

Local council electoral structure review

# Final Report

Greater Geelong City Council

August 2023

### Acknowledgement of Country

The electoral representation advisory panel acknowledges the Wadawurrung people 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

Version	Date approved	Approved by
1	23 August 2023	Ms Julie Eisenbise
1	23 August 2023	Mr Tim Presnell
1	22 August 2023	Ms Dana Fleming

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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 Geelong 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 Geelong 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 Geelong 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 Geelong City Council adopt an 11 single-councillor ward structure – 11 wards with one councillor per ward.

The recommended names for the 11 wards in this electoral structure are Barrabool Hills Ward, Charlemont Ward, Cheetham Ward, Connewarre Ward, Corio Ward, Deakin Ward, Hamlyn Heights Ward, Kardinia Ward, Leopold Ward, Murradoc Ward, and You Yangs 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 5 July 2023 with the following electoral structure models for public consultation:

- Model 1: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 11 councillors – 11 wards with one councillor per ward.
- Model 2: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 11 councillors – 11 wards with one councillor per ward, with different ward boundaries to Model 1.
- Model 3: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 12 councillors – 12 wards with one councillor per ward.

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 38 submissions responding to the preliminary report. Of these, 3 submissions included maps.

A full analysis of response submissions received can be found on [page 16](#).

### Public hearing

The panel held an online public hearing for those wishing to speak about their response submission at 10 am on Tuesday 1 August 2023. Eight 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 Greater Geelong City Council) must now have single-councillor ward electoral structures.

For Greater Geelong 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 Geelong 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 Geelong 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 Geelong City Council was also offered but did not take up 2 optional promotion methods to promote the reviews:

- targeted social media advertisements in 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 Geelong 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 Greater Geelong 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 Geelong 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 Geelong City Council

## Profile

Greater Geelong City Council is located about 70 km south-west of central Melbourne and covers an area of 1,248 km<sup>2</sup>. It has a population of 271,057, making it the most populated of Victoria's regional cities and the third most populated local government area in Victoria after Casey and Wyndham cities (ABS 2021).

Greater Geelong City is surrounded by Surf Coast Shire to the south, Golden Plains and Moorabool shires to the west and north, and Wyndham City to the north. Queenscliffe Borough is adjacent to Greater Geelong City on the Bellarine Peninsula. The city includes significant coastal areas, extending south from Breamlea to include the Bellarine Peninsula (except for the small part occupied by Queenscliffe Borough) and a large section of the Port Phillip Bay coast up to Little River.

The Traditional Custodians of Greater Geelong City Council are the Wadawurrung people.

## Landscape

The council includes the large urban area and city of Geelong and the Bellarine Peninsula, which includes significant residential development and large rural areas, particularly in the north and a number of areas particularly in the southwest where new residential areas are developing. Well recognised natural features include the You Yangs, the Barwon and Moorabool rivers, and Lake Connewarre, plus extensive coastal environments and wetlands. Approximately 70% of land is used for primary production, mainly grazing.

The urban centre and surrounding suburbs of Geelong is home to about 180,000 residents. A significant population is located on the Bellarine Peninsula in Ocean Grove – Barwon Heads (approximately 22,000) and Drysdale – Clifton Springs (16,200). Lara to the north and Leopold to the east are other large urban areas with populations of about 15,700 and 12,300 respectively. The population living in the rural areas of the Greater Geelong City Council is about 9,000, or 3.3% of the total population of the city (ABS 2021b).

The council area includes a rich diversity of flora and fauna, including rare and unique species and ecological communities, major waterways, large coastal areas and complex freshwater and marine wetlands (DTP 2023). Agricultural land use is mainly sheep and beef grazing. There are small areas of cropping in the north, and horticultural businesses in the south, particularly on the Bellarine Peninsula (Agriculture Victoria 2023).

Historically, the council area has been a centre for industrial manufacturing, with an automotive industry, agricultural inputs sector, and a fuel refinery having interests in the area. It has Victoria's second largest seaport and airport and has had major investments in its road and rail infrastructure. It is located on the state and interstate road and rail network, providing direct links to South Australia, south-western Victoria and Melbourne (DTP 2023). The Geelong Ring Road extends the length of the Geelong urban centre and forms a boundary between development on either side.

## Community

The council area has a fast-growing population increasing from 183,530 in 2001 (ABS 2001) to over 270,000 people currently. It is forecast to grow to nearly 400,000 people by 2041 at a rate of about 6,000 people or 2% per year and the population will increase by about 25,000 between council elections (.id 2023).

The greatest rates of growth between 2023 and 2041 as forecast will occur in the following small areas:

- Lovely Banks – Batesford – Moorabool (470% from about 3,000 to nearly 17,000 people)
- Bell-Post Hill (140% from about 5,000 to just over 12,300)
- Marshall – Charlemont (200% from about 5,800 to over 17,800)
- Armstrong Creek (100% from about 13,600 to over 27,000)
- Mount Duneed (112% from 7,770 to about 16,500)
- Curlewis, Geelong – South Geelong – Drumcondra, and Herne Hill are forecast to increase between 45-100% by 2041 (.id 2023).

The median age of residents of the council area is 39 years, and its age profile is similar to Victoria overall. However, there are fewer people as a proportion of the overall population aged 30-45 years and more people as a proportion of the population aged 60 years and above when compared to Victoria overall (ABS 2021a).

Most residents identify as having English or Australian ancestry (38.4% and 35.7% respectively, about 10% above the State average), followed by Irish, Scottish, and Italian. At 77.6%, a greater proportion of the population were born in Australia than for Victoria overall (65%) and metropolitan Melbourne (59.9%). There were 3,562 people (1.3%) who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples in the 2021 Census, which as a proportion of the overall population, is slightly higher than 1.0% for Victoria overall. About 83% of the population speak only English at home (compared to 67.2% for Victoria overall) (ABS 2021a).

