

Local council ward boundary review

# Final Report

Pyrenees Shire Council

April 2024



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(Victorian Electoral Commission)  
April 2024

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### Content approval

Version	Date approved	Approved by
1	17 April 2024	VEC panel member
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### Report Approval

Version	Date approved	Approved by	Brief description
1	22 April 2024	Electoral Commissioner	Final approval



### **Acknowledgement of Country**

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) acknowledges the Dja Dja Wurrung, Eastern Maar, Wadawurrung, Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters for which it is holding this review and pays respects to ancestors and Elders past, present and emerging. The VEC acknowledges their custodianship for many thousands of years and their continuing living culture.

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## Executive summary

Under section 17 of the *Local Government Act 2020* (Vic) (the Act), the Minister for Local Government asked the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) to conduct ward boundary reviews for 10 local council areas prior to the next general local council elections in October 2024.

For these 10 councils, the number of voters per councillor is forecast to be out of balance by October 2024, with the number of voters per councillor in one or more wards forecast to vary from the average number of voters per councillor for all of the wards by more than 10 per cent.

Pyrenees Shire Council was one of the 10 local council areas under review. The purpose of this review was to correct this forecast imbalance for the October 2024 local council election.

During its review, the VEC looked at:

- the number of currently enrolled voters in each ward
- the forecast number of enrolled voters at the next election
- adjustments to the locations of existing ward boundaries.

This report presents the VEC's final advice to the minister on the recommended ward boundary adjustments for Pyrenees Shire Council to meet the requirements of the Act.

More information about the background to the review is available on [page 7](#) of this report.

## Recommendation

The VEC recommends adjustments to the boundaries of the following wards within Pyrenees Shire Council:

- Avoca Ward
- Beaufort Ward
- De Cameron Ward
- Ercildoune Ward
- Mount Emu Ward

This recommendation is submitted to the Minister for Local Government as required by the Act.

Detailed maps of the ward boundary adjustments are provided as [Appendix 1](#) of this report.

## Summary of review steps

### Developing ward adjustment models

The VEC considered a range of factors when deciding on appropriate ward boundary adjustments:

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

More information on the way the VEC decided on ward adjustments is available on [page 8](#).

### Preliminary report

The VEC published a preliminary report on Wednesday 21 February 2024. The following 2 models were presented for community consideration:

- Model 1, which proposed changes to the boundaries of all wards.
- Model 2, which proposed changes to the boundaries of all wards but with different ward boundaries to Model 1.

A summary of the models presented can be found on [page 13](#).

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 VEC did not receive any submissions responding to the preliminary report.

### Public hearing

An online public hearing for those wishing to speak about their response submission was scheduled for 2 pm on Wednesday 27 March 2024. As no submitters asked to speak, the hearing did not go ahead.

# Background

## About the 2024 ward boundary reviews

Under section 15(2) of the *Local Government Act 2020* (Vic), for a council that is divided into wards:

- a) each ward should have an approximately equal number of voters per councillor; and
- b) the number of voters per councillor in a ward should not vary from the average number of voters per councillor for all of the wards by more than 10 per cent.

On 22 February 2023, the VEC provided advice to the Minister for Local Government on councils that were projected to have at least one ward with the number of voters per councillor outside this +/-10% range at the time of the October 2024 local council elections.

This advice was based on:

- current enrolment and enrolment trends
- future population projections
- legislated changes to council entitlements for council-enrolled voters.

On 20 April 2023, in response to this advice and under section 17 of the Act, the minister asked the VEC to conduct ward boundary reviews for 10 local council areas before the October 2024 local council elections. These reviews aimed to balance the number of voters per councillor for the wards of these 10 councils in time for the 2024 elections. At the end of each review, the VEC must provide a report to the minister containing recommended ward boundary adjustments for the council.

Pyrenees Shire Council was one of the 10 local council areas under review.

During its review, the VEC looked at:

- the number of currently enrolled voters in each ward
- the forecast number of enrolled voters at the next election
- adjustments to the locations of existing ward boundaries.

A ward boundary review does not change a council's electoral structure, number of councillors, or ward names. A ward boundary review also cannot change the external boundaries of a local council, divide local councils, or amalgamate local councils.

