

Local council ward boundary review

# Final Report

Murrindindi Shire Council

April 2024



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(Victorian Electoral Commission)  
April 2024

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### Content approval

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| 1       | 12 April 2024 | VEC panel member |
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### Report Approval

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### **Acknowledgement of Country**

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) acknowledges the Taungurung and Wurundjeri 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.

Murrindindi 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 Murrindindi 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 Murrindindi Shire Council:

- Cathedral Ward
- Cheviot Ward
- Eildon Ward
- Kinglake Ward
- King Parrot Ward
- Koriella Ward
- Red Gate 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 14](#).

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 received 8 submissions responding to the preliminary report. Of these, 4 submissions included maps.

A full analysis of response submissions received can be found on [page 17](#).

### Public hearing

The VEC held an online public hearing for those wishing to speak about their response submission at 10 am on Tuesday 19 March 2024. One person spoke at the hearing.

## 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.

Murrindindi 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 Murrindindi 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.

Murrindindi 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 Murrindindi 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 Murrindindi Shire Council

## Profile

Murrindindi Shire Council is located in central Victoria approximately 150 km north-east of Melbourne's central business district. Covering an area of 3,873 km<sup>2</sup> it stretches from the Kinglake Ranges and Great Dividing Range in the south to the Strathbogie Ranges in the north, and from Eildon in the east to Flowerdale in the west.

The Traditional Custodians of the land in Murrindindi Shire Council are the Taungurung and Wurundjeri peoples, with the majority of Murrindindi Shire located on Taungurung Country.

## Landscape

Murrindindi Shire Council is serviced by 3 major highways. The Goulburn Valley Highway traverses the council area from east to west while the Melba and Maroondah Highways run in a north-south direction. With no trains and limited bus services the Murrindindi community is generally reliant on private vehicles for transport (MSC 2022).

The council area contains several National and State parks as well as many other natural attractions. These include Kinglake National Park, Lake Eildon and Yarra Ranges National Parks, Cathedral Range State Park, Murrindindi Scenic Reserve and the Goulburn River. Nearby attractions on the border of the council area include the Lake Mountain Alpine Resort and Lake Eildon.

Approximately 48% of the council area is forested public land most of which is managed by the State Government (DTP 2024). Much of this forested land is rugged and mountainous. Parts of Murrindindi Shire, particularly in the south and south-east, have a significant bushfire risk and were heavily affected by the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires. Recent flooding events have also significantly impacted local communities and recovery is ongoing.

The council area consists of 45 localities, with the main towns being Alexandra, Yea, Eildon and Marysville. Other smaller townships include Molesworth and Yarck in the north, Flowerdale, Glenburn, Buxton, Strath Creek, Taggerty and Thornton in the centre, and Kinglake, Kinglake West, Narbethong and Toolangi in the south.

The council area is predominantly rural, with agriculture, forestry, fishing and tourism being major economic drivers. Almost 40% of land is used for forestry and over 40% is used for livestock production (DAFF 2021). The shire has a diverse agricultural base that includes beef, sheep, poultry and dairy farming, as well as olives, grapes, trout, alpaca and deer farming (ABARES 2022, MSC 2019). Tourism is largely focused on the natural environment and outdoor leisure activities. Construction and education also contribute significantly to the local economy (REMPAN 2024).

Social and economic shifts are expected to see the emergence of new industries supporting the local economy as it transitions away from native forestry, and local communities seek sustainable responses to the challenges of climate change and natural disasters (DTP 2024).

Growth industries in Murrindindi Shire Council include agri-tourism and outdoor education (REMPPLAN 2024).

### **Community**

Murrindindi Shire Council was home to 15,197 people in 2021 (ABS 2022a), an increase of 2,139 over the previous decade (ABS 2011). Population growth for the shire is expected to be low (at less than 1% growth per year) and the population is forecast to increase to 17,455 by 2036 (DTP 2023). Most of the population growth is expected to occur within the towns of Alexandra, Yea, Eildon and Marysville (MSC 2022).

With a significantly older population compared to the overall state, the median age of residents in 2021 was 50, higher than both the Victorian average of 38 and the regional Victorian average of 43 (ABS 2022a, 2022b). Murrindindi also had a higher proportion of people aged 45 years and over (57.6%) compared to the Victorian average of 41% (ABS 2022a). The average household size of 2.3 persons in 2021 was lower than the Victorian average of 2.5 (ABS, 2022a, 2022b).

