

Local council electoral structure review

Final Report

Campaspe Shire Council

May 2023

Revised July 2023

Acknowledgement of Country

The electoral representation advisory panel acknowledges the Dja Dja Wurrung, Taungurung, and Yorta Yorta 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 panel acknowledges their custodianship for many thousands of years and their continuing living culture.

Document history and version control

Version	Date approved	Submission approved by	Brief description
1	12 May 2023	Acting Deputy Electoral Commissioner	Final version
2	21 July 2023	Program Sponsor	Revised version with inclusion of good governance wording

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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 Campaspe Shire Council.

The purpose of the review is to advise the Minister on the appropriate number of councillors and electoral structure for the council.

The panel looked at:

- whether the council had an appropriate number of councillors
- whether it should be unsubdivided or subdivided
- appropriate ward names.

This report presents the panel's final advice to the Minister on the recommended new electoral structure of Campaspe Shire Council to meet the requirements of Victoria's *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act).

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

Recommendation

The electoral representation advisory panel recommends that Campaspe Shire Council adopt an unsubdivided electoral structure, represented by 9 councillors.

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.

Please see [Appendix 1](#) for a detailed map of this recommended electoral structure.

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 submissions

The panel received 10 preliminary submissions. Of these, one submission included a map.

A summary of the preliminary submissions is contained in the preliminary report, available on the VEC website at vec.vic.gov.au

Preliminary report

The panel published a preliminary report on Wednesday 22 March 2023 with the following electoral structure models for public consultation:

- Model 1: an unsubdivided electoral structure with 9 councillors.
- Model 2: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 9 councillors, 3 wards and 3 councillors per ward.
- Model 3: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 9 councillors, 3 wards and 3 councillors per ward.

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

Response submissions

The panel received 2 submissions responding to the preliminary report. Of these, no submissions included maps.

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

Public hearing

The panel held an online public hearing for those wishing to speak about their response submission at 10 am on Tuesday 18 April 2023. One person spoke at the hearing.

Background

About the 2023–24 electoral structure reviews

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

The Act introduced several changes to local government representation, including the types of electoral structures local councils may have. Large and small rural shire councils (including Campaspe Shire Council) can have one of 3 electoral structures:

- unsubdivided (entire council area with no wards)
- single-councillor wards
- multi-councillor wards with the same number of councillors per ward.

For Campaspe Shire Council, the electoral representation advisory panel examined:

- the number of councillors
- whether the council should be subdivided into wards or unsubdivided.

For subdivided structures, it also examined:

- the number of wards
- where the ward boundaries should be
- the names of each ward
- how many councillors should be elected for each ward.

The Act requires electoral structures to provide fair and equitable representation and facilitate good governance. For subdivided structures, 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 Campaspe Shire Council had 3 members:

- The Honourable Frank Vincent AO KC (Chairperson)
- Ms Liz Williams PSM
- Electoral Commissioner Mr Warwick Gately AM (January to March 2023)

Upon Warwick Gately's retirement as Victoria's Electoral Commissioner, the following representatives of the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) were nominated as panel members:

- Director, Electoral Integrity and Regulation Mr Keegan Bartlett (April 2023)

- Acting Deputy Electoral Commissioner Ms Máiréad Doyle (May 2023).

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

To inform the public about the Campaspe Shire Council electoral structure review, the VEC supported a public information and awareness program, which included:

- printing public notices in state-wide newspapers
- holding public information sessions to outline the review process and respond to questions from the community
- sending out media releases announcing the start of the review and the release of the preliminary and final reports
- publishing information on social media channels
- regularly updating the VEC website content on vec.vic.gov.au, with:
 - current information on the review process
 - submission guides and fact sheets for each council under review with background information
 - preliminary and response submissions from the public.

Public consultation

The panel encouraged public input to the review of Campaspe Shire Council via:

- preliminary submissions at the start of the review
- 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 Campaspe Shire 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 rural shire 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
- whether a particular type of electoral structure requiring a certain number of councillors would best suit the council (see 'Deciding the electoral structure' below)
- any matter raised in public submissions not already listed above.