Of those people in the labour force (60.7%), 53.1% worked full-time (56.2% for Victoria overall), 35.7% part-time (32.3%), 6.8% were away from work (6.5%), and 4.4% were unemployed (5.0%) (ABS 2021a). The main occupations are professionals who make up 22.7% of the working population (25% for Victoria overall), technicians and trades workers at 14.5% (12.6%), community and personal service workers at 13.6% (11.0%), managers at 11.6% (14.0%), clerical and administrative workers at 11.4% (12.4%) (ABS 2021a).

In terms of the industry of employment, the main industries are hospitals, other social assistance services, supermarket and grocery stores, cafes and restaurants, and primary education, all at rates just above Victoria overall (ABS 2021a).

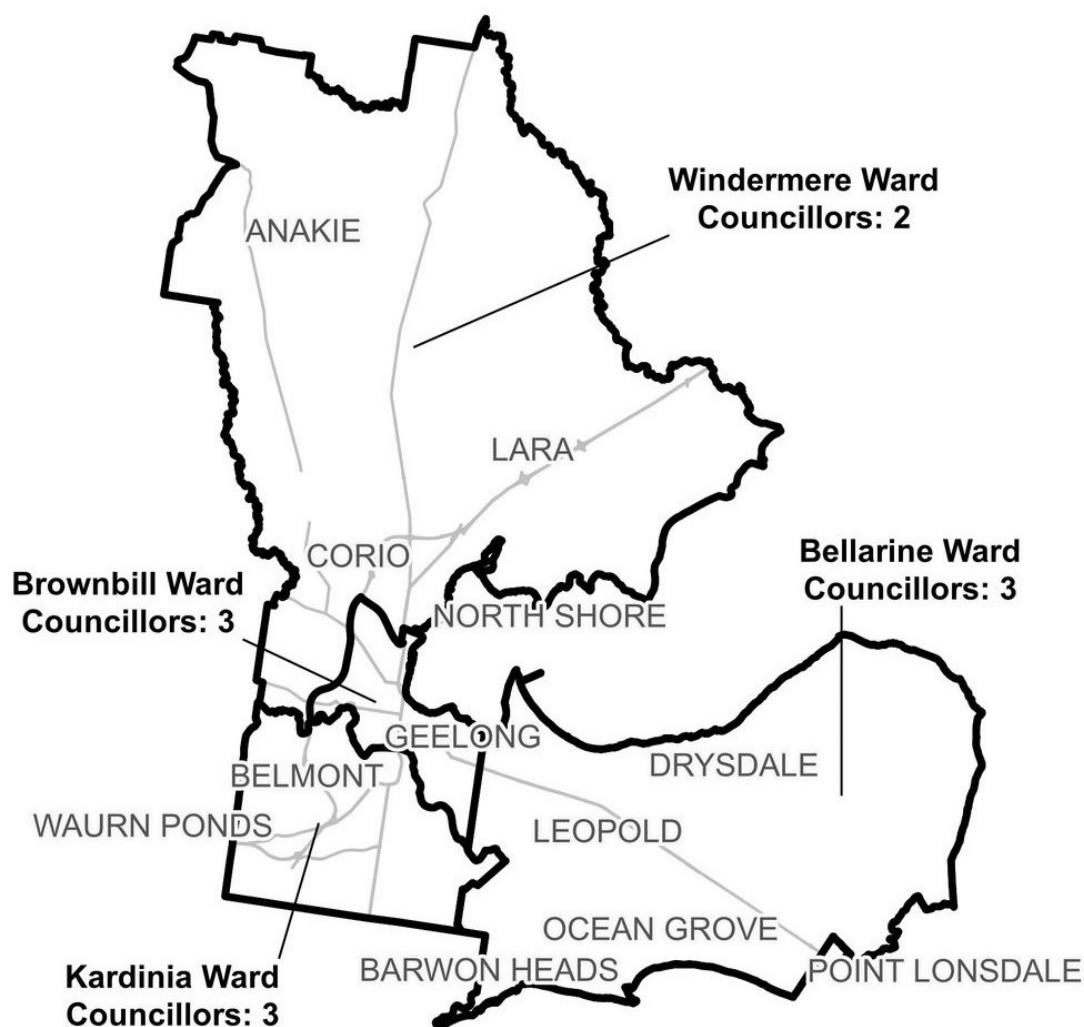
Median weekly incomes are slightly lower when compared to Victoria, which for individuals is \$769 (\$803 Victoria), families \$2,051 (\$2,136) and households \$1,592 (\$1,759) (ABS 2021a).

Greater Geelong City Council is considered to have relatively high levels of socio-economic advantage, though there are pockets of the council area with very high levels of disadvantage. Norlane (population of about 8,600 people) ranks as the most disadvantaged suburb in Victoria and Whittington (population 3,990) and Corio (15,500) are also areas of high disadvantage (ABS 2023).

## Current number of councillors and electoral structure

Greater Geelong City Council is currently divided into 4 wards with a total of 11 councillors:

- one ward with 2 councillors (Windermere Ward)
- 3 wards with 3 councillors each (Bellarine, Brownbill, Kardinia wards).



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

There are approximately 212,369 voters in Greater Geelong City Council, with an approximate ratio of 19,306 voters per councillor.

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

## **Last electoral structure review**

The VEC conducted an electoral representation review of Greater Geelong City Council in 2016. 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 Geelong City Council adopt a structure of 11 councillors elected from 4 wards (one ward with 2 councillors and 3 wards with 3 councillors each).

Visit the VEC website at [vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au) to access a copy of the 2017 representation review final report.

## Preliminary report

A preliminary report was released on Wednesday 5 July 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 11 councillors – 11 wards with one councillor per ward.
- Model 2: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 11 councillors – 11 wards with one councillor per ward, with different ward boundaries to Model 1.
- Model 3: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 12 councillors – 12 wards with one councillor per ward.

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 38 response submissions to the preliminary report from the public by the deadline of 5 pm on Wednesday 26 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 (11 single-councillor wards)	Model 2 (11 single-councillor wards)	Model 3 (12 single-councillor wards)	No preferred model indicated	Maintain current structure
10	5	9	14	26*

\*13 submitters showed support for more than one option.

