsham North Ward.

The second speaker, Sean Mulcahy, spoke on behalf of the Ballaarat and District Greens. Mulcahy did not present a strong view or position on the number of councillors, but described an unsubdivided electoral structure as the most suitable for the council. Acknowledging that legislative change meant the council had to change to a single councillor ward structure, Mulcahy stated of the preliminary models, Models 1 and 2 were preferred. Although the ward structure resulted in a city-wide focus, it was seen as a better way to blend the municipality. Mulcahy argued Model 3 had the most shortcomings, including an unnatural division of communities of interest, wards with no clear base being neither urban or rural, and blurred lines between areas that could disincentivise candidates. Mulcahy argued that Model 3 carried a real risk of no rural representation being achieved and suggested that while it appeared to favour rural areas, would likely tilt in favour of urban areas.

Findings and recommendation

As outlined in the submission guide for this review, the panel is committed to the principle of 'one vote, one value', which is a requirement for subdivided electoral structures under the Act. This is to ensure that every person's vote counts equally. When undertaking an electoral structure review, the panel must adhere to the Act's legislated equality requirement to seek to ensure the number of voters per councillor in a ward to be within +/-10% of the average number of voters per councillor in any other ward.

The equality requirement exists to support fair and equitable representation for all voters within a local council (and consequently facilitate good governance), which is a major aim of this review. All wards in a subdivided electoral structure recommended by the panel must aim to be within the legislated tolerance in time for the 2024 local council elections. The panel must comply to legislated requirements.

Number of councillors

After considering the requirements of the Act, public submissions and the agreed criteria, the panel found 7 councillors to be an appropriate number for Horsham Rural City Council.

The panel considered the characteristics of Horsham Rural City Council in relation to similar regional city councils, including its size and geography, population and the number and distribution of voters across the council area.

Horsham Rural City Council currently has 15,753 voters represented by 7 councillors and covers an area of 4,267 km². Other regional city councils with a similar number of voters and which function as a major regional service centre usually also have 7 councillors. The panel felt the change from an unsubdivided structure was significant for the council and considered an additional change in councillor numbers would be too disruptive for the council and some residents. More generally, the panel saw no reason and was not presented with any arguments to change the number of councillors.

In some cases, a local council may have special circumstances that support a recommendation for fewer or more councillors. The panel did not identify any new circumstances for Horsham Rural City Council since the representation review in 2015. However, the panel also recognised that the geographic features and uneven distribution of voters across the council area make developing a satisfactory single-councillor ward structure for Horsham Rural City Council challenging. Because of this, the panel also considered models with fewer or more councillors. It explored whether an increase or decrease in the number of councillors would enable single-councillor ward structures to be created that might provide more favourable representation for the community. However, the panel considered that only the 7-councillor models were suitable to put forward for public comment.

Electoral structure

After considering the requirements of the Act, public submissions and the agreed criteria, the panel found Model 1 to be the single-councillor ward model with the best potential to promote

fair and equitable representation for voters in Horsham Rural City Council and consequently facilitate good governance.

Although Model 3 attracted the most support in submissions, and appears to provide 7 equally sized wards, the panel considered it to have various drawbacks, including dilution of the rural voice. The proportion of the population of Horsham Rural City Council residing outside of the Horsham town and urban area is about 25% of the total. The panel felt having 2 of 7 wards with a rural focus would be a fair and accurate reflection of the councils' communities. The panel was concerned that the mix of urban and rural voters in the wards of Model 3, where 6 of the 7 wards had well over 50% of voters residing in the Horsham locality, and in some cases significantly more, would see rural-based voters consistently outnumbered. Moreover, Model 3 would see the council's various rural communities divided across 7 wards, potentially preventing a united voice to represent rural issues. As a result, rural voters might find it difficult to have their concerns and interests represented on council and the potential for urban interests to dominate.

Models 1 and 2, on the other hand, would provide greater certainty that rural representation would be achieved as a proportion of the total number of votes. Having 2 rural-focused wards would provide a better chance that at least 2 councillors would represent and focus on rural issues. And, by keeping the rural areas united in each of these wards, more opportunity for a united rural voice to be heard.