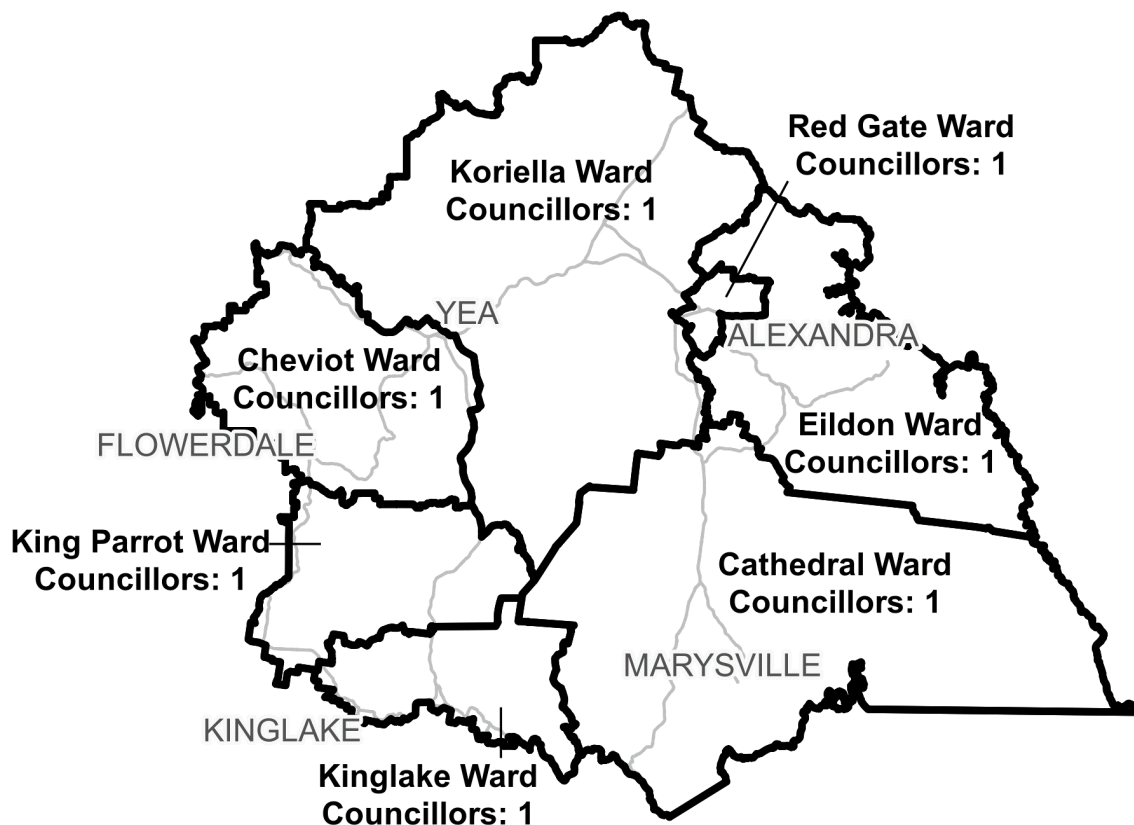
In 2021, over 80% of people were born in Australia and over 87% of people speak only English at home (ABS 2022a). Of those who were born overseas, England and New Zealand were the most common countries of origin (ABS 2022a).

Similar to much of regional Victoria, housing consists mainly of separate dwellings and in 2021 over 80% were owned outright or had a mortgage. At 13.6%, the proportion of households renting was significantly lower than the Victorian average of 28.5% (ABS 2022a). The median household weekly income in 2021 was \$1,287, lower than both Victorian and regional Victorian medians of \$1,759 and \$1,386 respectively (ABS 2022a, 2022b).

Murrindindi Shire Council's economy supports over 5,000 jobs (REMPPLAN 2024) and in 2021 54.2% of the population over 15 years of age were in the workforce, which is lower than the regional Victorian average of 57.4% (ABS 2022a, 2022b). The most common industries of employment in 2021 for residents were beef cattle farming, accommodation and hospitals (ABS 2022a).