Most submissions preferred models 1 and 3, with roughly equal numbers supporting each. Significantly less submitters preferred Model 2. However, 28 submitters argued against single-councillor wards and wanted to maintain the current structure. A large number of these submitters did not state a preference for any model. Where a preference was stated, it was generally considered to be the one that would be accepted providing it met the interests of the submitter. Overall, submitters were highly critical of the models on offer most particularly for the Bellarine Peninsular area.

There was no submission from the Greater Geelong City Council. However, current Windermere Ward Councillor and Deputy Mayor, Anthony Aitken, argued the boundaries in each model were 'artificial' and grouped 'different and opposing communities of interest' together in the same wards. Councillor Aitken suggested this would make 'representation by a single ward councillor difficult to manage and represent'.

In contrast, submitters generally focused on their local area to emphasise the drawbacks of single-councillor wards and provide comment on the proposed models. It was evident most felt they could not comment on wards outside of their local area. The models preferred generally reflected the concern not to have a local community divided between wards.

Of the 38 submissions, 27 were concerned with the electoral structure of the Bellarine Peninsula area. Nine submissions were from the urban part of the council and one from the north. Associations and member organisations provided 9 submissions. While the Greater Geelong City Council did not make a submission many individual councillors made submissions as did several previous councillors. Three submissions included a map.

Although submitters focused mostly on their immediate area, common concerns were evident across broader parts of the council area. Submitters from the Bellarine Peninsula nearly all tended to emphasise the significance and need to protect the natural environment of the Bellarine. Some connected these concerns to arguments on electoral structures by referring to



the Victorian Government's Distinctive Areas and Landscapes (DAL) scheme (*Planning and Environmental Amendment (Distinctive Areas and Landscapes) Act 2018*). Under this arrangement any DAL has planning protections, which are overseen by the Victoria Parliament and designed to protect the environment from over-development. Multiple submitters suggested this planning control should be a factor in deciding on the model or ward boundaries for the Bellarine. The panel felt it worth noting the DAL is a planning instrument and has no legislative coverage over the establishment of electoral structures. However, to better understand communities of interest and community sentiment, references to the Bellarine Peninsula DAL were valuable. Submissions from the various towns on the Bellarine together reveal a community of interest capturing the whole peninsula.

Likewise, but to a lesser degree, submissions from the outer-northern suburbs of Geelong and the rural area in the north of the council addressed local issues as part of broader concerns about the northern part of the council. A smaller number identified the growth suburbs in the south of the council as having common interests.

### **Model 1**

Model 1 was supported by 10 submissions, 8 from residents of the Bellarine Peninsula and 2 from the urban area of Geelong. Most submitters were critical of single-councillor wards and preferred the current structure. They generally considered Model 1 the most acceptable or tolerable based on local interests.

The Barwon Heads Association provided a written and mapped submission focused just on the Bellarine Peninsula. It argued Model 1 better grouped Barwon Heads, Ocean Grove, Connewarre and Breamlea into the same ward. For similar reasons, 3 submitters from Barwon Heads, and 2 from Ocean Grove felt Model 1 to be most favourable of all the models. The Breamlea Association supported Model 1, despite its problems, because it would bring together communities of interest. Tom O'Connor of Drysdale supported Model 1 because it most closely approximated the current ward boundaries. The Portarlington Community Association felt Model 1 the least problematic for Portarlington specifically.

David L. White of Drumcondra reluctantly supported Model 1. White saw no reason for increasing councillor numbers and considered the boundaries of Model 1 to be the most natural of the models for the inner Geelong area.

Windermere Ward Councillor Sarah Hathway of Corio preferred Model 1 but also considered 12 councillors a feasible option. Hathway's written and mapped submission identified issues with ward boundaries and made suggestions to keep North Shore, Norlane and all of Corio together in the same ward. Although the mapped submission had a deviation of 14%, Councillor Hathway believed it would balance out as the population grows.

There were 13 submissions opposed to Model 1, most of which felt its boundaries were arbitrary and divided communities. Of these, 8 were from the Bellarine Peninsula. A total of 6 submissions from residents of Indented Head opposed Model 1 because it would divide their community.

Dianne Bennett from Curlewis suggested of all 3 models Model 1 would negatively affect at least one Bellarine community. Others opposed Model 1 because they did not want Moolap and Armstrong Creek included in the Bellarine wards.

Lisa Cunningham of East Geelong felt the division of the CBD in Model 1 was unacceptable. Cunningham believed the boundaries of the East Geelong Ward failed to capture the diversity of the area.

Submissions focused on the north of the council area opposed Model 1 largely due to the way the northern communities were grouped in wards or divided by boundaries. For example, Mat Hines criticised including Anakie, Norlane and a portion of Highton in the same ward, while Tom Welsh felt the same about Highton and Anakie being together. Welsh suggested keeping Ceres, Highton, Wandana Heights and Waurin Ponds (west of the ring road) together to better reflect community connections. Teagan Mitchell of Armstrong Creek preferred having 12 councillors and wished to keep Charlemont and Armstrong Creek in the same ward. Mitchell also opposed the division of Waurin Ponds.

## **Model 2**

Model 2 was supported by 5 submissions, the lowest for any model, and was directly opposed by 16 submissions. Again, most argued against single-councillor wards and the need to change from the current structure at all.

Three individual submitters from the Bellarine felt Model 2 was the best option for Drysdale, Clifton Springs, and Curlewis as it recognised them as part of a broader community with strong connections. Lisa Cunningham preferred Model 2 because it contained the CBD in Kardinia Ward.

Councillor Ron Nelson of Kardinia Ward preferred Model 2. This was partly because the large suburb of Highton was contained in Buckley Falls Ward. Councillor Nelson also thought keeping all of Corio in one ward was a potential improvement. Kylie Grzybek suggested modifying Model 2 by transferring the small part of Corio from You Yangs Ward to Corio Bay Ward. This would mean the Corio and Norlane neighbourhood houses would be in one ward and represented by the same councillor.

There were 6 submissions from the Indented Head community opposed to Model 2 due to concerns the ward boundaries would divide their community.

