

Local council electoral structure review

# Final Report

Greater Bendigo City Council

August 2023

### Acknowledgement of Country

The electoral representation advisory panel acknowledges the Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung 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	16 August 2023	Ms Julie Eisenbise
1	16 August 2023	Mr Tim Presnell
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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 Greater Bendigo 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), Greater Bendigo 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 Greater Bendigo 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 Greater Bendigo City Council adopt a 9 single-councillor ward structure – 9 wards with one councillor per ward.

The recommended names for the 9 wards in this electoral structure are Axedale, Eppalock, Epsom, Golden Square, Kennington, Lake Weeroona, Lockwood, Ravenswood and Whipstick.

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 9 councillors – 9 wards with one councillor per ward.
- Model 2: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 9 councillors – 9 wards with one councillor per ward, with different ward boundaries to Model 1.
- Model 3: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 9 councillors – 9 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](http://vec.vic.gov.au)

### Response submissions

The panel received 6 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 2 pm on Tuesday 25 July 2023. One person 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 Greater Bendigo City Council) must now have single-councillor ward electoral structures.

For Greater Bendigo 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 Greater Bendigo City Council had 3 members:

- Ms Julie Eisenbise (Chairperson)
- Mr Tim Presnell
- Acting Electoral Commissioner Ms Dana Fleming.

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 Greater Bendigo 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](http://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.

Greater Bendigo 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 Greater Bendigo 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.

In examining the appropriate number of councillors for Greater Bendigo 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 Greater Bendigo 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 Greater Bendigo City Council

## Profile

Greater Bendigo City Council is in the Loddon Mallee region of Victoria, about 150 km north-west of Melbourne. It covers an area of 3,000 km<sup>2</sup> and shares borders with 5 other councils: Campaspe Shire Council in the north, Strathbogie and Mitchell shire councils in the east, Mount Alexander Shire Council in the south, and Loddon Shire Council in the west.

The Traditional Custodians of the Bendigo area are the Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung peoples.

## Landscape

Bendigo is a regional city surrounded by forest and rural hinterland. Most of the rural land is for agricultural purposes, such as grazing, poultry and pig farming, and vineyards (DTP 2023). The council area includes national, state and regional parks including the Greater Bendigo National Park and extensive Box Ironbark forests (Bendigo Region 2023) and is home to a population of the critically endangered swift parrot (IUCN 2018). The Campaspe River flows through the municipality and into Lake Eppalock, which serves as major water storage for the population centres of Bendigo and Heathcote and the Campaspe irrigation district (GMW 2023).

At the 2021 Census, the municipality's population was 121,470 with almost 87% of the population living in one of 6 main urban centres – Axedale, Bendigo, Elmore, Goornong, Heathcote and Marong (ABS 2022a).

Bendigo is the largest urban centre, stretching from Big Hill in the south to Huntly in the north. It had a population of 100,649 in 2021 and accounted for almost 83% of the municipality's population (ABS 2022b). Bendigo was known as Big Gold Mountain by the Chinese gold-rush immigrants of the 1850s (Bendigo Heritage Attractions 2023) and the town's Victorian architecture reflects the wealth of this era. Bendigo is now better known as a UNESCO City of Gastronomy (Bendigo Gastronomy 2023).

With a population of about 1,850, Heathcote is in the east of the council area. Heathcote is nestled between the McHarg and McIvor ranges and is well known for its Shiraz grapes.

About 15 km west of central Bendigo is Marong, a semi-rural village on Bullock Creek, home to 1,508 residents (ABS 2022f, 2022g).

Elmore (population 753 in 2021), a small town in the north-east of the council area along the Campaspe River, Axedale (population 348 in 2021) and Goornong (population 326 in 2021) make up the remaining major urban centres (ABS 2022c, 2022d, 2022e).

Several major highways, including the Calder, Midland and McIvor, converge in and support a large freight network across the Bendigo area. The municipality has several bus services, a tourist tram, and Bendigo Airport, while V/line passenger trains connect Bendigo to Melbourne, Echuca, and Swan Hill.