## The VEC ward boundary review team

The VEC ward boundary review panel provides a recommended structure to the Electoral Commissioner. The Electoral Commissioner will review the panel's recommendation and then decide on the final recommendation for provision to the Minister for Local Government. The VEC panel is made up of 2 senior VEC members including the program sponsor. Administrative and technical support for the program is provided by VEC electoral structure and boundary review experts as well as specialists from across the VEC.

## Public engagement

### Public information program

The VEC conducted a public information and awareness program about the Pyrenees Shire Council ward boundary review. This included:

- printed public notices in state-wide newspapers
- public information sessions to outline the review process and respond to questions from the community
- a media release to announce the start of the review
- information on social media channels
- website content on [vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au), including:
  - current information on the review process
  - fact sheets for each council under review and a submission guide.

Pyrenees Shire Council was also offered but did not take up 2 optional methods to promote the reviews:

- printed public notices in local newspapers
- targeted social media advertisements for the council area.

### Public consultation

The VEC encouraged input to the ward boundary review of Pyrenees Shire Council via:

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

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

## Developing recommendations

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

- research and analysis conducted by the VEC, including geospatial, electoral 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).

When developing the final recommendation, the VEC considered:

- whether the adjusted wards would comply with section 15(2) of the Act (see below), and how long they are likely to comply

- 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
- the scale of ward boundary changes, aiming for minimal change (where possible)
- 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 across all wards. 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 of that council.

During this review, the VEC aimed to recommend ward boundary adjustments that help ensure a council's wards 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 is conducted. The VEC 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 meant it was not possible to adjust the ward boundaries of a council so that both 'current' (at the time of the review) and 'forecast' (at October 2024) voter numbers were within the legislated +/-10% tolerance. Where this happened, the VEC prioritised compliance at the October 2024 elections to ensure each vote would have approximately equal value at the 2024 elections. In some cases, the VEC's recommended model may set the current ward deviations outside the +/-10% tolerance. This was because the ward deviations were forecast to change over a short period of time and move within the +/-10% tolerance by the time of the 2024 local council elections.

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 electors. 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 VEC took this change to the makeup of voters' rolls, and therefore compliance with section 15(2) of the Act, into consideration during this review.

# About Pyrenees Shire Council

## Profile

Pyrenees Shire Council is in the Central Highlands region of Victoria around 145 kms from central Melbourne. The council covers an area of 3,434 km<sup>2</sup> and has a population of 7,671 making it one of Victoria's least populated councils (ABS 2022a). The shire is bordered by Northern Grampians and Central Goldfields shire councils to the north, Hepburn Shire Council and Ballarat City Council to the east, Golden Plains and Corangamite shire councils to the south, and Ararat Rural City Council to the west.

The shire is predominantly rural, with over 60 localities and many small centres serving the surrounding rural areas. There are 2 main population centres – Avoca in the north and Beaufort in the south – with farming activities supported by smaller townships including Amphitheatre, Landsborough, Lexton, Moonambel, and Snake Valley. These small settlements provide services and facilities to rural areas and are important focal points for community activities. Many residents rely on nearby regional centres outside of the council area for employment, retail, entertainment, and other services (DTP 2023).

The Dja Dja Wurrung, Eastern Maar, Wadawurrung, Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk peoples are the Traditional Custodians of most of the land in Pyrenees Shire Council (VAHC 2024).

## Landscape

The shire includes the Pyrenees Ranges, at the southern end of the Great Dividing Range. The ranges create 2 distinct climates – a warmer, drier climate in the north and a cooler, wetter climate south of the ranges. Much of the ranges are wooded with most areas designated state forests or reserves, with small pockets of plantation forestry.

Agriculture makes up 71.5% of land use, dominated by livestock (mostly sheep) grazing and pasturing, followed by dryland cropping. The Pyrenees Wine Region is in the shire's north-west corner (ABARES 2022, DAFF 2021).

Four major roads service the council:

- The Western Highway runs east-west through Beaufort towards Ararat.
- The Sunraysia Highway runs north-west through Lexton, Avoca, and Wedderburn.
- The Glenelg Highway heads south-west from Ballarat to Hamilton.
- The Pyrenees Highway runs south-west from Maryborough to Ararat, via Avoca.

Two railway lines run towards Ararat. One in an east-west direction, largely following the Western Highway. The other rail line follows the Pyrenees Highway from Maryborough to Ararat carrying freight and agricultural products.