## Current electoral structure

Murrindindi Shire Council has a total of 7 councillors and is divided into 7 single-councillor wards (Cathedral, Cheviot, Eildon, King Parrot, Kinglake, Koriella and Red Gate wards).



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

There are an estimated 13,910 voters in Murrindindi Shire Council, with an estimated ratio of 1,988 voters per councillor.

By October 2024, the voter-to-councillor ratios of Cheviot, Kinglake and Red Gate wards are forecast to be outside of +10%, and the voter-to-councillor ratios of Cathedral, Eildon and Koriella wards are forecast to be outside of -10%.

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

## Last review

The VEC conducted an electoral representation review of Murrindindi Shire Council in 2019. 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 Murrindindi Shire Council adopt a structure of 7 councillors elected from 3 wards (2 wards with 2 councillors and 1 ward with 3 councillors) to replace the 7 single-councillor ward structure that had been in place since 2008.

Coinciding with changes to permitted electoral structures under the *Local Government Act 2020* (Vic), the minister approved a 7 single-councillor electoral structure for Murrindindi Shire Council. This was similar to the single-councillor ward model that had been in place since 2008, with minor boundary modifications to balance voter deviations.

Visit the VEC website at [vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au) to access a copy of the 2019 representation review final report.

## Preliminary findings and response

The current ward boundary review of Murrindindi Shire Council was required due to the voter-to-councillor ratios projected to be outside the +/-10% range across 6 wards at the October 2024 local council elections. Cheviot, Kinglake and Red Gate wards were projected to be outside the +10% range, and Cathedral, Eildon and Koriella wards were projected to be outside the -10% range. Boundary adjustments would therefore be required to transfer voter numbers from the wards above +10% into other wards, to ensure all wards met the legislated voter deviations at the time of the elections.

While the VEC noted the existing King Parrot Ward was the only ward projected to comply with voter deviations at the 2024 elections, changes would likely be needed to this ward to balance boundary adjustments in other wards.

## Preliminary report

The VEC's ward boundary review of Murrindindi 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 Murrindindi 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.

Murrindindi Shire Council is geographically large and contains many diverse landscapes and communities. Many of these communities are physically separated by rivers, mountainous areas and rugged terrain. Given the relatively low numbers of voters and a low rate of growth focused on a limited number of towns, even small adjustments to existing ward boundaries in one location has flow-on effects to voter deviations and ward boundaries across the whole shire. Adjusting the existing single-councillor ward model to create wards that comply with the legislated +/-10% requirement whilst still maintaining communities of interest for Murrindindi Shire Council was therefore challenging.

Each model dealt with these challenges in different ways, with different strengths and potential drawbacks.

### Model 1

- Model 1 sought to minimise change by keeping boundary adjustments to a minimum to maintain voter deviations. It also sought to keep communities of interest together where practical. The main potential drawback of this model was parts of Toolangi and Castella were included in Cathedral Ward, which split communities of interest in the south-western area of the council.

## **Model 2**

- Model 2 sought to retain the existing boundary between Kinglake and Cathedral wards with the aim of keeping all townships in the south-west of the council area together and avoid dividing these communities across more than 2 wards. The main potential drawback of this model was the resulting 2 large and irregular-shaped wards in the centre of the council area, however broader communities of interest for these rural areas would still be maintained along the river valleys and highways.

## Response submissions

The VEC received 8 response submissions to the preliminary report from the public by the deadline of 5 pm on Wednesday 13 March 2024. 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  | Model 2 | No preferred model indicated | Other |
| -  | 2       | 3                            | 3     |

All submissions were opposed to the boundaries proposed under Model 1. Two submissions supported Model 2, 3 submissions put forward alternative boundary changes to the preliminary report models and a further 3 did not indicate a preference for any model.

A total of 4 submitters provided maps of proposed boundary changes to the models in the preliminary report, and 3 submitters expressed support for alternative electoral structures. One of the submitters (M Evans) lodged 2 submissions. Submissions were received from Murrindindi Shire Council and the Mayor of Murrindindi Shire Council, Cr D. Gallagher.

Two submitters queried some of the voter data and growth projections relating to specific towns, and one submitter addressed matters that are out of scope for this review.