## Community

Taking a regional service role, the council area's major economic output is provided through construction, manufacturing, health care, and education (DTP 2023). Mining is still a major industry, and there was a recent expansion of goldmines at Fosterville and Costerfield. However, more residents worked in health care and social assistance than any other industry in 2021, which employed 19.1% of residents (.id 2022a).

Greater Bendigo City Council's population increased from 110,477 in 2016 to 121,470 in 2021. This trend is expected to continue with an estimated annual growth rate of 2%, which would see the city grow to 155,175 by 2036 (.id 2022b).

The 2021 Census showed the council had a higher proportion of younger age groups (0-to-17 years) and a lower proportion of older age groups (over 60) compared with regional Victoria (.id 2022a). The largest age group in 2021 was 25-to-29 year olds, comprising 6.5% of the municipality's population. The median age in 2021 was 40, which was lower than the regional Victorian overall median of 43 in 2021 (ABS 2022a, 2022h).

In 2021, just over 84% of Greater Bendigo City residents were born in Australia, and residents who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people accounted for 2.3% of the municipality's population. English was the only language spoken at home for 87.8% of residents, compared with 86.4% for regional Victoria overall (ABS 2022a, 2022h). Other languages spoken include Karen (1.3%), Mandarin (0.5%), Malayalam (0.4%), Punjabi (0.4) and Tagalog (0.2%).

Most people in the municipality (70.5%) owned their own home either outright or with a mortgage, and in 2021 the median weekly household income was \$1,448 (ABS 2022a).

## Current number of councillors and electoral structure

Greater Bendigo City Council is currently divided into 3 wards with a total of 9 councillors:

- 3 wards with 3 councillors each (Eppalock, Lockwood and Whipstick wards).



**Figure 1:** Diagram of current electoral structure of Greater Bendigo City Council.

There are around 93,852 voters in Greater Bendigo City Council, with an approximate ratio of 10,428 voters per councillor.

Visit the VEC website at [vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au) for more information on Greater Bendigo City Council.

## Last electoral structure review

The VEC conducted an electoral representation review of Greater Bendigo City Council in 2011. 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 Greater Bendigo City Council adopt a structure of 9 councillors elected from 3 wards (3 wards with 3 councillors).

Visit the VEC website at [vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au) to access a copy of the 2011 representation review final report.

## 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 9 councillors – 9 wards with one councillor per ward.
- Model 2: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 9 councillors – 9 wards with one councillor per ward, with different ward boundaries to Model 1.
- Model 3: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 9 councillors – 9 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](https://vec.vic.gov.au)

## Response submissions

The panel received 6 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 (9 single-councillor wards)	Model 2 (9 single-councillor wards)	Model 3 (9 single-councillor wards)	No preferred model indicated*	Other
1	1	2	2	1

\*1 submitter gave no model preference, but commented on ward names, and another opposed any change.

There were 3 individual submissions from residents and 1 each from current Councillor Gregory Penna, Advance Heathcote Incorporated, and from Greater Bendigo City Council (the council).

The submissions expressed a number of different preferences in response to the proposed models. Model 1 was supported in one submission, as was Model 2. There were 2 submissions in support of Model 3. Two submissions did not express a preference for any of the models, one of which opposed changing the electoral structure altogether and the other proposed alternative ward names to Grassy Flat Ward as proposed in Model 1.

There was broad support for keeping the number of councillors at 9, including from the council. No submissions directly opposed having 9 councillors or suggested a different number.

### Model 1

The submission by Advance Heathcote Incorporated (a local community group focused on community planning and advocacy in Heathcote) supported Model 1 because it captured the whole community of interest of Heathcote in Eppalock Ward. This submission noted that Model 1 best maintained a sense of “one Heathcote community voice” by keeping community together in the one single-councillor ward.

Two submissions opposed Model 1. Dionne Lynch, from Golden Square was concerned the boundaries of Model 1 would not be easily identifiable and suggested the ward names would be confusing. The Greater Bendigo City Council submission suggested Model 1 was not preferred but did not comment directly on the model.

## **Model 2**

Advance Heathcote Incorporated also favoured Model 2 for the same reasons it supported Model 1. Having the Heathcote community kept together in the one ward would similarly maintain its identity and sense of connectedness.