Generally, local councils with a larger number of voters will have a higher number of councillors. Large populations are often more likely to 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 particular circumstances of a 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

The electoral structure of large and small rural shire councils can be:

- unsubdivided (entire council area with no wards)
 - made up of single-councillor wards
- or
- made up of multi-councillor wards with the same number of councillors per ward.

When developing electoral structure models for Campaspe Shire 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 can be established and whether these would be easily identifiable to local communities
- 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 any 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 government 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 always possible to create a subdivided structure that complies with section 15(2) based on voter numbers that were current at the time of the review as well as 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. Voters' rolls are a combination of state electors (making up the majority of a voters' roll) and a smaller number of ratepayer-based voting entitlements. The Act introduced changes to ratepayer-based entitlement categories, which come into full effect at the 2024 local government elections. As this will change the makeup of voters' rolls, and therefore compliance with section 15(2) of the Act, this is a consideration of the panel during this review.

Deciding on ward names

The panel has taken the following approach to naming wards.

1. Existing ward names were retained where possible and appropriate (if the name was still relevant to the area covered by a ward).
2. Where a new name was required, the panel based this on features such as:
 - places (registered under the *Geographic Place Names Act 1998*) located 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 be named using Aboriginal language. Meaningful consultation is a significant and important process which the panel is not able to undertake within the timeframes of the current review program.

At the same time, 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 in some cases put forward new ward names using Aboriginal language, but only where this is the name of a place within a ward, it is currently in common use, and this name is registered under the *Geographic Place Names Act 1998* (Vic). This is a practical solution to the reality that many of Victoria's geographic features are named using Aboriginal language.

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, an appropriate consultation process should be followed before doing so.

About Campaspe Shire Council

Profile

Campaspe Shire Council is a large rural council located in north-central Victoria, about 180 km north of Melbourne. Covering an area of 4,519 km², the shire is mainly located in the riverine plains of northern Victoria and sits within the Murray-Darling Basin. The nationally important Murray River and the Goulburn River form the northern border, and Campaspe Shire is surrounded by 6 other Victorian councils, Gannawarra, Loddon, Bendigo, Strathbogie, Greater Shepparton, and Moira.

The Traditional Custodians of Campaspe are the Taungurung, Dja Dja Wurrung, and Yorta Yorta peoples.

Landscape

The shire is named after the Campaspe River, which runs in a north-south direction. The Campaspe River forms the south-west boundary and then passes through the centre of the shire and through the towns of Rochester and Echuca. The shire's identity is tied to water, through rivers, irrigation communities and the Port of Echuca's historic linkages.

The Gunbower Forest, which includes Ramsar wetlands of international importance (DEPI, 2013), is in the northwest corner of the shire, and in the southeast is the Rushworth State Forest. Kow Swamp, in the northwest, is a site of international importance due to the presence of an ancient burial site, showing signs of human habitation from between 9,500 to 14,000 years ago (Dorey, 2021).

At the 2021 Census, Campaspe Shire had a population of 38,735 people, with about two-thirds of people residing in the major townships and the remaining third living in rural areas. The shire has 5 main service centres: Echuca, Kyabram, Rochester, Tongala, and Rushworth, plus many smaller towns. Echuca is the largest with a population of 13,764 people at the 2021 Census. The next largest town is Kyabram (with a population of 6,010) followed by Rochester (2,802), Tongala (1,331), Rushworth (972), Stanhope (486), Lockington (395) and Gunbower (303) (ABS, 2021).

The main transport linkages in the shire include the Northern, Midland and Murray Valley highways. Echuca is serviced by 2 active railway lines, one which runs to Shepparton and one which runs to Bendigo. Echuca also has a small airport.

Community

The shire is forecast to have moderate levels of growth between 2023 and 2036, with an annual average growth rate of 0.5%. The majority of this growth is expected to occur around Echuca, particularly on the west boundary of Echuca which will increase from 6,441 to 8,747. Kyabram East (from 3,554 to 4,220) and Kyabram West (from 4,235 to nearly 5,000) are also forecast to

have small population increases between 2023 and 2036. The regional areas of the shire are not forecast to have any significant population changes.