Additionally, the wards of Model 3 had little in the way of central communities of interest or other focal points holding them together. Comparing the 3 models, the panel noted Model 3 would see the least number of localities entirely captured in wards, which was felt might further divide communities of interest. For these reasons, the panel determined Model 3 to have significant disadvantages and decided against recommending its adoption.

When considering Model 1 and Model 2, the panel noted that the division of the Horsham locality across wards was much the same in both. The main point of difference was the configuration of the rural-based wards. The panel considered the rural wards of Model 1 to group communities of interest more effectively than Model 2. For instance, Model 2 combined Natimuk in the west of council, Pimpinio in the north and Dadswell Bridge in the east into the one ward. The panel determined this would likely result in large travel distances for the councillor and contain in the one ward communities that may well have stronger connections to areas outside of their ward. The panel also found the rural divide of Model 1 preferable, as it would keep the agricultural lands in the east in one ward and likewise in the west, the Natimuk-Douglas Wetlands and major areas of parkland in a single ward. Additionally, there had been no support for Model 2 from the community.

Finally, a favourable consideration for Model 1 was its stability. It was the most stable of the 3 models and was expected to remain in the +/-10% requirement for longer than any other model. For these reasons the panel selected Model 1 as the preferred electoral structure for Horsham Rural City Council.

Creating a single-councillor ward structure for Horsham Rural City Council that both complies with the legislated +/-10% requirement and captures geographic communities within wards is challenging. In the case of Horsham Rural City Council, where there is an urban centre in the middle of a large rural area, it may appear unequal to have wards concentrated in the centre. However, the radial approach is not an effective solution. This is because the rural communities would be spread across 7 wards, effectively dividing these communities from one another. The composition of these wards, where the rural vote is in the minority, may result in a situation whereby rural voters could perceive their interests are in competition with the larger urban vote, as would be the case with the wards in Model 3.

Having 2 wards that cover a larger geographic area is considered on balance the fairest approach to representation the panel could identify once all matters had been considered. While having such a significant difference in the size of the rural wards compared with the urban wards might be perceived as unfair, the panel considers Model 1 best able to uphold the one vote, one value principle. This is because the wards in Model 1 better reflect and capture communities of interest, providing them all with the opportunity to elect a candidate that represents their interests. Moreover, the panel can see no reason Model 1 would prevent councillors taking a council-wide approach to decision-making and that in fact having fair representation should facilitate this requirement of councillors.

While it is difficult to predict the number of candidates likely to stand at future elections, especially in councils changing from an unsubdivided electoral structure to one consisting of single-councillor wards, past election results provide some indication. The panel examined election results for Horsham Rural City Council, including numbers of candidates nominating, incidences of uncontested elections and rates of informal voting. With the change in structure, the panel notes the potential for uncontested or failed elections in areas where historically candidate numbers have not been as strong. Given 7 councillors has been determined to be the appropriate number, this is a compromise the panel considered as unavoidable in light of the legislative requirements for a single councillor ward electoral structure. Moreover, the possibility that some candidates could be deterred from standing in either one of the large rural wards, increases the risk of uncontested or failed elections in these wards.

The panel notes valid arguments both in favour of and against the different single-councillor ward structures examined in this review. However, the panel considers Model 1 to be the single-councillor ward model with the best potential to promote fair and equitable representation for voters in Horsham Rural City Council and consequently facilitate good governance under the requirements of the Act.

Ward names

The ward names for the panel's recommended electoral structure were based on the following:

- Green Park Ward: Put forward in submissions as an alternative name for the proposed 'Southbank Ward' in preliminary report Model 1. Based on the local name for the area of Horsham south of the Wimmera River.

- Horsham North Ward: A directional name, put forward in submissions as an alternative name for the proposed 'Coglin Park Ward' in preliminary report Model 1.
- Kalimna Ward: Put forward in submissions as an alternative name for the proposed 'Rudolph Ward' in preliminary report Model 1. Based on a road in the ward.
- May Park Ward: New name based on a terrace in the ward in the ward. The terrace name is registered in the VICNAMES register. May Park Terrace adjoins May Park.
- Oatlands Ward: New name based on a registered park in the ward. This park name is registered in the VICNAMES register.
- Pine Lake Ward: New name based on a registered lake in the ward. This lake name is registered in the VICNAMES register.
- Wyn Wyn Ward: New name based on an abbreviated name of a registered lake in the ward. This Lake Wyn Wyn is registered in the VICNAMES register.