The council opposed Model 2 in its submission. It suggested the boundary proposed to separate Golden Square and Strathfieldsaye wards was an 'adjustment to the historic border from Retreat Rd to Spring Gully Road' that residents would view as unnecessary. The current ward boundary sits several blocks further east and council questioned why these residents could not be kept in the same ward using this boundary.

## **Model 3**

Two submissions supported Model 3. Trevor Atherton from Axedale preferred Model 3 but did not detail why. The council submission described Model 3 as the 'least unacceptable'. This was given as the consensus of councillors but not unanimous. This was mainly because Model 3 did not unnecessarily split the Spring Gully community like Model 2.

The submission by Advance Heathcote Incorporated opposed Model 3 as it would see the Heathcote community split between the Eppalock and Axedale wards., It suggested this model would have a negative effect on community connectedness. The council identified two drawbacks of Model 3: the 'massive' ward covering the area from Flora Hill to Heathcote; and the splitting of Tooleen, Knowsley, Ladys Pass, Redcastle and other localities north and north-west of Heathcote into a different ward.

## **Other options**

Councillor Gregory Penna argued for no change and to leave the council as is (3 multi-member wards, each with 3 councillors). The submission emphasised that under this structure council is currently working well and 'if it isn't broken, don't fix it'.

Martin Ireland from Kennington suggested the ward name of Grassy Flat wouldn't be easily identifiable. Ireland proposed changing the name to Kennington, East Bendigo, Strathdale or Epsom.

In its submission, the council raised various concerns and questions about the review process and the information used to inform the panel's proposed models. including:

- population forecast data used
- historical electoral data used
- the degree to which the boundaries in the proposed models align with current suburb boundaries
- if consideration was given to the impact on work health safety, particularly psychosocial, of councillors being solely responsible for all engagement and social activities,



- any research and analysis conducted to make sure the proposed electoral structures would facilitate good governance.

## Public hearing

The panel held an online public hearing for those wishing to speak about their response submission at 2 pm on Tuesday 25 July 2023. One person spoke at the hearing.

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

The Mayor of Greater Bendigo City Council, Cr Andrea Metcalf, spoke on behalf of the council. Councillor Metcalf began by raising the same concerns presented in the council's written submission. The council were frustrated at the lack of consultation about the decision to change the electoral structure requirements as they apply to the Greater Bendigo City. The Mayor stated the council did not believe one kind of electoral model would work for all regional cities. The council's view was that a subdivided, multi-member ward structure provides better representation for both the urban and rural areas of Greater Bendigo City Council. The council also noted the current structure allows for more flexible work arrangements, as councillors can share ward responsibilities. Councillor Metcalf suggested this had resulted in younger candidates nominating and becoming councillors, as well as councillors with different family and working needs.

Councillor Metcalf highlighted many of the same points presented in the council's submission and added more detail on the council's views of the proposed models. The council strongly supports retaining 9 councillors as was proposed in all models, and Councillor Metcalf noted this number was 'the way to go'. The council also expressed concerns about splitting the suburban areas of Bendigo from the rural localities over multiple wards. Ward size was another concern, especially the large rural wards in Models 1 and 2. Councillor Metcalf suggested this would be inequitable, as councillors elected from the larger rural wards would be required to travel more and across larger distances. This would increase their workloads compared with those elected from the smaller urban wards.

Model 3 was the most acceptable to the council. This was mainly because the council felt there was a more even spread of rural and urban localities across the 9 wards compared with models 1 and 2. However, Councillor Metcalf noted Model 3 split the community of Heathcote between wards. In response to a question from the panel, Councillor Metcalf indicated the Heathcote split was an important concern for some on the council. However, the pressure the large wards in Models 1 and 2 would have on the whole of council was a key priority according to the Mayor. For these reasons, the council reached a consensus to support Model 3 over the other models.

## Findings and recommendation

The panel noted that several submitters criticised the review process, including the requirement of regional cities to adhere to the single-member ward structure as specified in the Act.

Submitters suggested such a structure would not be appropriate for Greater Bendigo City and that the council was functioning well under a structure of multi-member ward structure. The panel understands these and similar concerns but is not responsible for determining the type of electoral structure councils must adopt.

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. The equality requirement exists to support fair and equitable representation for all voters within a local council and is the main aim of the review process.