Primary production accounts for 91% of land use (DJSIR, 2022). The shire has high quality irrigated agricultural land in its northeast, supporting dairy production and orcharding. Dryland and extensive agricultural practices tend to be favoured in the west and south of the shire (Agriculture Victoria, 2023).

The 2021 Census reported 18,010 residents in the labour force, with 9,840 working full-time and 6,083 working part-time. A total of 1,446 residents reported as being away from work, while 639 reported as being unemployed, which at 3.5% is lower than for regional Victoria (4.1%) (ABS, 2021).

In Campaspe, dairy farming (921 people) is the main industry of employment, followed by hospitals (904), aged care residential services (547), other social assistance services (519) and supermarket and grocery stores (497). Residents living in Campaspe Shire are mainly employed as managers (2,898), technicians and trades workers (2,592), labourers (2,489), professionals (2,482), and community and personal service workers (2,125) (ABS, 2021).

Campaspe has a greater percentage of residents in all age brackets over 50 years, when compared to the Victorian population (ABS, 2021). In terms of ancestry, residents identify as being Australian (43.6%), English (42%), Irish (12.0%), Scottish (10.8%), and German (4.0%). Residents were predominantly born in Australia (84.8%), with smaller numbers of people born in England (1.7%), New Zealand (1.0%), Philippines (0.8%), Italy (0.4%), and India (0.3%) (ABS, 2021). There were 1,169 people who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples in the 2021 Census. At 3% of the population, this is higher than for Victoria (1%) and is close to the Australian percentage (3.2%) (ABS, 2021).

English was the only language used at home for 89.2% of residents, compared to the Victorian average of 67.2%. Households where a non-English language is present, at 5.4%, is far lower than that for Victorian households (30.2%). The median personal weekly income for Campaspe was \$668 (compared to \$803 for Victoria), the median family weekly income was \$1,630 (compared to \$2,136 for Victoria), and the median household weekly income was \$1,264 (compared to \$1,759 for Victoria) (ABS, 2021).

Residents are more likely to own houses outright (41.7%) when compared with the Victorian percentage (32.2%). A smaller number of residents own their home with a mortgage (31.6%), and residents who rent account for 22% of tenure type (ABS, 2021).

Current number of councillors and electoral structure

Campaspe Shire Council is currently divided into 5 wards with a total of 9 councillors:

- 2 wards with 3 councillors each
- 3 wards with one councillor each.