## **Community**

The shire has had consistently low population growth. Since 2001 the population has grown by about 1,300 people (ABS 2001, ABS 2022a) and is forecast to continue at a relatively modest rate. Much of the growth is in Beaufort, Avoca, and Snake Valley, offsetting a decline in the smaller, more rural localities.

The median age in the shire is 50 – much higher than the median of 43 for regional Victoria overall. Australia was the country of birth for 81% of shire residents, matching the average for regional Victoria, but much higher than the 65% for Victoria overall (ABS 2022a, ABS 2022b).

About 48% of adults are in the work force, which is low compared to 57% for regional Victoria overall and about 62% for all of Victoria (ABS 2022a, ABS 2022b). The top 5 employment industries are sheep farming, health care, local government, social assistance, and wine and alcoholic beverage making. Sheep farming employs nearly 8% of the shire's workforce.

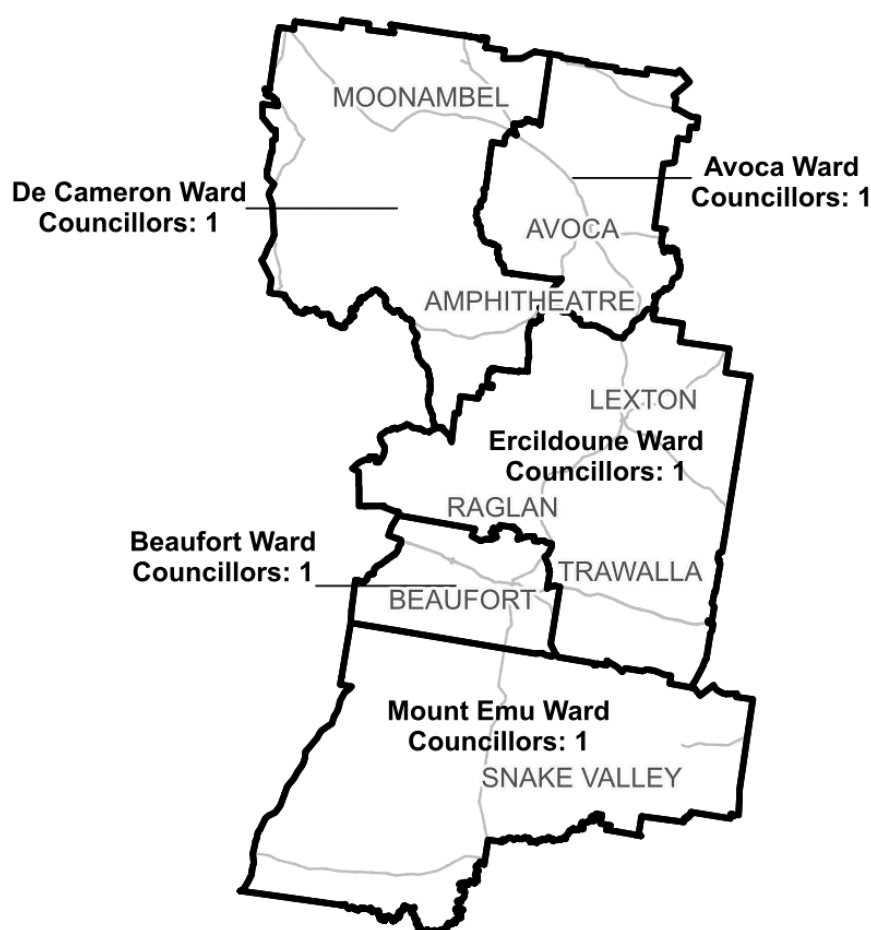
Personal and household median weekly incomes are \$579 and \$1,101 respectively – well below the \$722 and \$1,422 for regional Victoria overall (ABS 2022a, ABS 2022b).

Nearly 98% of private dwellings are separate houses, which is higher than regional Victoria (91%) (ABS 2022a). Home ownership at 82.9% is significantly above the Victorian average of 68.3% (ABS 2022a). There are only 33 social housing dwellings – amongst the lowest in Victoria (AIHW 2022). Over 52% of families are couples without children, over 8% higher than regional Victoria. The number of families with children is low at 32% compared to regional Victoria overall at 39% (ABS 2022a, ABS 2022b).