The panel is aware of the difficulties adhering to the equality requirement for single-councillor electoral structures in councils where the population is distributed unevenly, usually concentrated in a town or city centre and dispersed across rural areas. Significant differences in the areas covered by each ward can result. While ward size is a factor considered during the review process, particularly as it impacts councillor travel and workload, it must be balanced with other requirements, including the equality requirement, communities of interest and use of effective wards boundaries. Each of the 3 models strike a different balance across the various factors considered.

### Number of councillors

After considering the requirements of the Act, public submissions and the agreed criteria, the panel found 9 councillors to be an appropriate number for the Greater Bendigo City Council.

The panel considered the characteristics of Greater Bendigo City Council in relation to similar regional city councils, including geographic features, area size, population and the number and distribution of voters across the council area.

Greater Bendigo City Council currently has 93,852 voters represented by 9 councillors and covers an area of 3,000 km<sup>2</sup>. Other regional city councils, such as Ballarat City, with a similar number of voters usually also have 9 councillors.

The panel noted that Greater Bendigo City is much larger than most other regional city councils with 9 councillors, covering a greater area than Ballarat City (739 km<sup>2</sup>), Latrobe City (1,426 km<sup>2</sup>) and Greater Shepparton City (2,422 km<sup>2</sup>). The size of the municipality and the uneven distribution of voters does present demands on councillor workloads and travel requirements. However, given the support in submissions for maintaining the current number of councillors and none suggested need for more councillors due to increased workload, 9 councillors was considered appropriate at this stage. Additionally, the rates of population growth within Greater Bendigo City Council have been consistent with similar councils and while steady are not so great as to justify councillor numbers increasing.

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 such circumstances impacting the Greater Bendigo City Council in recent years to warrant an increase in the number of councillors. For these reasons, the panel determined that the number of councillors should remain at 9.

## **Electoral structure**

After considering the requirements of the Act, public submissions and the agreed criteria, the panel found Model 3 to be the single-councillor ward model with the best potential to promote fair and equitable representation for voters in Greater Bendigo City Council.

The panel considered the benefits and drawbacks of each model, including public feedback provided through submissions. The panel also explored the suggestions put forward in some submissions to change ward boundaries. This included a suggested change to Model 2 around the community of Spring Gully. As this minor change could be accommodated within the required +/-10% deviations and made sense from a communities of interest perspective, the panel considered Model 2 with these revisions.

The panel noted that Model 1 and Model 2 captured rural and urban communities well within their own wards. Keeping these communities of interest together is an important part of maintaining equitable representation in a subdivided ward structure. The panel was also conscious of the use of main roads in Model 2, acknowledging boundaries along roads can divide business and social communities that often exist on both sides of these thoroughfares. The panel's view was that the use of localities and the trainline gave Model 1 stronger boundaries than Model 2.

However, the panel acknowledged the Greater Bendigo City Council's feedback on the significant difference in size between the 6 urban and 3 rural wards in both models 1 and 2. The panel further recognised the serious challenges posed by geographic size and uneven voter distribution for councillor workload. The logistical difficulty of travelling and engaging with communities is significantly greater for large rural wards with dispersed populations. These challenges can impact the fair representation of voters when compared to the much smaller urban wards of central Bendigo.

The panel considered Model 3 captured the rural parts of the council area in 6 wards, with the urban centre of Bendigo mostly contained in 3 smaller wards. For this and the above reasons, Model 3 was seen to facilitate a more even distribution of councillor numbers and workloads across the council area. The panel also considered Model 3 to make greater and more effective use of current boundaries, with each of the 3 current wards divided more evenly into 3 single-councillor wards. This level of familiarity would possibly assist in the transition to a new electoral structure.

The panel factored in arguments against Model 3, particularly the concerns put forward by the Heathcote community organisation to keep the town and its surrounds together in the one ward. However, the panel noted the locality of Heathcote itself was completely captured in 1 ward,

and that under Model 3 the wider Heathcote community would possibly have 2 councillors to connect with. The panel considered the drawbacks of Model 3 raised by the council, including dividing Heathcote from surrounding localities to its north and the 'massive' Eppalock Ward, balanced with council's preference for Model 3 as the 'least inappropriate'. The panel also noted the council's preference for not having large rural wards and minimising the division of localities and communities as much as possible. On balance, the panel determined Model 3 to be the best option.