### Model 1

There were no submissions received supporting Model 1, with all 8 submissions opposed to the proposed boundaries of Model 1.

The arguments put forward against Model 1 related mainly to the proposed boundaries between Cathedral and Kinglake wards, which split the localities of Toolangi and Castella across both wards. These included:

- Communities of interest for Toolangi and Castella are aligned to the west with the communities of the Kinglake Ranges (such as Kinglake and Kinglake Central), and not communities to the east in Cathedral Ward.
- There are significant topographic constraints and no direct road access from the western end of Cathedral Ward to the east, requiring significant travel outside the ward (via Healesville to the south or Yea to the north) to travel from Toolangi and Castella to the rest of the ward.



- There is the likelihood of representation issues for residents of Castella and Toolangi located in the western end of Cathedral Ward as they will not be well represented by a councillor based in the eastern end of the ward. Further, any candidate for Cathedral Ward located in Toolangi or Castella would likely be at a disadvantage at an election.
- The boundary of Model 1 between Kinglake and Cathedral wards will have an adverse impact on municipal planning, service delivery and governance outcomes.

A further argument put forward against the boundaries of Model 1 included that access from Strath Creek to the rest of Koriella Ward would be challenging, resulting in representation issues due to the lack of transport connection.

## **Model 2**

Two submissions supported Model 2, on the following grounds:

- Model 2 does not split Toolangi and Castella across 2 wards.
- Despite their size, both Koriella and Cathedral wards would best preserve a commonality of interest in these communities.
- Road connectivity and accessibility was more practical than in Model 1.

Arguments put forward against Model 2 included:

- A potential disparity in the representation of voters in Red Gate and Eildon wards, due to an imbalance in voter numbers.
- A significant disparity in size between Red Gate Ward and the large Koriella and Cathedral wards.

One submitter identified that Model 2 included part of the locality of Murrindindi in Cathedral Ward, which cannot be accessed directly by road from the rest of Cathedral Ward. However, this submitter lodged a supplementary submission noting that as there are no voters in the area of Murrindindi to be included in Cathedral Ward under Model 2, it did not matter which ward it went into.

## **Other options**

Four submissions included mapped proposals that varied the boundaries provided in the preliminary report models. Each map was tested by the VEC for compliance with voter deviations predicted at the time of the 2024 local council elections and it was found that none of the proposed alternative models would comply with legislative requirements at that time.

Three submissions also offered their support for alternative electoral structures for Murrindindi Shire Council. This included support for a mixed multi-councillor ward model, or an unsubdivided model. Supporters of these alternative electoral structures argued that they would facilitate fairer and more equitable representation for communities, by allowing for wards to be combined with shared councillors and communities of interest to be preserved within wards of a larger area. The VEC notes, however, that consideration of alternative electoral structures is out

of scope of the current ward boundary review. Changes to an electoral structure can only be considered by an Electoral Representation Advisory Panel as part of a full electoral structure review.

## Public hearing

The VEC held an online public hearing for those wishing to speak about their response submission at 10 am on Tuesday 19 March 2024. One person spoke at the hearing.

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

Mr Michael Chesworth, speaking on behalf of Murrindindi Shire Council, reiterated the main points made in the council's written submission, that the council is fundamentally opposed to Model 1 and prefers Model 2. He argued that the extension of Cathedral Ward west to include parts of Toolangi and Castella, as proposed under Model 1, is not supported by the council for the following reasons:

- It would be difficult for any Cathedral Ward councillor to effectively represent the Toolangi and Castella community as there are no main roads providing direct access to this western part of Cathedral Ward in Model 1. The only access is a 1.5-hour journey around the ranges with difficult road conditions.
- Castella and Toolangi do not share communities of interest with the rest of the Model 1 Cathedral Ward due to these access issues. Their communities of interest are to the west, being part of the Kinglake Ranges communities, or to the south of the council area in Healesville.
- Municipal planning, service delivery and bushfire recovery all align Castella and Toolangi with the Kinglake Ranges communities to the west, rather than with Cathedral Ward to the east.
- Kinglake Ranges communities are currently served by 2 councillors. The addition of a third councillor to this area would not be advantageous, as the councillor representing Cathedral Ward would focus to the east where the bulk of constituents were located.
- Residents in Castella and Toolangi who may want to nominate for the council elections would likely be at a disadvantage during an election, due to the isolation of these communities from the rest of the Cathedral Ward community to the east.