Thirteen of the shire's localities, including Beaufort and Avoca, are considered amongst the most disadvantaged in the state (ABS 2023).

## Current electoral structure

Pyrenees Shire Council has a total of 5 councillors and is divided into 5 single-councillor wards (Avoca, Beaufort, De Cameron, Ercildoune, and Mount Emu wards).



**Figure 1:** Diagram of current electoral structure of Pyrenees Shire Council.

There are an estimated 7,270 voters in Pyrenees Shire Council, with an estimated ratio of 1,454 voters per councillor.

By October 2024, the voter-to-councillor ratio of Beaufort Ward is forecast to be outside of +10%, and the voter-to-councillor ratio of De Cameron Ward is forecast to be outside of -10%.

Visit the VEC website at [vec.vic.gov.au](https://vec.vic.gov.au) for more information on Pyrenees Shire Council.

## Last review

The VEC conducted an electoral representation review of Pyrenees Shire Council in 2011. That 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 Pyrenees Shire Council continue to consist of 5 councillors elected from 5 wards.

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

## Preliminary findings and response

The current ward boundary review of Pyrenees Shire Council was required due to the voter-to-councillor ratios in Beaufort and De Cameron wards, which were projected to be outside of the legislated +/-10% range at the October 2024 local council election. Beaufort Ward is projected to have too many voters, while De Cameron Ward is projected to have too few. Population change, combined with changes to ratepayer-based entitlement categories that come into full effect at the 2024 local council elections, are impacting voter deviations in these wards.

Beaufort and De Cameron wards do not border each other, so the boundaries of all 5 of the council's wards must be adjusted to balance voter-to-councillor ratios.

### Preliminary report

The VEC's ward boundary review of Pyrenees Shire Council began with the release of a preliminary report on Wednesday 21 February 2024.

The full preliminary report is available on the VEC website at [vec.vic.gov.au](https://vec.vic.gov.au)

When preparing the preliminary report, the VEC considered a range of ward boundary adjustments for Pyrenees Shire Council and chose the strongest 2 models for public consultation. The following 2 models were presented for community consideration:

- Model 1, which proposed changes to the boundaries of all wards.
- Model 2, which proposed changes to the boundaries of all wards but with different ward boundaries to Model 1.

Both models retained existing ward boundaries where possible, however substantial change was needed for most ward boundaries. Ward deviations of both models were forecast to remain within the legislated +/-10% range through to the 2028 local council elections.

#### Model 1

The most significant change in Model 1 was the south-eastern movement of the boundary between De Cameron and Ercildoune wards. The adjusted boundary largely followed locality boundaries and main roads and was considered stronger than the existing boundary between the 2 wards. The boundary also followed the southern edge of Lexton, bringing the township into De Cameron Ward.

Beaufort Ward was reduced in size, with Ercildoune Ward shifting south to take in the northern outskirts of Beaufort as well as Main Lead, Raglan and Middle Creek.

Avoca Ward was also reduced in size, with the entirety of Tanwood, Percydale and Lamplough localities transferred from Avoca Ward into De Cameron Ward.

Minimal changes to Mount Emu Ward allowed the full length of the boundary to follow locality boundaries.

## **Model 2**

Model 2 retained fewer existing boundaries compared with Model 1.

Like in Model 1, the boundary between De Cameron and Ercildoune wards was shifted to the south-east. However, in Model 2 this change was more significant with De Cameron Ward extending further south, intersecting with Mount Emu Ward and resulting in a larger De Cameron Ward than in Model 1. The boundary between De Cameron and Ercildoune wards largely followed the Sunraysia Highway and main roads. Unlike Model 1, the boundary skirted Lexton's north-eastern edge to retain the town in Ercildoune Ward. A main drawback of Model 2 was the division of central Raglan between De Cameron and Ercildoune wards, which was necessary to balance voter numbers across wards in this model.

Beaufort Ward had a greater reduction in size compared to Model 1, with the transfer of the western half of the current ward to De Cameron and Mount Emu wards.

Mount Emu Ward gained parts of the existing Beaufort Ward south of the Western Highway, which offset the loss of parts of Mena Park, Carngham, and Burrumbeet to Ercildoune Ward.