The panel understands that there is some community sentiment for the Greater Bendigo City to retain its current ward structure, and that the council is functioning well. The council has a unique set of features, with a centralised, urban population, strong communities of interest and expansive rural areas. For these reasons, the panel also acknowledges that there may well be no perfect single-member ward structure for regional city councils like the Greater Bendigo City. However, the panel must comply with the legislative requirements of the Act.

While it is difficult to predict the number of candidates likely to stand at future elections past election results provide some indication. The panel examined election results for Greater Bendigo City Council, including numbers of candidates nominating, incidences of uncontested elections and rates of informal voting, and found there to be relatively strong candidate numbers across the council area. The panel assumes this trend will continue under a structure of 9 single-councillor wards, minimising the risk of uncontested or failed elections, albeit mindful of an uncontested ward election in 2008 when the council was subdivided into single-councillor wards.

After considering a range of factors, including public feedback, communities of interest, councillor workloads and the boundaries used in each model, the panel recommends Model 3 as the most acceptable structure to promote fair and equitable representation (and therefore facilitate good governance) for voters in the Greater Bendigo City Council.

## Ward names

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

- Axedale: new name based on a locality in the ward. This locality name is registered in the VICNAMES register.
- Eppalock: the name of an existing ward under the current electoral structure. The new ward covers a large part of the existing ward, including the locality of Eppalock. This locality name is registered in the VICNAMES register.
- Epsom: new name based on a locality in the ward. This locality name is registered in the VICNAMES register. This name was also a ward name in the ward structure before 2012.
- Golden Square: new name based on a locality in the ward. This locality name is registered in the VICNAMES register. This name was also a ward name in the ward structure before 2004.

- Kennington: new name based on a locality in the ward. This new name is shared by a state forest and park in the council. This locality, forest and park name is registered in the VICNAMES register.
- Lockwood: the name of an existing ward under the current electoral structure. The new ward covers a large part of the existing ward, including the locality of Lockwood. This locality name is registered in the VICNAMES register.
- Ravenswood: new name based on a locality in the ward. This new name is shared by a parish and creek in the council. This locality, parish and creek name is registered in the VICNAMES register.
- Whipstick: the name of an existing ward under the current electoral structure. The new ward covers a large part of the existing ward, including the locality of Whipstick. This locality name is registered in the VICNAMES register.

The panel acknowledges there was 1 public submission that expressed confusion over ward names. The submission highlighted no specific names and did not suggest alternatives. The panel considered the name of each ward seriously, and notes that every effort is made to include both the names of the current wards, where appropriate, as well as the use of names shared with notable localities and recognisable natural features.

## **The panel's recommendation**

The electoral representation advisory panel recommends that Greater Bendigo City Council adopt a 9 single-councillor ward structure - 9 wards with one councillor per ward.

The recommended names for the 9 wards in this electoral structure are Axedale, Eppalock, Epsom, Golden Square, Kennington, Lake Weeroona, Lockwood, Ravenswood, and Whipstick.

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 3 in the preliminary report.