Mr Chesworth understood that the current ward boundary review was not an electoral structure review. However, he noted that the council does have a concern that if population trends continue, the current single-councillor ward structure may be unsuitable for the shire, as the urban wards (such as Red Gate Ward) would need to continue to shrink in size to balance voter numbers, causing even bigger disparities in the geographic size of wards. He also noted that rural-based wards would continue to take on more urban areas on the outskirts of the main towns, which may further divide communities of interest and cause representation issues.

The VEC was interested to understand the council's position on the large and unusually shaped Koriella and Cathedral wards that were proposed by Model 2. Mr Chesworth responded that despite the large geographic areas these wards cover, the communities contained within these wards were largely rural communities with common interests, and there were transport connections between communities within the proposed wards. On that basis, the council did not have major concerns with the size or shape of these wards. When asked specifically about the placement of Glenburn in Koriella Ward under Model 2, Mr Chesworth commented that Glenburn is a rural community without a major urban centre and was not significantly different to other rural communities to the north within Koriella Ward such as Murrindindi and Limestone, and noted again the good road access connecting these communities.

## 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 recognises the presence of multiple, distinct communities and townships within Murrindindi Shire Council that are physically separated by diverse rural landscapes, including rivers and mountainous areas. As was reflected in public submissions, there is a strong desire for these communities and townships to be reflected in the ward boundaries as much as is practical whilst also meeting legislated voter deviations.

After considering the models presented in the preliminary report, the requirements of the Act and public submissions, the VEC has chosen to put forward Model 2 as the VEC's recommended model with no further adjustments.

In coming to its decision on the recommended boundary adjustments, the VEC sought to balance a range of factors, including the advantages of minimal change, the use of clear features as ward boundaries, the impacts of boundary changes on major towns and other communities of interest, and the arguments presented in public submissions.

Model 2, as the recommended model, acknowledges the strength of arguments put forward in submissions and directly addresses the main issues raised by all submitters, specifically, retaining the existing boundary between Cathedral and Kinglake wards. This results in all the Kinglake Ranges townships remaining united within 2 wards (Kinglake and King Parrot wards) and retaining their current level of representation.

Other strengths of the recommended model are that it seeks to maintain communities of interest across the rest of the council area by predominantly using locality boundaries as ward boundaries and keeping townships together as much as is practical. For instance, the boundaries of Cheviot Ward have been adjusted without having to divide the town of Yea, and communities of interest are maintained along the north-south highway corridors in both Koriella and Cathedral wards. Also, while the division of Alexandra was unavoidable under any single-councillor ward arrangement, Model 2 minimises the division with Alexandra split across 2 wards only, rather than 3 wards as is the case under the current ward boundaries.

A potential drawback of the recommended model is that both Cathedral and Koriella wards are geographically larger than other wards and cover diverse rural areas. In particular, there is a large size disparity between these 2 wards and the smallest ward, being Red Gate Ward. This is considered to be unavoidable under the current electoral structure, as the voter deviations for the 3 largest wards (Cathedral, Eildon and Koriella wards) are all expected to be below -10% at

the 2024 elections, and therefore require additional voters. Moving voters into Cathedral, Eildon and Koriella wards from other wards is the only way to balance voter deviations across the whole council area. In its verbal submission, the council acknowledged the large size of these wards, however also noted that they contained similar rural communities with good transport connections.

Arguments raised by submitters advocating for alternative electoral structures, and the increasing size discrepancy between wards reflect some of the challenges in seeking to maintain balanced voter numbers for Murrindindi Shire Council. These issues were also highlighted at the public hearing by the council representative, who noted that when future ward boundary reviews are carried out to re-balance the number of voters across wards, urban wards will continue to get smaller, and the rural wards will continue to get larger. The VEC acknowledges these issues cannot be addressed as part of this ward boundary review and can only be addressed as part of any future electoral structure review.

The VEC recommends Model 2 as it most effectively meets all legislated requirements. Further, due to the distribution of voters and the geography of the council area, the VEC considered no other boundary adjustments could be developed which afforded stronger ward boundaries or represented communities of interest as effectively as Model 2.