There was significant opposition to the prospect of Model 2 combining growth areas, such as grouping Armstrong Creek with the Bellarine communities further east. Councillor Douglas James (Jim) Mason of Bellarine Ward considered Model 2 the most undesirable for this reason. Councillor Mason further argued the length of Connewarre Ward and its geography would make it difficult for the elected councillor to access and represent residents. Both the Ocean Grove Community Association and the Barwon Heads Association shared the same concerns about Connewarre Ward. Three other submitters felt the boundaries in Model 2 were arbitrary.

Others were concerned about some communities being included in wards in Model 2 where they had little or no connections. Brownbill Ward Councillor Melissa Cadwell felt this was the case with Belmont, St Albans Park and Breakwater being part of Breakwater Ward. Councillor Sarah Hathway was particularly concerned about grouping the disadvantaged suburbs of Norlane and Corio with affluent suburbs Drumcondra and Rippleside in the proposed northern wards.

### **Model 3**

Model 3 received support in 9 submissions, 7 of which were residents of the Bellarine Peninsula. There were 10 submitters who opposed it.

The panel received 6 submissions supporting Model 3 that were concerned about the division of Indented Head in models 1 and 2. These submissions generally wished the boundary changes would keep the Indented Head community together. While models 1 or 2 did not divide the main part of the Indented Head community, but rather ran along its outskirts, the panel understands the primary concern is in keeping these communities together.

Councillor Mason preferred Model 3 as the least damaging and most acceptable option given the circumstances. Councillor Cadwell supported it largely because it maintained much of the existing ward boundaries without devising too many new ones. Although Teagan Mitchell indicated some support for Model 3 there were concerns about arbitrary boundaries grouping dissimilar communities of interest.

Andy McKoy and the Ocean Grove Community Association opposed Model 3. Both submissions argued it destroyed any chance of Bellarine towns having a voice to implement DAL recommendations, because it grouped Bellarine and non-Bellarine towns in the same wards. Sandra Gatehouse was concerned about Ocean Grove and Barwon Heads being in different wards, as well as grouping Armstrong Creek with Breamlea, Connewarre and Barwon Heads. Gatehouse opposed Model 3 because it grouped areas with no common interests and split others with strong connections. The Barwon Heads Association had the same concerns and was strongly opposed to the boundaries proposed in Model 3.

The Association raised additional concerns that Model 3 compounded the problems identified with Model 1. It believes that increasing the number of wards would further divide communities and arbitrarily group communities with little connections. It also suggested the introduction of single-councillor wards had the potential to create competition between wards.

### **Other options**

Mat Hines did not support any of the preliminary models, and instead submitted a mapped 12 single-councillor ward structure. Hines also argued that single member wards are undemocratic and reduce diversity while encouraging parochialism.

Anne Brackley from Drysdale believed the proposed boundaries are divisive and preferred the current structure over any of the preliminary models. In their submissions the Combined

Bellarine Community Associations and the Drysdale Clifton Springs Curlewis Association also described a strong preference for keeping the current structure.

The Australian Labor Party – Bellarine Branch referred to the 2016 representation review for Greater Geelong City Council, which described single-councillor wards as not having served the city well. They asked for the status quo to be maintained and for the review to be deferred for 36 months.

Robert Penfold of Clifton Springs opposed all 3 models and was critical of single-councillor wards. Sally Fisher of Hamlyn Heights suggested all 3 proposals were 'inadequate to support good governance and representation in Geelong'.

In its submission, Women in Local Democracy (WILD) did not state a preferred model. They were concerned single-councillor wards would result in voters arbitrarily being placed in wards they would not identify with and lead to confusion and potential disillusionment with their local government.

## **Ward names**

The panel received 4 submissions from the public about possible ward names that use Aboriginal language. Several submissions indicated support for the use of Aboriginal language without recommending names. The panel includes these for the Minister's information but notes it was not possible to verify if appropriate consultation took place with relevant Aboriginal groups about the proposed names.

- Beangala
- Bellarine
- Borrong Gook
- Coraiyo (Corio)
- Djilang
- Malop (Maloppio)
- Moorabool
- Parwan
- Wurdi Youang (You Yangs)

Beangala, Borrong Gook, Coraiyo, Djilang, and Maloppio are not currently registered in the VICNAMES register so could not be considered by the panel.

## Public hearing

The panel held an online public hearing for those wishing to speak about their response submission at 10 am 1 August 2023. Eight people spoke at the hearing.

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

Professor Lawrence St Leger spoke on behalf of the Breamlea Association about the correlation between health and environment. They referred to the importance of the DAL and how it carries expectations for government agencies under legislation. They expressed concern with single-councillor wards and the divisions created, arguing the Bellarine Peninsula needs to be treated as a total entity. St Leger also explained how single-councillor wards carried a risk of councillors having their local constituents as their primary concern which undermined collegiality. They described how poorly planned developments upstream of the Bellarine Peninsula were having negative environmental consequences downstream in the Connewarre area.

Brian Cook spoke on behalf of the Barwon Heads Association, which supported keeping 11 councillors for the council. Cook spoke about the services shared between Barwon Heads and Ocean Grove and stressed the importance of keeping them together in a ward. The Association preferred Model 1 but Cook pointed out the problem of dividing St Leonards and Indented Head. Cook described Model 2 as a disaster which isolated communities due to the Connewarre Ward and believed Model 3 excessively split communities. Their submitted model would address some of the issues of other models, however they recognised it divided Drysdale and Clifton Springs. In addition, Cook believed Moolap has more in common with the Geelong urban area than the Bellarine.

Judith Brooks expressed disappointment that only 20 days had been available for submissions which limited the number and quality of submissions. Brooks felt Model 1 was better but found it had many problems. A significant concern was the naming of wards, which they believed would ideally unite communities. Brooks believed removing the Brownbill Ward name, named after the first woman to win a seat for Labor in the State Parliament, was a case of writing women out of history.