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

## References

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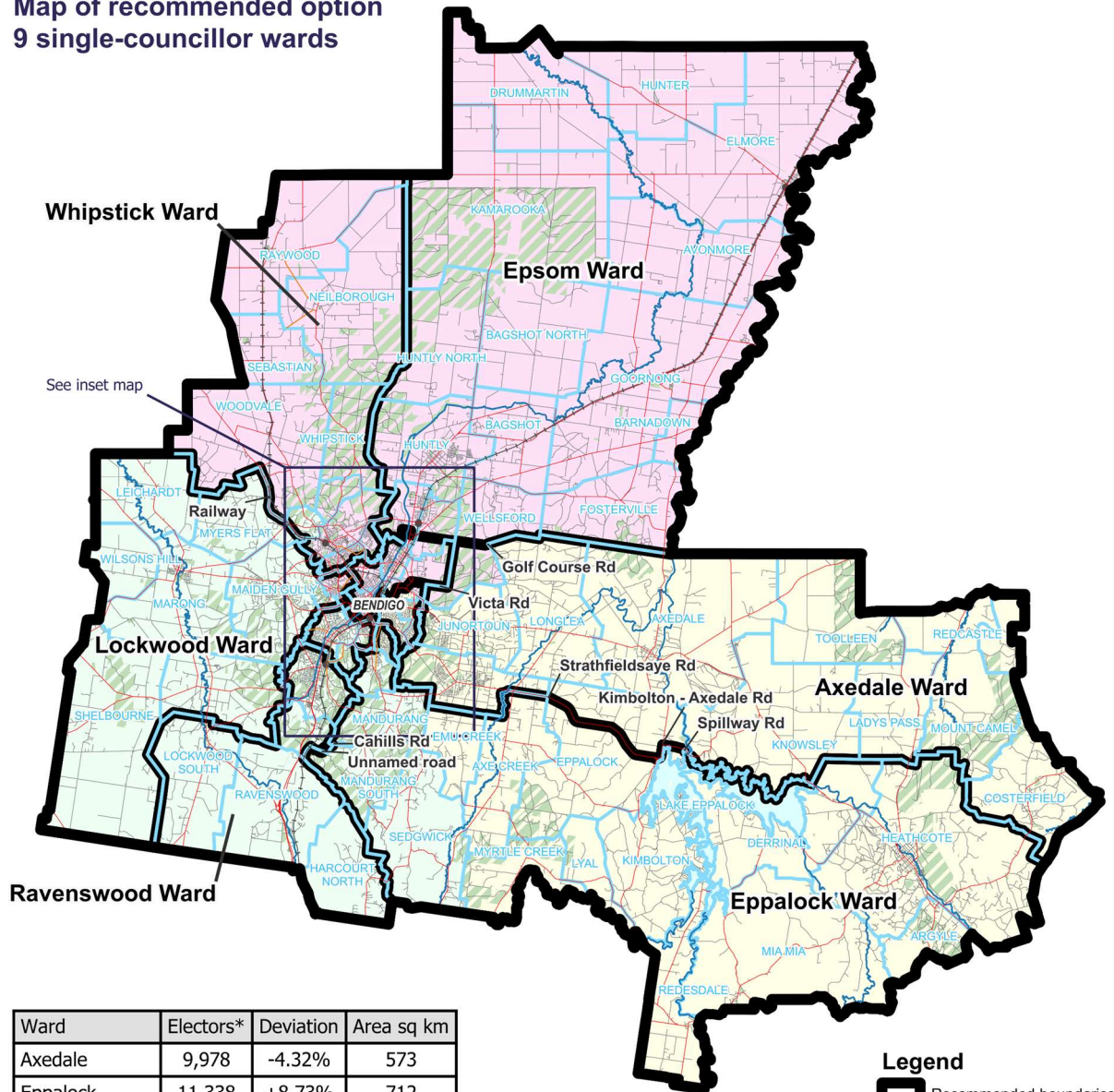
Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2020 (Vic)



# Appendix 1: Map of recommended structure

## Greater Bendigo City Council

### Map of recommended option 9 single-councillor wards



Ward	Electors*	Deviation	Area sq km
Axedale	9,978	-4.32%	573
Eppalock	11,338	+8.73%	712
Epsom	9,602	-7.92%	877
Golden Square	10,380	-0.46%	15
Kennington	10,684	+2.45%	11
Lake Weeroona	10,311	-1.12%	25
Lockwood	10,356	-0.69%	323
Ravenswood	10,287	-1.35%	163
Whipstick	10,916	+4.68%	299
Total	93,852		2,999
Average	10,428		333

\*Elector numbers as at 30 March 2023

Data use:



Layers for alignment:  
© State of Victoria (Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action)