Green Park Ward was put forward by Dean Lawson and Alan Williams as a potential name for Southbank Ward, they noted that Green Park is a recognised name for the area of Horsham township to the south of the Wimmera River and is part of Horsham's history. Horsham North Ward was proposed by Dean Lawson as a name that was well recognised by the community. Kalimna Ward was proposed by Dean Lawson for Kalimna Avenue, which is a recognised place in that ward. Alan Williams pointed out that Kalimna is a recorded part of Horsham's history. In preparing the Horsham Rural City Council preliminary report, the name Oatlands had been incorrectly spelt as Oaklands in the VICNAMES register. Dean Lawson and Alan Williams pointed out the correct local spelling is Oatlands. This has since been rectified.

The panel's recommendation

The electoral representation advisory panel recommends that Horsham Rural City Council adopt a 7 single-councillor ward structure – 7 wards with one councillor per ward.

The recommended names for the 7 wards in this electoral structure are Green Park Ward, Horsham North Ward, Kalimna Ward, May Park Ward, Oatlands Ward, Pine Lake Ward, and Wyn Wyn Ward.

This advice is submitted to the Minister for Local Government as required by the Terms of Reference of the electoral representation advisory panel and the Act. This electoral structure was designated as Model 1 in the preliminary report.

A detailed map of the boundaries for the recommended electoral structure is provided as [Appendix 1](#).

References

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) (2021a) [2021 Census All Persons QuickStats, Horsham \(LGA\)](#), ABS, accessed 28 March 2023.

–(2021b) [2021 Census All Persons QuickStats, Horsham \(UCL\)](#), ABS, accessed 16 May 2023.

–(2021c) [2021 Census All Persons QuickStats, Natimuk \(UCL\)](#), ABS, accessed 16 May 2023.

DTP (Department of Transport and Planning) (2023) [Horsham Planning Scheme](#), DTP, accessed 28 March 2023.

Electoral Act 2002 (Vic)

Geographic Place Names Act 1998 (Vic)

Local Government Act 1989 (Vic)

Local Government Act 2020 (Vic)

Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2020 (Vic)

WCMA (Wimmera Catchment Management Authority) (2023) [Horsham | Wimmera Regional Catchment Strategy \(rcs.vic.gov.au\)](#), WCMA, accessed 28 March 2023.

Appendix 1: Map of recommended structure

Horsham Rural City Council Map of recommended option 7 single-councillor wards



Ward	Electors*	Deviation	Area sq km
Green Park	2,276	+1.14%	7
Horsham North	2,443	+8.56%	2
Kalimna	2,417	+7.40%	2
May Park	2,103	-6.55%	5
Oatlands	2,281	+1.36%	3
Pine Lake	2,081	-7.53%	1,415
Wyn Wyn	2,152	-4.37%	2,828
Total	15,753		4,262
Average	2,250		609

*Elector numbers as at 30 March 2023

Data use:



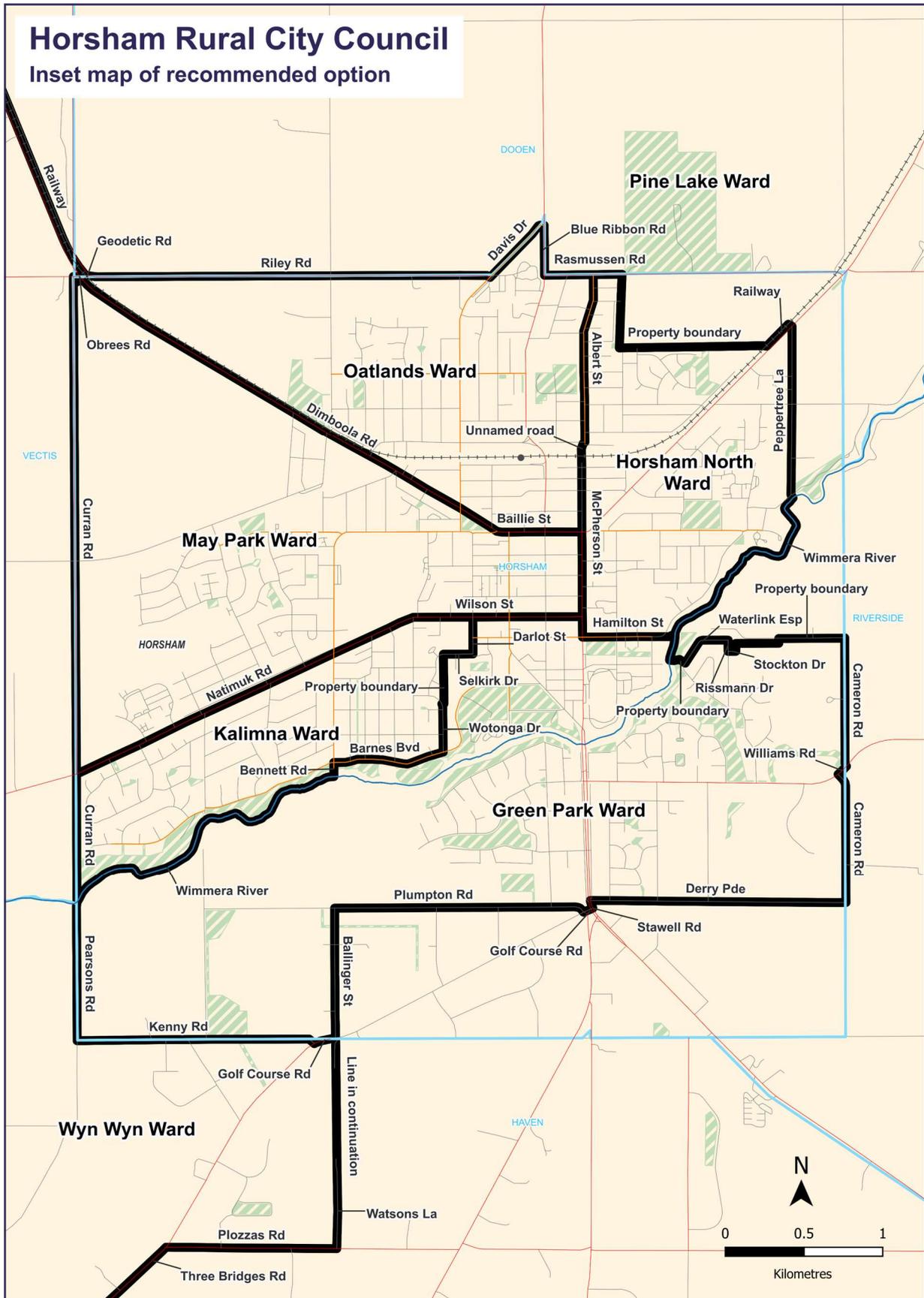
Layers for alignment:
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Total	15,753	-	4,262
Average	2,250	-	609

*Elector numbers as at 30 March 2023

#Ward area (square km) and total council area is measured at level of accuracy required for electoral boundaries. This may vary slightly from other data sources (e.g. ABS).



Appendix 2: Public involvement

The panel wishes to thank all submitters to the review and speakers at the public hearing for their participation in the review process.

Response submissions

Response submissions were made by:

Ballaarat and District Greens

Barber, Stephanie

Barber, Kristen

Basham, Brian

Blake, Dianna

Haenel, Claudia (Councillor, Horsham Rural City Council)

Horsham Rural City Council

Jenkin, Peter

Keenan, Shayne

Lawson, Dean

O'Donnell, Terry

Radford, Mark

Sharer, Neill

Smith, Jennifer

Van, Andy

Vincent, Christopher

Williams, Alan

Public hearing

The following people spoke at the public hearing:

Keenan, Shayne

Mulcahy, Sean (on behalf of Ballaarat and District Greens)

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