Avoca Ward was slightly smaller than in Model 1, with the additional transfer of Amphitheatre to De Cameron Ward.

## **Response submissions**

The VEC accepted response submissions to the preliminary report from Wednesday 21 February 2024 until 5 pm on Wednesday 20 March 2024. The VEC did not receive any submissions from the public responding to the preliminary report.

The VEC granted a one-week extension to the close of submission date, shifting this from Wednesday 13 March to Wednesday 20 March. As a result, all subsequent event dates for the ward boundary review of Pyrenees Shire Council were shifted out by one week. The VEC granted this extension due to special circumstances related to a fire emergency in the council area, to allow additional time for interested community members to participate in the public submission process.

## **Public hearing**

An online public hearing for those wishing to speak about their response submission was scheduled for 2 pm on Wednesday 27 March 2024. As there were no submissions, the hearing did not go ahead.

## Findings and recommendation

As outlined in the submission guide for this review, the VEC 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 a ward boundary review, the VEC must adhere to the Act's legislated equality requirement to seek to ensure the number of voters per councillor in a ward is within +/-10% of the average number of voters per councillor for all wards in the council area.

### The recommended model

The VEC did not receive any submissions commenting on the models presented in the preliminary report. While the VEC considers that either of the proposed ward boundary adjustments presented in the preliminary report would support representation for the communities of interest in the council area, it is acknowledged that the bushfire emergency during the submission period may have impacted community feedback to the review.

After considering the models presented in the preliminary report and the requirements of the Act, the VEC has chosen to put forward Model 1, with no further adjustments, as the VEC's recommended model.

The major benefit of Model 1 is that this model better avoids dividing townships and communities by making use of locality boundaries where possible. Importantly, this model avoids dividing the township of Raglan. Given the likelihood of the wards of both models remaining within the +/-10% tolerance to the 2028 elections, Model 2 would be dividing Raglan township into separate wards for many elections to come. In addition, locality boundaries form the entire boundary of Mount Emu Ward, and the expansion of De Cameron Ward unites several localities. Another advantage of using locality boundaries is that it creates wards that are likely to be easily identifiable to local communities.

The VEC acknowledges that the changes proposed in Model 1 result in some oddly shaped wards, particularly the manner in which Ercildoune Ward wraps around Beaufort Ward. This was a result of the uneven distribution of voters across the council area, the small number of voters in the shire, and the desire to keep townships intact within single wards. When adjusting ward boundaries for Pyrenees Shire, moving a small number of voters into a different ward can have a large impact on ward deviations. At the time of this review, moving as few as 15 voters from one ward to another results in around a 1% change in deviations. In addition, the sparse distribution of voters across the shire means that ward boundaries need to be adjusted significantly to move voters between wards. On balance, the ability of Model 1 to keep communities together was considered of greater benefit to communities in the shire than the slightly better ward shapes of Model 2.

While Model 1 alters many existing ward boundaries, less than 9% of currently enrolled voters in Pyrenees Shire would be affected by these changes. Based on enrolments at the time of the review, Model 1 would result in 646 voters changing wards – 321 from Ercildoune Ward, 239

from Beaufort Ward, 65 from Avoca Ward and 21 from Mount Emu Ward. This is lower than the number of voters that would be impacted under Model 2 (732).

While the VEC acknowledges there are both potential benefits and drawbacks for this recommended model, it considers the boundary adjustments of this model to have the best potential to promote fair and equitable representation for voters in Pyrenees Shire Council while also complying with the requirements of the Act.

It should be noted that due to the changes to voter entitlement and variable population growth across the council area, it was necessary to set some current ward deviations outside +/-10% to increase the likelihood of ward deviations being within the +/-10% requirement at the time of the 2024 election. Despite best efforts, the panel acknowledges that, due to the volatility of population growth as well as the uncertain impacts of changes to council voting entitlements under the Act, that there remains a risk that some wards may remain or move outside +/-10% by the time of the 2024 election.

## **The VEC's recommendation**

The VEC recommends adjustments to the boundaries of the following wards within Pyrenees Shire Council:

- Avoca Ward
- Beaufort Ward
- De Cameron Ward
- Ercildoune Ward
- Mount Emu Ward

The recommended adjustments were presented as Model 1 in the preliminary report.

This recommendation is submitted to the Minister for Local Government as required by the Act.