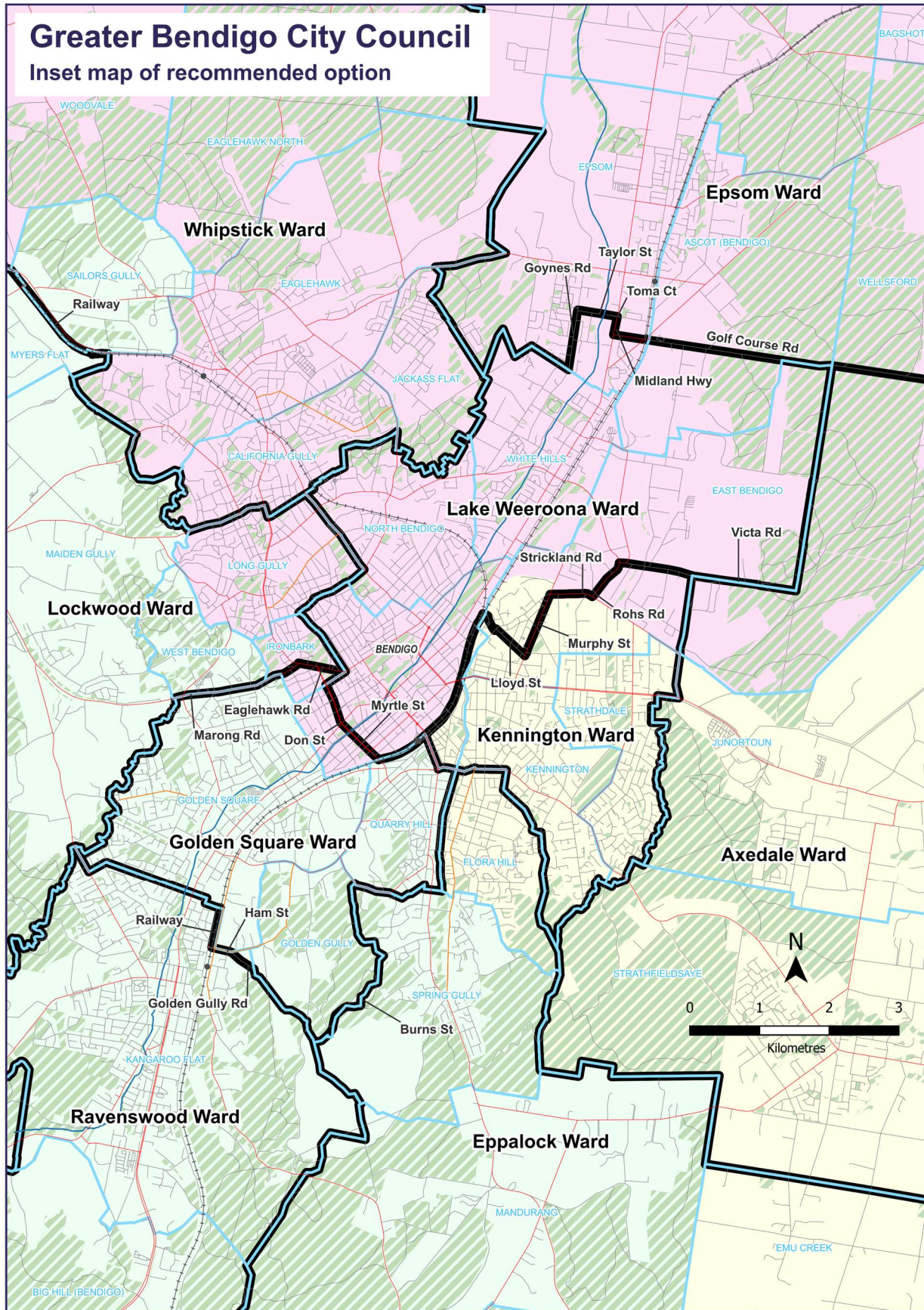
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Ward	Electors*	Deviation	Area# (square km)
Axedale	9,978	-4.32%	573
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Lockwood	10,356	-0.69%	323
Ravenswood	10,287	-1.35%	163
Whipstick	10,916	+4.68%	299
<b>Total</b>	<b>93,852</b>	-	<b>2,999</b>
<b>Average per ward</b>	<b>10,428</b>	-	<b>333</b>

\*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:

Advance Heathcote Incorporated

Atherton, Trevor

City of Greater Bendigo

Ireland, Martin

Lynch, Dionne

Penna, Cr Gregory

### **Public hearing**

The following people spoke at the public hearing:

Metcalf, Cr Andrea (Mayor)

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