The ward boundary adjustments proposed by Model 2 will affect 1,652 voters, being 12% of all voters within Murrindindi Shire Council (based on current enrolment figures). Although the boundary adjustments proposed under Model 1 would impact fewer voters, the VEC considers that the overall representation outcome for communities in the shire was likely to be more favourable under Model 2.

The VEC notes that the name of the proposed Cheviot Ward may no longer be appropriate under the recommended boundary adjustments as it does not include the features that the ward was originally named after (being Cheviot Road, the former Cheviot railway station and the Cheviot railway tunnel). However, the VEC also notes that under the existing ward boundaries the current Cheviot Ward does not include these features either. Ward name changes are not a consideration of this review. The minister may wish to consider a future ward name change for this council.

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 Murrindindi Shire Council while also complying with the requirements of the Act.

## **The VEC's recommendation**

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

- Cathedral Ward
- Cheviot Ward

- Eildon Ward
- Kinglake Ward
- King Parrot Ward
- Koriella Ward
- Red Gate Ward

The recommended adjustments were presented as Model 2 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.

## References

ABARES (Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences) (2022) [Agricultural commodities 2020-21 by local government area](#), ABARES website, accessed 9 January 2024.

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) (2022a) [2021 Census All persons QuickStats, Murrindindi \(LGA\)](#), ABS website, accessed 16 January 2024.

—(2022b) 2021 [2021 Census All persons QuickStats, Rest of Vic](#), ABS website, accessed 16 January 2024.

—(2011) [2011 Census All persons QuickStats, Murrindindi \(LGA\)](#), ABS website, accessed 16 January 2024.

DAFF (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) (2021) [Catchment scale land use profile dashboard – local government areas](#), DAFF website, accessed on 9 January 2024.

DTP (Department of Transport and Planning) (2024) [Murrindindi planning scheme](#), DTP website, accessed 16 January 2024.

—(2023) [Victoria in Future 2023 - population and household projections](#), DTP website, accessed 16 January 2024.

Electoral Act 2002 (Vic).

FPSR (First Peoples State Relations) (2024) [Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners](#), First Peoples State Relations website, accessed 16 January 2024.

Local Government Act 1989 (Vic).

Local Government Act 2020 (Vic).

Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2020 (Vic).