Colin Bridges spoke on behalf of Combined Bellarine Community Associations (CBCA), which represents 9 community associations, and expressed disappointment the review process was largely an arithmetic exercise. They did not support any of the preliminary models because each had poor outcomes for one or more Bellarine communities of interest. Because the CBCA represents all communities it could not favour one model over another.

Tom O'Connor spoke about how the Bellarine needs to be strategic in its approach and to use the interdependent nature of Bellarine Peninsula communities to its advantage. O'Connor felt the success of any model was ultimately up to the elected councillors and their intellectual and emotional aptitude.

Councillor Anthony Aitken believed 12 councillors would be appropriate for the council, mainly because of its population and forecast growth. Councillor Aitken argued 12 councillors would

allow maximum participation in democracy and felt that the 12-councillor model from 2007 might work as an appropriate template. In addition, Councillor Aitken described how nearly all votes at council are unanimous and often a councillor is absent when votes are cast. They pointed out that splitting rural communities in the north, as is the case for models 1 and 3, would be a problem for council grants programs.

Jan Farrell urged the panel to keep the 9 Bellarine townships together in Bellarine wards. Farrell believed the Greater Geelong City Council had been an experiment since its inception and its problematic history was evidence of this. Farrell felt 12 councillors to be an appropriate number for the council. They suggested the number of submissions opposed to the change in structure indicated the government might have made an error in deciding to change the council electoral structure. Their preference was to have Indigenous names across all wards because of significant work to address past harms and the review presented an opportunity for acknowledgement of Indigenous peoples. Farrell was least opposed to Model 3, but nonetheless was concerned about arbitrary boundaries dividing communities.

Speaking on behalf of the Ocean Grove Community Association, Andy McKoy spoke favourably about the current multi-councillor ward structure. McKoy argued for keeping the current structure. The Association was concerned about how single-councillor wards may impact on the success of the DAL, and that these environments may be jeopardised if councillors do not work together with a shared sense of purpose. Model 1 was the only acceptable model to the Association, as long as modifications were made to ensure communities of interest were kept together. Models 2 and 3 were unacceptable to the Association.

## Findings and recommendation

The panel notes the large number of submitters critical of the review process, including the need to adhere to the legislative requirements and a state-wide approach to determining the appropriate number of councillors. It also notes community concerns about the move to single-councillor wards overall and specifically in some smaller areas. Additionally, given the scale of change involved, the tight timelines for completion of reviews and the history of electoral structures in Greater Geelong City Council, the panel was not surprised at the level of opposition to the models proposed at the preliminary stage.

Through its commitment to fair and equitable representation and in support of community engagement, the panel has attempted to allay community concerns in developing its final recommendation. This has involved significant adjustments to the proposed models to develop an electoral structure that aligns with the council's communities of interest as much as possible and provides the best outcome to promote good governance. The panel also recognises it cannot resolve or include every suggestion for change, given the legislative constraints it must operate within.

As outlined in the submission guide for this review, the panel is committed to the principle of 'one vote, one value'. This is a requirement for subdivided electoral structures under the Act. This is to make sure 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.

Several submissions called for the panel to make exceptions to this legislated equality requirement for Greater Geelong City Council. The 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 cannot make exceptions to legislated requirements.

In this review the panel has sought to develop a model that meets the legislated requirements for fair and equitable representation for all voters and where possible responds sensitively to community concerns.

### Number of councillors

After considering the requirements of the Act, public submissions and the agreed criteria, the panel found 11 councillors to be an appropriate number for Greater Geelong City Council.

The panel considered the characteristics of Greater Geelong 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.

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 Greater

Geelong City Council since the representation review in 2015-16. 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 Greater Geelong City Council challenging. Because of this, the panel also considered models with more councillors. The panel explored if an increase in the number of councillors would enable single-councillor ward structures to be created that may provide more favourable representation for the community. As a result, the panel put forward one option with more councillors: Model 3. The panel found there to be moderate levels of support in submissions for increasing councillors to 12. Arguments favouring an increase, including a large and growing population, having 12 councillors in the past, and the potential for improved representation, were considered valid. However, the panel felt there was not strong support for or convincing evidence of the benefits of a structure based on 12 councillors. Given the challenges of creating single-councillor wards for the council, having to include another ward increased the likelihood of dividing communities and possibly provide a model that may not be the best model for good governance.

Greater Geelong City Council currently has 212,369 voters represented by 11 councillors and covers an area of 1,248 km<sup>2</sup>. Other councils with a similar number of voters usually also have 11 councillors. While other regional city councils all have smaller populations than Greater Geelong City Council, the interface councils, Casey, Whittlesea, Wyndham, and Hume cities all have similarly large populations and 11 councillors each.

The panel came to recommend 11 councillors for the following reasons:

- the overwhelming support in submissions for keeping 11 councillors
- the benefits of avoiding unnecessary disruption given the significance of changing to a single-councillor ward structure
- the increased chances of dividing communities with an additional ward
- the lack of any major benefits to voter representation with a structure based on 12 councillors.

The unanimous nature of votes in council meetings, as well as the mayor having a second vote, was seen as another drawback of increasing to 12 councillors.

The panel recognised the population growth of Geelong did mean councillors would have higher voter to councillor ratios. However, when weighed against the reasons not to increase councillor numbers listed above, the panel did not think this a good enough reason to add an extra councillor.

## **Electoral structure**

After considering the requirements of the Act, public submissions and the agreed criteria, the panel considered models 1 and 2 each contained elements and different qualities that would suit the needs of Greater Geelong City Council and its various communities. Because of the volume and high quality of the public feedback received on the proposed models, and the



desire to incorporate community concerns and suggestions for change, an appropriate modified electoral structure was developed.

The panel believes the modified model is sympathetic to the concerns raised by many communities of interest in the review process. Ward boundary adjustments have been made to avoid splitting communities in:

- the northern area of the council
- the Geelong CBD
- the south, to better capture the growth communities
- and on the Bellarine Peninsula, where the boundaries have been redrawn to better group its communities.