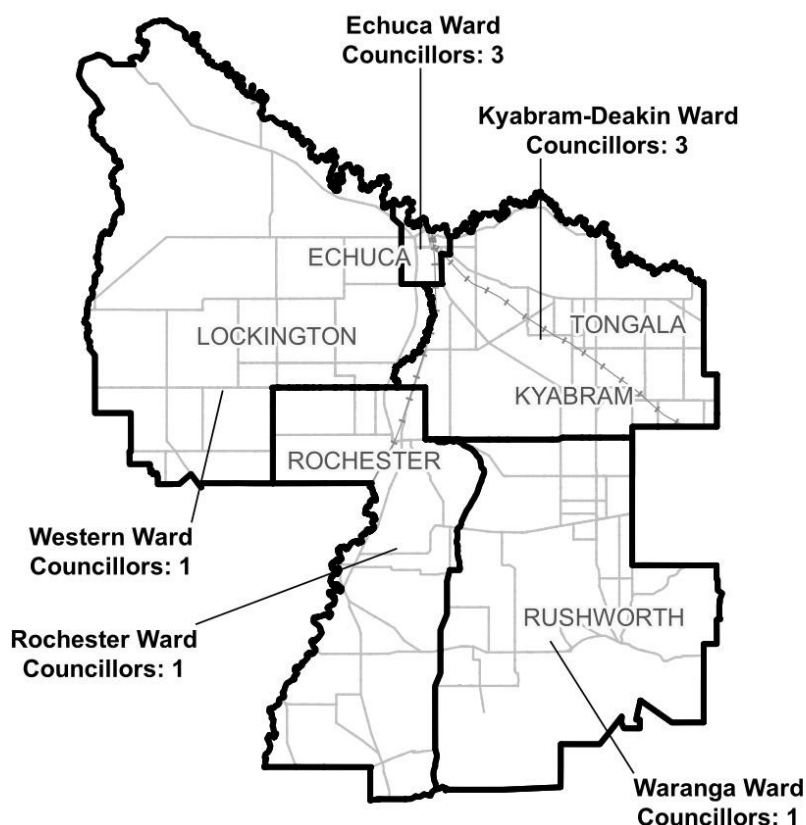


Figure 1: Diagram of current electoral structure of Campaspe Shire Council.

There are approximately 31,046 voters in Campaspe Shire Council, with a ratio of 3,450 voters per councillor.

Visit the VEC website at vec.vic.gov.au for more information on Campaspe Shire Council.

Last electoral structure review

The VEC conducted an electoral representation review of Campaspe Shire Council in 2019. This representation review was carried out under the *Local Government Act 1989*, which was replaced by the *Local Government Act 2020*.

After conducting the review, the VEC recommended that Campaspe Shire Council continue to consist of 9 councillors elected from 5 wards.

Visit the VEC website at vec.vic.gov.au to access a copy of the 2019 representation review final report.

Before the 2019 review, the VEC held a representation review of Campaspe Shire Council in 2007. This resulted in the current electoral structure being implemented. Before the 2007 representation review, Campaspe Shire Council comprised of 6 wards with a total of 7 councillors (one ward with 2 councillors and 5 wards with one councillor each).

Preliminary submissions

At the close of submissions on Wednesday 22 February 2023, the panel had received 10 submissions for the electoral structure review of Campaspe Shire Council. You can find a list of people who made a preliminary submission in [Appendix 2](#).

The panel received submissions from a range of stakeholders including individuals and community organisations. Submissions were published on the VEC website.

A summary of the preliminary submissions is contained in the preliminary report, available on the VEC website at vec.vic.gov.au

Preliminary report

A preliminary report was released on Wednesday 22 March 2023. The panel considered public submissions and research findings 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: an unsubdivided electoral structure with 9 councillors.
- Model 2: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 9 councillors, 3 wards and 3 councillors per ward.
- Model 3: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 9 councillors, 3 wards and 3 councillors per ward.

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

Response submissions

The panel received 2 response submissions to the preliminary report from the public by the deadline of 5 pm on Wednesday 12 April 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 (unsubdivided, 9 councillors)	Model 2* (3 wards with 3 councillors per ward)	Model 3 (3 wards with 3 councillors per ward)
2	1	0

*One submitter supported Model 2 as a second preference.

Both submissions supported Model 1, an unsubdivided electoral structure. Submitters put forward 2 key arguments in favour of an unsubdivided model – one about the local implications of the structure, and one based on the shire-wide democratic benefits of the structure.

Unsubdivided structure

Model 1

Tony Murphy supported an unsubdivided structure based on the experience of living in Nanneella in the Kyabram-Deakin Ward, but having a strong connection to Rochester, which was the closest town by distance but was in a different ward. Murphy argued that an unsubdivided structure would ensure the community was not separated by ward boundaries.

Zoe Cook supported an unsubdivided structure as the most fair and democratic of the models. Cook felt the model would benefit the entire shire, as all residents would have the broadest pool of candidates to choose from and, therefore, a range of ideas and policies to align themselves with.

Cook also suggested that the limited number of candidates and history of uncontested elections in the shire was due to its small population. Dividing the shire into wards would lead to a smaller pool of candidates for voters in each ward to choose from and limit voter choice and representation, Cook argued. Cook felt an unsubdivided electoral structure would improve choice and provide a more diverse range of candidates.

Subdivided structures

Model 2

No response submissions supported Model 2. However, Zoe Cook supported it as a second preference. Cook suggested the community – particularly those living outside Echuca – were concerned the council would be dominated by Echuca residents and saw this as a reason to

maintain ward boundaries. However, Cook suggested Model 2 could encourage political apathy because residents might not worry about candidates' policies, as long as they had 3 candidates from their ward.