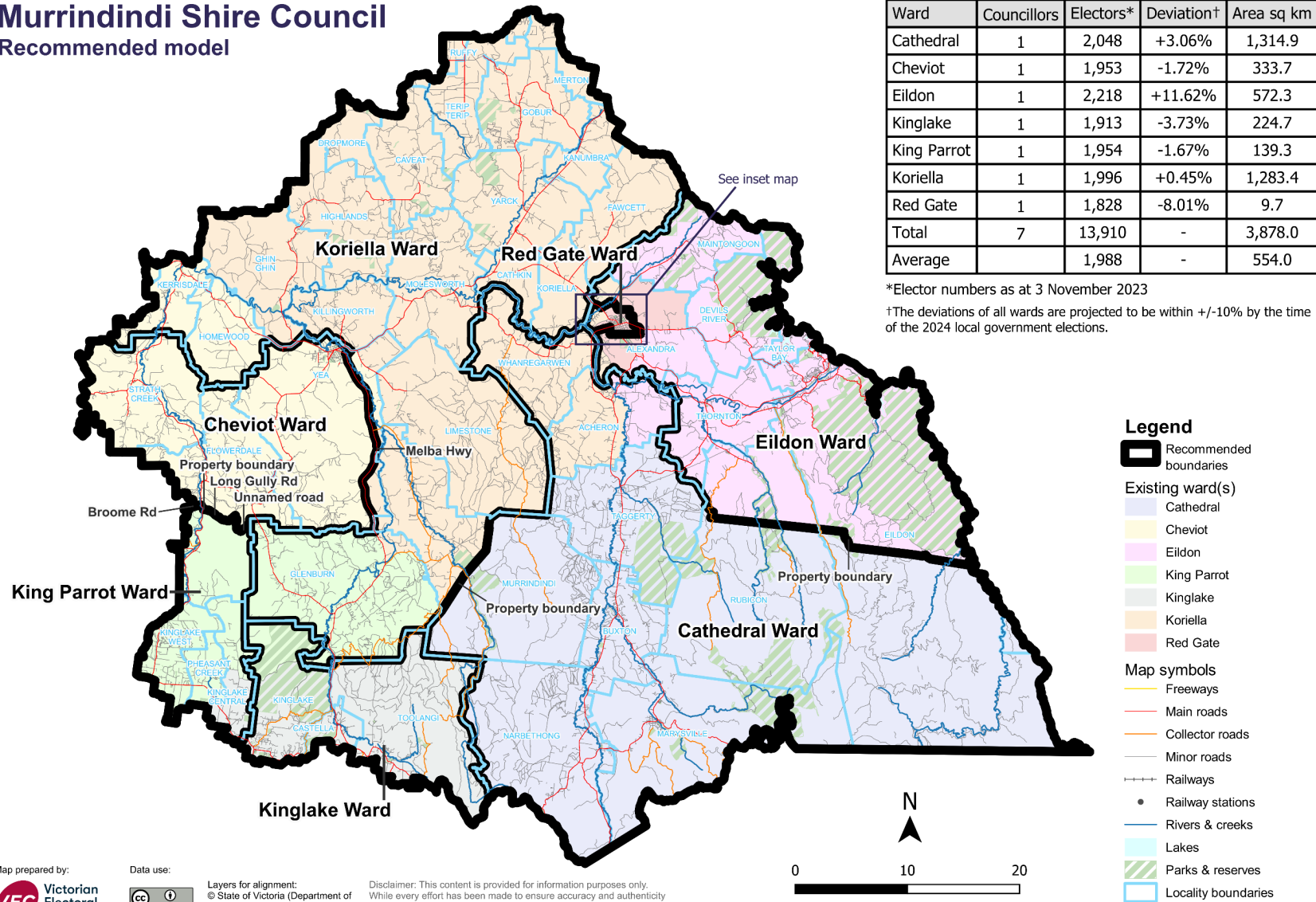
(MSC) Murrindindi Shire Council (2022) [Murrindindi Shire Housing and Settlement Strategy](#) Murrindindi Shire Council website, accessed 22 January 2024.

—(2019) [Murrindindi Shire Council Fire Management Plan 2020-2023](#) Murrindindi Shire Council website, accessed 22 January 2024.

REMPLAN (2024) [Murrindindi Shire Council Economy, Jobs and Business Insights](#), REMPLAN website, accessed 10 January 2024.