In the final modified model, 7 of the 11 wards from Model 1 are very similar or unchanged. The panel found the modified model to be the single-councillor ward model with the best potential to promote fair and equitable representation for voters in Greater Geelong City Council and consequently facilitate good governance.

Responses to the preliminary models contained significant criticisms of proposed models and many proposed ward boundary modifications to the models. This offered the panel an opportunity to develop a modified model which responded to community sentiment.

The 2 northernmost wards of the council have been rearranged to be more like those of Model 2. The rural and sparsely populated areas are captured in You Yangs Ward, similar as to the ward proposed in Model 2. However, the boundary travels farther south to the Barwon River, while Model 2 went as far south as Ballarat Road, thus gathering more rural residents under the one rural ward. It includes some of suburban Corio, which the panel found was a necessary compromise in preparing You Yangs Ward, to make sure the ward was within +/-10% of the average number of voters per councillor. Given the geography of the council there were only a few places where this urban component could be included in the northern ward. The panel reasoned the most northerly part of Corio, while not ideal, was the most suitable division, possibly lessening travel distances for a You Yangs Ward councillor. This ward division was the cleanest and most sensible of any options the panel explored.

Having set the You Yangs boundary at the Barwon River, a modification has been made to Buckley Ward in Model 1, which expands westwards to incorporate the locality of Ceres and part of the Barrabool Hills. Additionally, Deakin Ward expands taking the whole of Waurn Ponds and the area of Highton west of the Ring Road.

The northern suburbs are captured in Corio Ward, similar to Corio Bay Ward in Model 2 which instead of incorporating the suburbs of Rippleside and Drumcondra, and the coastal areas of North Geelong, incorporates the areas of Bell Post Hill and Bell Park suburbs north of Braund Avenue and Furner Avenue.

Slight adjustments were made to Corio Ward's boundaries with Kardinia and Hamlyn Heights wards, which the panel considers to be an improvement. While not possible to contain all of Corio in the one ward, there are potential benefits to having one councillor focused on the northern suburbs of Norlane, North Shore and most of Corio.

The Hamlyn Heights Ward southern boundary in Model 1 was the Barwon River, and in the recommended model the boundary has been shifted south to include a small part of Highton. To connect Highton with the rest of the ward, the boundary with Kardinia Ward turns south at Minerva Road to Queens Park Road.

The panel preferred the more vertically-orientated wards for the city of Geelong, as proposed in Model 1. Slight adjustments have been made to make sure the CBD is not split and to provide effective representation to the commercial area of Geelong. The boundaries now follow McKillop Street and then Garden Street to the coast, changing the boundary between Kardinia and Cheetham wards. Cheetham Ward now incorporates the whole locality of Moolap.

The boundaries were redrawn on the Bellarine Peninsula to address concerns about the division of communities. The changes capture Breamlea, Connewarre, Barwon Heads and Ocean Grove into a Connewarre Ward, while Leopold and Drysdale are in Leopold Ward. The rest of the peninsula area is captured in Murradoc Ward.

Because of the way the population is spread across the peninsula it is a necessary compromise to divide at least one community to make sure all wards were within +/-10% of the average number of voters per councillor. The panel examined previous electoral structures when developing potential models and deciding on its recommended structure. The panel noted the 2008 Greater Geelong City Council electoral structure review divided Drysdale and Clifton Springs. The panel felt this division would be familiar to some residents and was believed to be the least disruptive to Bellarine Peninsula communities of interest. Accordingly, a similar division was deemed to be the fairest and most appropriate for this structure. These changes also meant that Moolap and the Armstrong Creek areas were not included in wards covering the Bellarine Peninsula, as was preferred by many submissions. The panel notes this as an improvement given the location of Moolap under the current structure. The Buckley and Deakin wards in Model 1 were changed to balance out projected growth and achieve an improved urban and rural balance in these rapidly growing areas.

Many submitters from the Bellarine Peninsula had argued that the DAL legislation was sufficient reason for certain ward configurations and even for delaying the review. Their concerns included councillors not cooperating with each other and preferencing their own ward over the peninsula as a whole. The panel noted that regardless of the selected model, the DAL is shared with the 5 councillors from the Borough of Queenscliffe and any councillor would need to work collaboratively with them. In addition, the DAL is potentially a common point of interest for communities to work together, including from beyond the Bellarine Peninsula. As Professor St Leger pointed out in the public hearing, upstream development was having downstream impact. This supports an argument for a holistic council approach, such as that made by Tom O'Connor who stressed the importance of fostering interdependence within the council.

The purpose of this review was for the panel to develop and recommend a single-councillor ward structure for Greater Geelong City Council. While the panel notes there was community opposition to the change to a single-councillor ward structure, the panel has a legislative responsibility to develop a structure that meets the legislation.

Although 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 Geelong 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 in all wards. The panel assumes this trend will continue under an 11 single-councillor structure, minimising the risk of uncontested or failed elections. It notes, however, that prior to changing to the current structure candidate numbers were relatively strong across 12 single-councillor wards at the 2012 elections, but 4 out of 12 of the wards were uncontested at the 2008 elections.

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

The panel notes the significant challenge of creating a single-councillor ward structure for Greater Geelong City Council that both complies with the legislated +/-10% requirement and captures geographic communities within wards. Due to the uneven distribution and growth of the population across the council area, it is also challenging for any single-councillor ward structure to comply with the +/-10% requirement beyond the 2024 local council elections.

## Ward names

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

- Barrabool Hills Ward: named after Barrabool Hills located in the ward. This name is registered in the VICNAMES register.
- Charlemont Ward: New name based on a locality in the ward. This locality name is registered in the VICNAMES register.
- Cheetham Ward: Named after Cheetham Salt Works located in the ward. This name is registered in the VICNAMES register.
- Connewarre Ward: Named after Lake Connewarre located in the ward. This name is registered in the VICNAMES register.
- Corio Ward: New name based on a locality in the ward. This locality name is registered in the VICNAMES register.
- Deakin Ward: Named after Deakin University (Waurin Ponds) Campus located in the ward. This name is registered in the VICNAMES register.