Please see [Appendix 1](#) for detailed maps of the recommended ward boundaries.

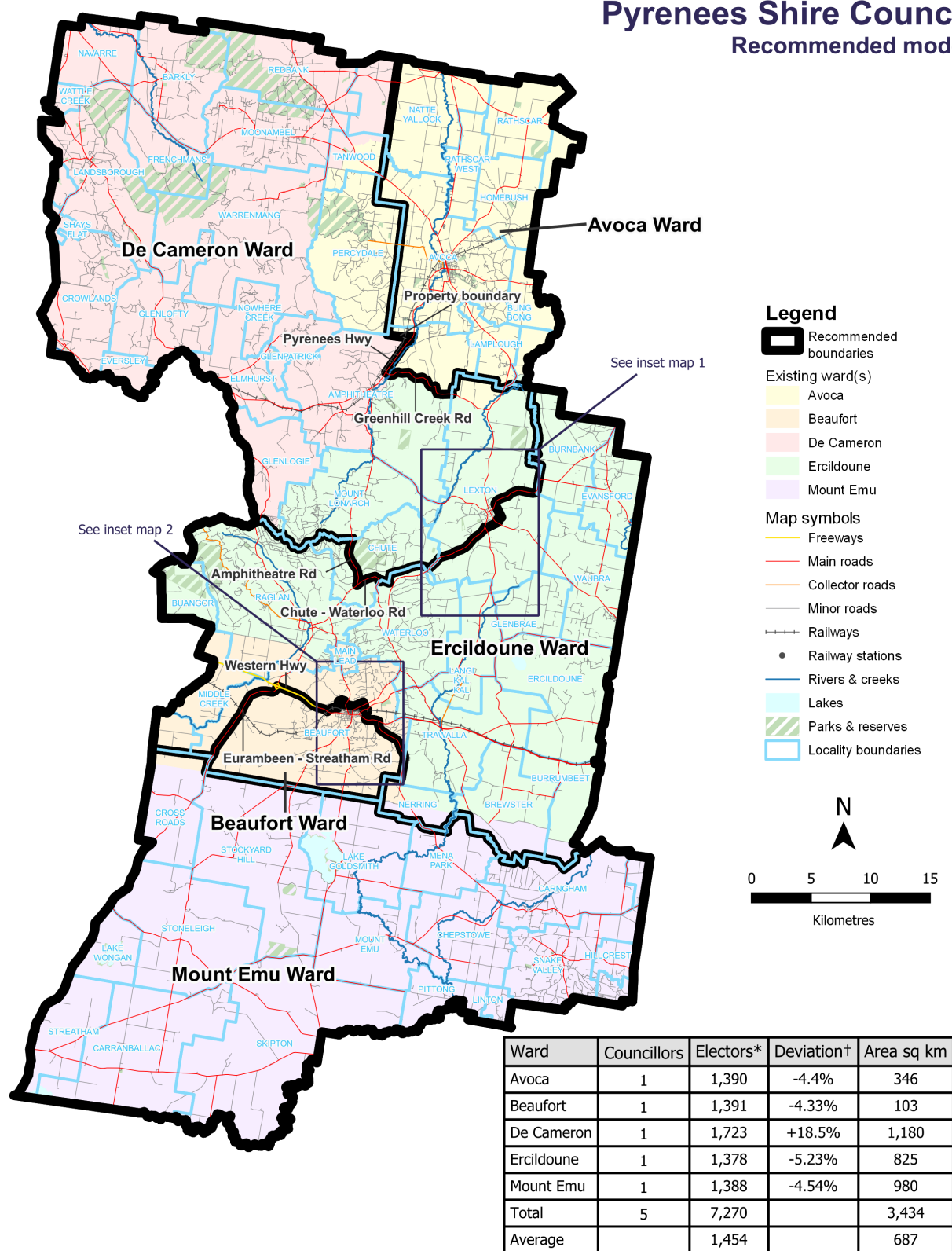
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# Appendix 1: Maps of recommended model

## Pyrenees Shire Council Recommended model



\*Elector numbers as at 3 November 2023

†The deviations of all wards are projected to be within +/-10% by the time of the 2024 local government elections.