# Appendix 1: Map of recommended model

## Murrindindi Shire Council Recommended model

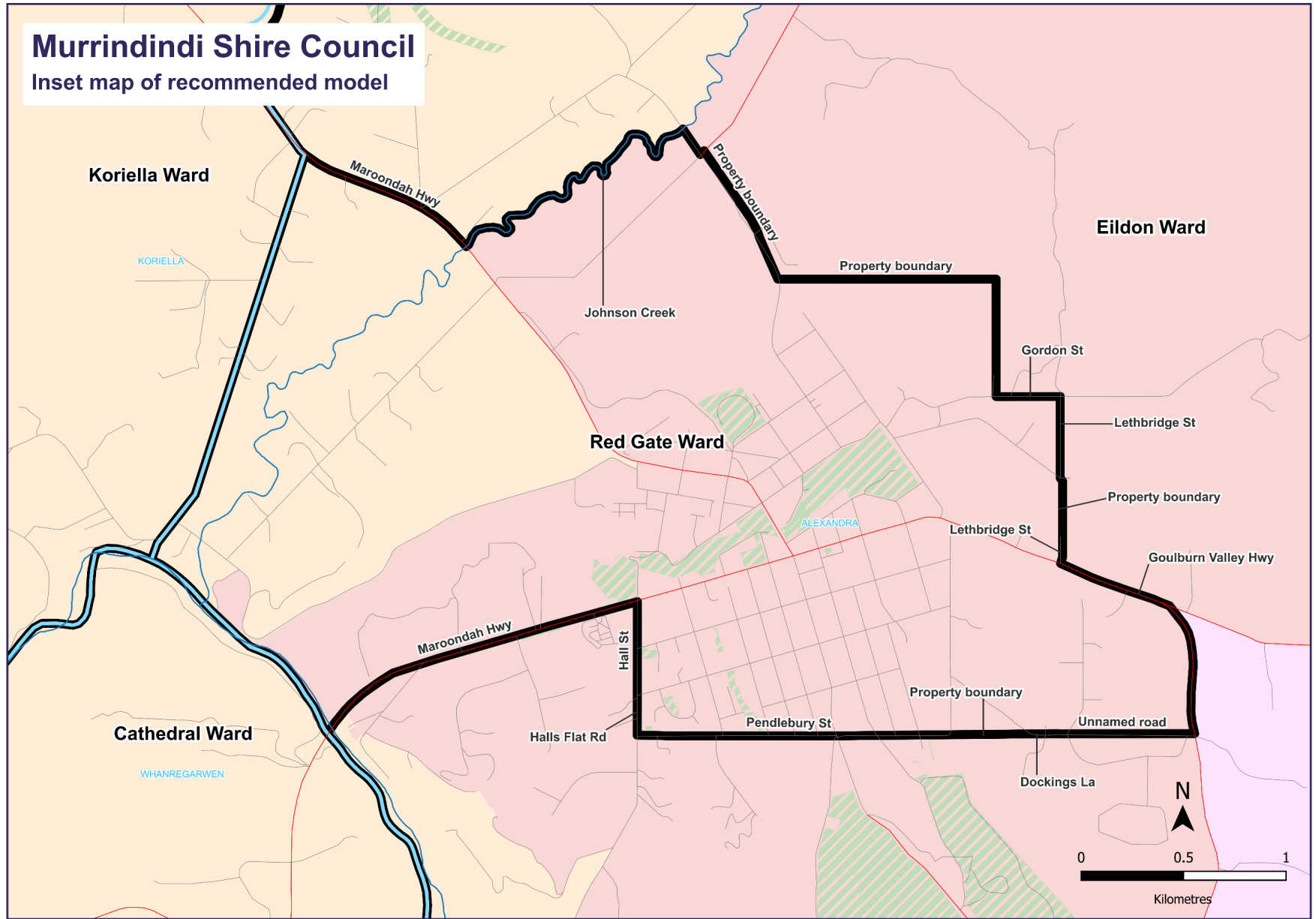


| Ward        | Councillors | Electors* | Deviation† | Area sq km |
|-------------|-------------|-----------|------------|------------|
| Cathedral   | 1           | 2,048     | +3.06%     | 1,314.9    |
| Cheviot     | 1           | 1,953     | -1.72%     | 333.7      |
| Eildon      | 1           | 2,218     | +11.62%    | 572.3      |
| Kinglake    | 1           | 1,913     | -3.73%     | 224.7      |
| King Parrot | 1           | 1,954     | -1.67%     | 139.3      |
| Koriella    | 1           | 1,996     | +0.45%     | 1,283.4    |
| Red Gate    | 1           | 1,828     | -8.01%     | 9.7        |
| Total       | 7           | 13,910    | -          | 3,878.0    |
| Average     |             | 1,988     | -          | 554.0      |

\*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.





## Data for recommended model

| Ward           | Electors*     | Deviation† | Area#<br>(square km) |
|----------------|---------------|------------|----------------------|
| Cathedral      | 2,048         | +3.06%     | 1,314.9              |
| Cheviot        | 1,953         | -1.72%     | 333.5                |
| Eildon         | 2,218         | +11.62%    | 572.4                |
| King Parrot    | 1,954         | -1.67%     | 139.3                |
| Kinglake       | 1,913         | -3.73%     | 224.6                |
| Koriella       | 1,996         | +0.45%     | 1,283.7              |
| Red Gate       | 1,828         | -8.01%     | 9.7                  |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>13,910</b> | <b>n/a</b> | <b>3,878.1</b>       |
| <b>Average</b> | <b>1,988</b>  | <b>n/a</b> | <b>555.0</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**

The VEC 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:

Evans, Melinda (2 submissions)

Evans, Richard

Gallagher, Damien (Councillor, Murrindindi Shire Council)

Koster, William

Legge, Nick

Murrindindi Shire Council

Rebecchi, John and Eunice

### **Public hearing**

The following people spoke at the public hearing:

Chesworth, Michael (on behalf of Murrindindi Shire Council)

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