- Hamlyn Heights Ward: New name based on a locality in the ward. This locality name is registered in the VICNAMES register.
- Kardinia Ward: Named after Kardinia Park located in the ward. This name is registered in the VICNAMES register.
- Leopold Ward: New name based on a locality in the ward. This locality name is registered in the VICNAMES register.
- Murradoc Ward: Named after Murradoc Hill located in the ward. This name is registered in the VICNAMES register.
- You Yangs Ward: Named after You Yangs State Forest located in the ward. This name is registered in the VICNAMES register.

## **The panel's recommendation**

The electoral representation advisory panel recommends that Greater Geelong City Council adopt an 11 single-councillor ward structure – 11 wards with one councillor per ward.

The recommended names for the 11 wards in this electoral structure are Barrabool Hills Ward, Charlemont Ward, Cheetham Ward, Connewarre Ward, Corio Ward, Deakin Ward, Hamlyn Heights Ward, Kardinia Ward, Leopold Ward, Murradoc Ward, and You Yangs 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 most resembled 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) (2001) [2001 Census All Persons QuickStats, Greater Geelong \(LGA\)](#), ABS, accessed 25 May 2023.

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ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) (2021a) [2021 Census All Persons QuickStats, Greater Geelong \(UCL\)](#), ABS, accessed 25 May 2023.

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DTP (Department of Transport and Planning) (2023) [Greater Geelong Planning Scheme](#), DTP, accessed 24 May 2023.

Electoral Act 2002 (Vic)

Geographic Place Names Act 1998 (Vic)

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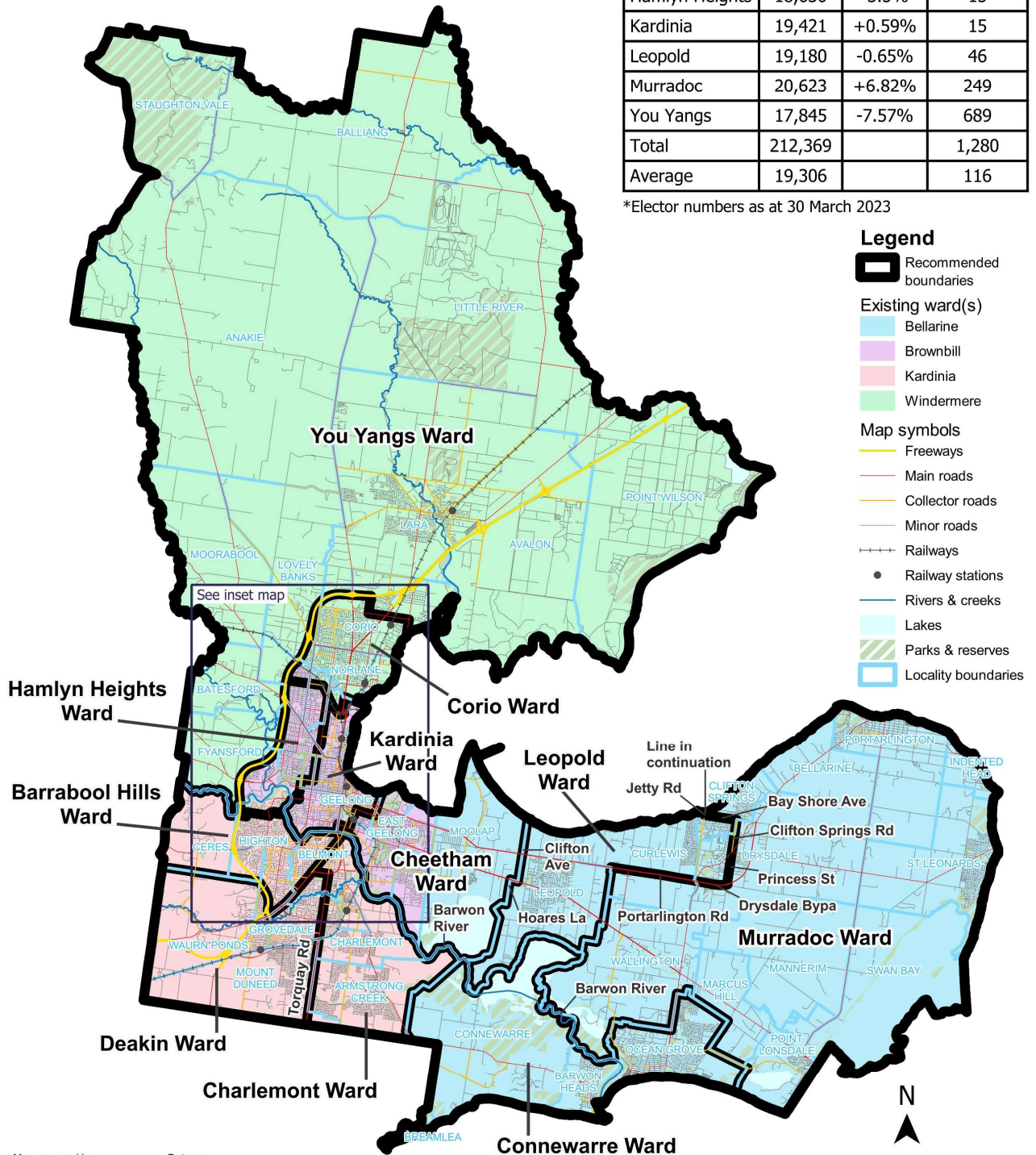
Planning and Environmental Amendment (Distinctive Areas and Landscapes) Act 2018 (Vic)

# Appendix 1: Map of recommended structure

## Greater Geelong City Council Map of recommended option 11 single-councillor wards

Ward	Electors*	Deviation	Area sq km
Barrabool Hills	20,336	+5.33%	27
Charlemont	17,790	-7.85%	38
Cheetham	19,224	-0.43%	53
Connewarre	20,132	+4.28%	75
Corio	19,519	+1.1%	21
Deakin	19,669	+1.88%	53
Hamlyn Heights	18,630	-3.5%	15
Kardinia	19,421	+0.59%	15
Leopold	19,180	-0.65%	46
Murradoc	20,623	+6.82%	249
You Yangs	17,845	-7.57%	689
Total	212,369		1,280
Average	19,306		116