Map prepared by:



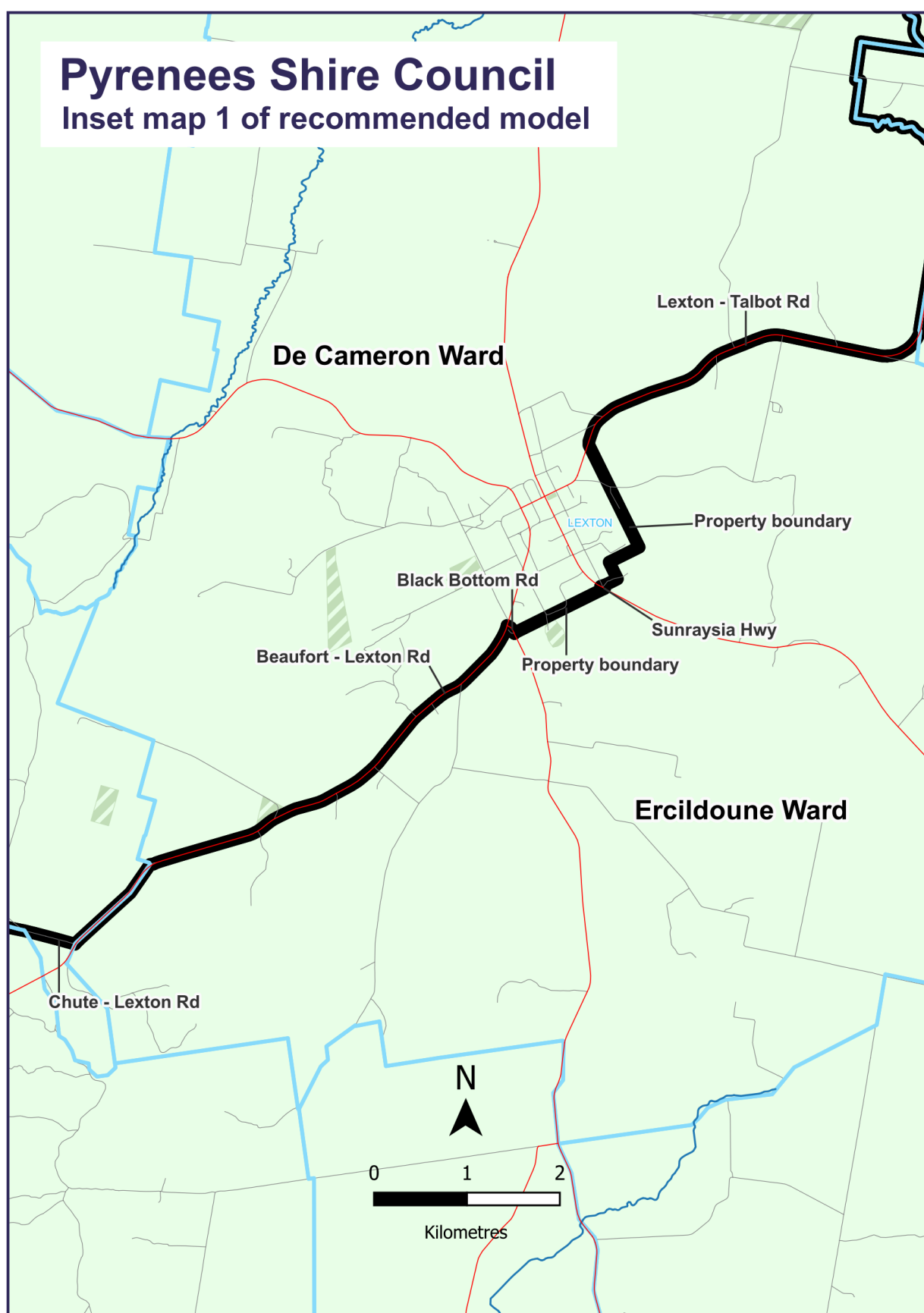
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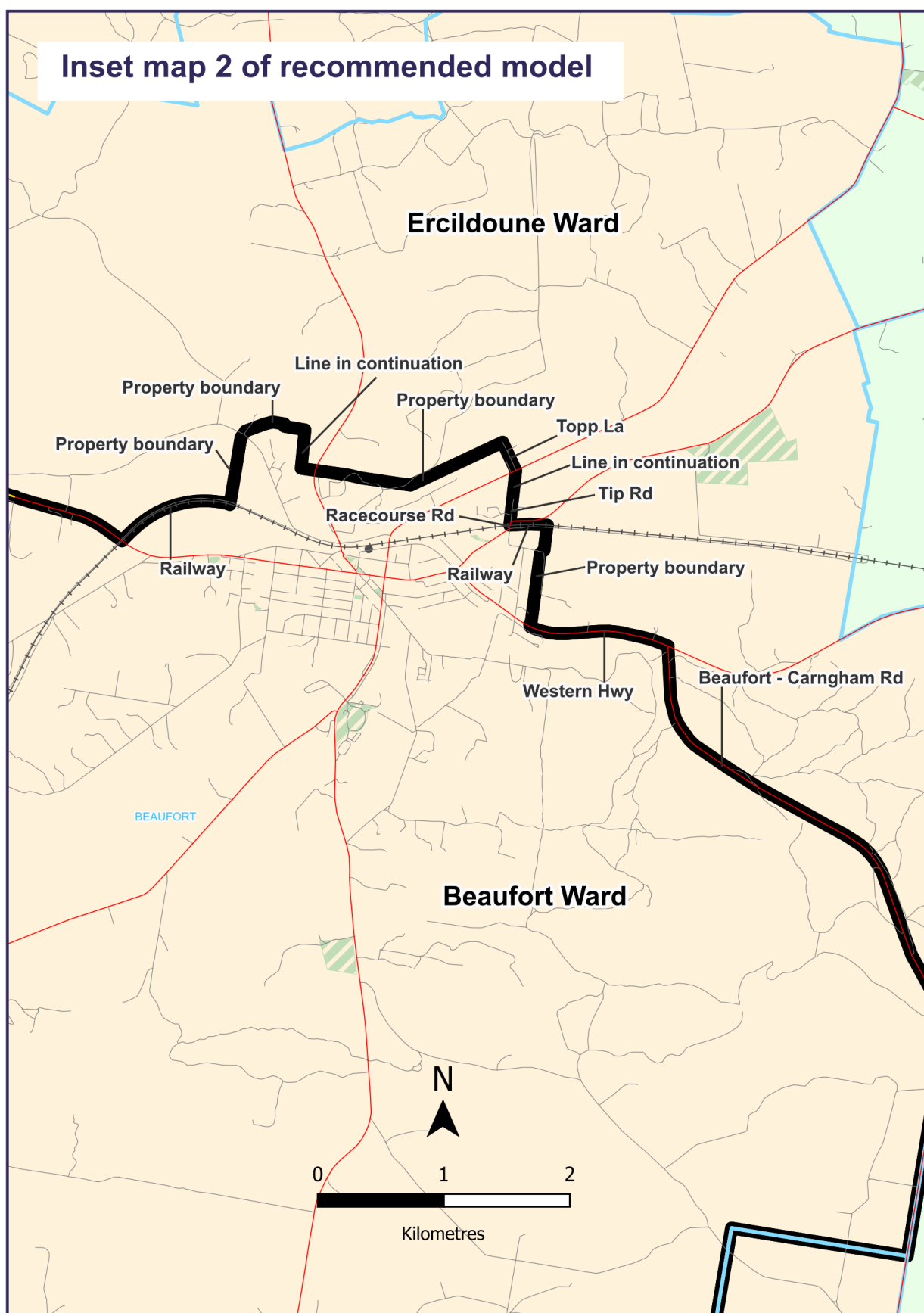


Layers for alignment:  
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**Data for recommended model**

<b>Ward</b>	<b>Electors*</b>	<b>Deviation†</b>	<b>Area# (square km)</b>
Avoca	1,390	-4.4%	346
Beaufort	1,391	-4.33%	103
De Cameron	1,723	+18.5%	1,180
Ercildoune	1,378	-5.23%	825
Mount Emu	1,388	-4.54%	980
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,270</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>3,434</b>
<b>Average</b>	<b>1,454</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>687</b>

\* Elector numbers at 3 November 2023.

† The deviations of all wards are projected to be within +/-10% at the time of the 2024 local council elections.

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

## **Appendix 2: Public involvement**

### **Response submissions**

There were no submissions received.

### **Public hearing**

As there were no submissions, the public hearing did not go ahead.

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