Model 3

No response submissions supported Model 3.

Public hearing

The panel held an online public hearing for those wishing to speak about their response submission at 10 am on Tuesday 18 April 2023. One person, Tony Murphy, spoke at the hearing.

Murphy argued that, under an unsubdivided electoral structure, councillors would have to operate in and connect with the whole shire – not just parts of it. Murphy reiterated the point in his written submission about living and running a business in Kyabram-Deakin Ward but having a closer connection to the town of Rochester, in the adjacent ward.

Murphy suggested there were practical consequences of these ward boundaries, using the 2022 floods as an example. Murphy felt that some information about the flood and recovery was delivered to residents in specific wards only. He felt he may have missed out on vital information about his situation because of arbitrary ward boundaries, and that an unsubdivided structure would help ensure the whole shire received the same messaging during emergency events.

Murphy believed that an unsubdivided structure for Campaspe Shire would remove any 'us and them' scenarios and put everyone 'on the same playing field'.

Findings and recommendation

Number of councillors

After considering the requirements of the Act, public submissions and the agreed criteria, the panel found 9 councillors to be an appropriate number for Campaspe Shire Council and consequently facilitate good governance.

The panel considered the characteristics of Campaspe Shire Council in relation to similar rural shire councils, including its size and geography, population and the number and distribution of voters across the shire.

Campaspe Shire Council had 31,046 voters in 2021, represented by 9 councillors and covers an area of about 4,500 km². Other rural shires with a similar number of voters generally also have 9 councillors.

Electoral structure

After considering the requirements of the Act, public submissions and the agreed criteria, the panel found Model 1 to be the best model for promoting fair and equitable representation for voters in Campaspe Shire Council and consequently facilitate good governance.

Model 1 removes any need to divide the shire along potentially arbitrary ward boundaries, which the panel considered a major drawback of models 2 and 3.

Although Model 2 was closest to the current ward structure, it required Echuca residents to be divided across 3 wards and combined with the 2 large, sparsely populated rural wards. Model 3 was seen as more equitable in terms of ward size and, therefore, councillor workloads, but it also divided Echuca and combined it with large rural areas. The big wards in models 2 and 3 risked a 'rural versus town' mindset, which the panel wished to avoid. The panel also acknowledged that some boundaries were arbitrary and could negatively impact residents in their vicinity. The panel preferred Model 1 because it did not risk dividing communities.

The panel also considered the shire's history of uncontested elections and low candidate numbers for single-councillor wards under the current structure. Model 1 would remove the risk of uncontested elections, provide a greater selection of candidates for voters, and could also encourage a more diverse council that better represented the community.

The panel also noted that an unsubdivided structure would have the greatest longevity of the models put forward in the preliminary report. While the ward deviations for both models 2 and 3 were forecast to remain within +/-10% beyond 2028, the panel recognised that removing the need for possible ward boundary changes in the future was another benefit of Model 1.

Finally, while the panel noted that there had been limited public feedback on the preliminary models, it felt the arguments in support of Model 1 in response submissions were sound.

There are valid arguments for and against the unsubdivided and subdivided electoral structures examined in this review. While it is not possible for an electoral structure to address all the issues in the shire, the panel considers Model 1 the best model for promoting fair and equitable

representation for voters in Campaspe Shire Council and consequently facilitate good governance under the requirements of the Act.

The panel's recommendation

The electoral representation advisory panel recommends that Campaspe Shire Council adopt an unsubdivided electoral structure, represented by 9 councillors.

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 *Local Government Act 2020* (Vic). This electoral structure was designated as Model 1 in the preliminary report.

Please see [Appendix 1](#) for a detailed map of this recommended electoral structure.