\*Elector numbers as at 30 March 2023

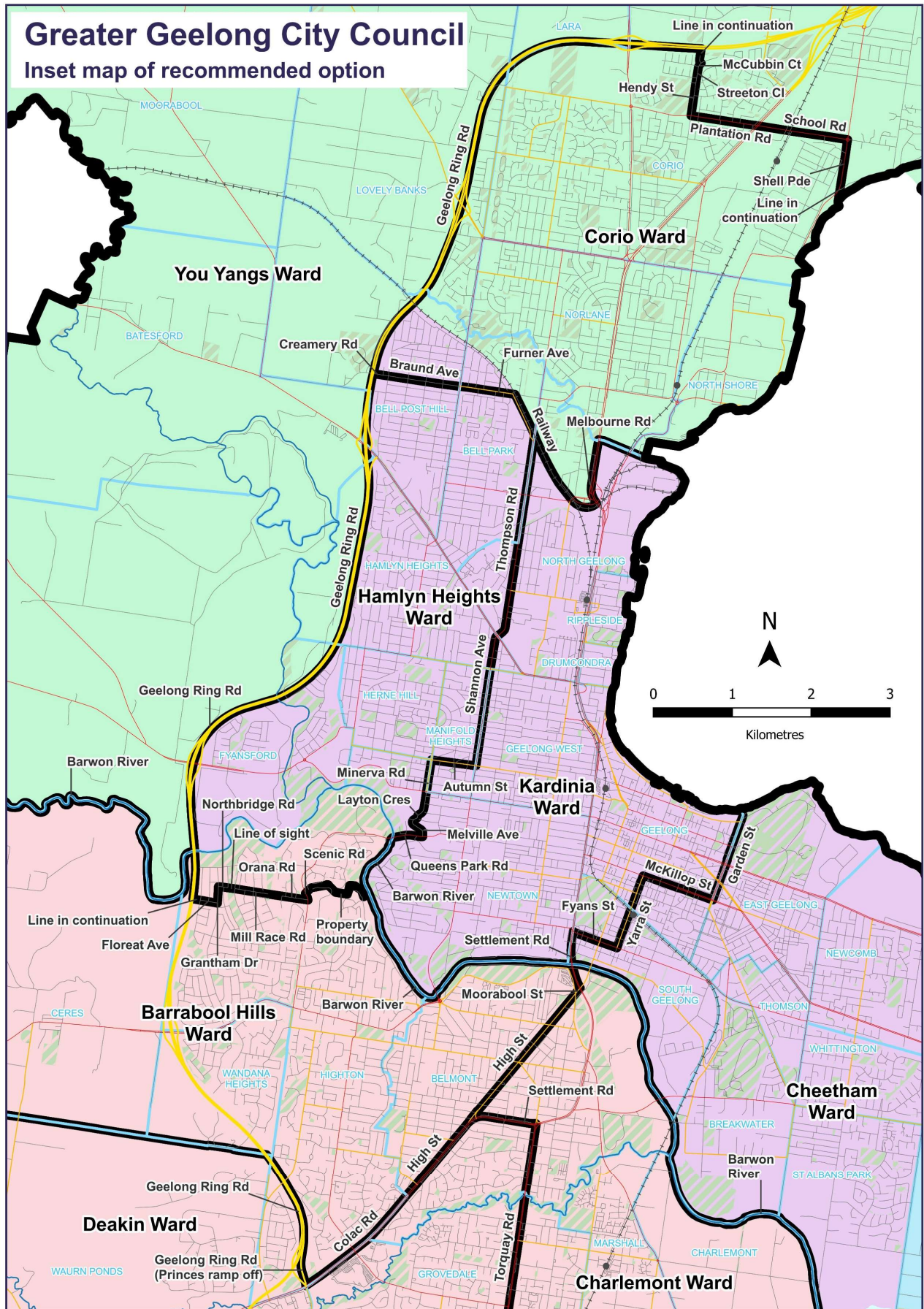


Ward	Electors*	Deviation	Area (square km)#
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You Yangs	17,845	-7.57%	689
<b>Total</b>	<b>212,369</b>	-	<b>1,280</b>
<b>Average</b>	<b>19,306</b>	-	<b>116</b>

\*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:

Aitken, Anthony (Councillor and Deputy Mayor, Greater Geelong City Council)	Hathway, Sarah (Councillor, Greater Geelong City Council)
Australian Labor Party - Bellarine Branch	Hill, Douglas
Barwon Heads Association	Hines, Mat
Bennett, Dianne	Indented Head Community Association
Bowman, Alan	MacLeod, Robert
Brackley, Anne	Manser, Pamela
Breamlea Association	Mason, Douglas James (Councillor, Greater Geelong City Council)
Brooks, Judith	McKoy, Andy
Cadwell, Melissa (Councillor, Greater Geelong City Council)	Michaelis, John
Chapman, Warren	Mitchell, Teagan
Combined Bellarine Community Associations (CBCA)	Nelson, Ron (Councillor, Greater Geelong City Council)
Cunningham, Lisa	Ocean Grove Community Association
Dower, Diane	O'Connor, Tom
Drysdale Clifton Springs Curlewis Association	Penfold, Robert
Farrell, Jan	Portarlinton Community Association
Fisher, Sally	Welsh, Tom
Fiske, Gina	White, David L.
Gardner, Robin	Women in Local Democracy (WILD)
Gatehouse, Sandra	
Grzybek, Kylie	

## Public hearing

The following people spoke at the public hearing:

Aitken, Anthony (Councillor, Greater Geelong City Council)

Bridges, Colin (on behalf of Combined Bellarine Community Associations)

Brooks, Judith

Cook, Brian and Bade, Phillip (on behalf of Barwon Heads Association)

Farrell, Jan

McKoy, Andy (Ocean Grove Community Association)

O'Connor, Tom

St Leger, Lawrence (on behalf of Breamlea Association)

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