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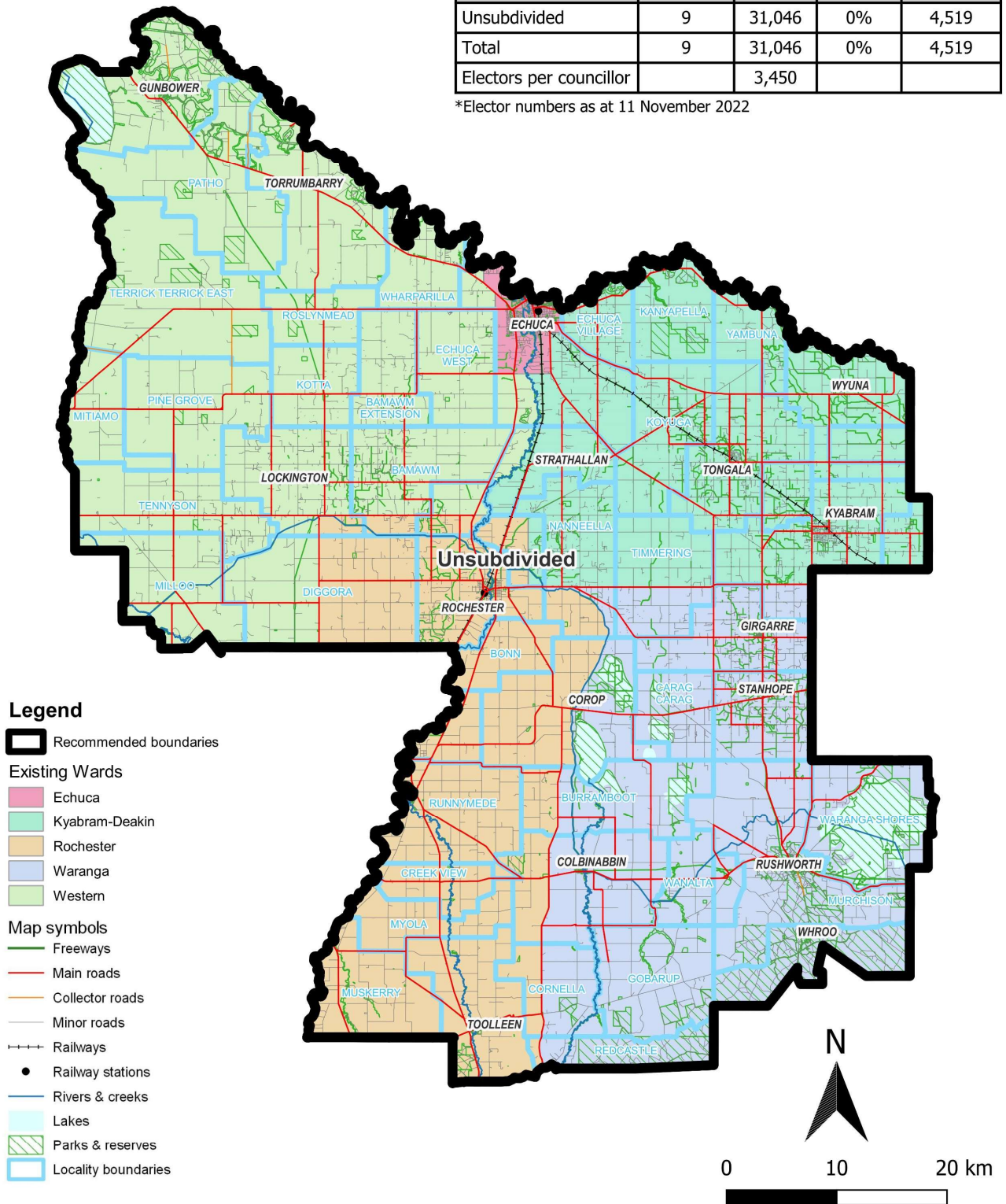
Appendix 1: Map of recommended structure

Campaspe Shire Council

Nine councillors, unsubdivided

Ward	Councillors	Electors*	Deviation	Area sq km
Unsubdivided	9	31,046	0%	4,519
Total	9	31,046	0%	4,519
Electors per councillor		3,450		

*Elector numbers as at 11 November 2022



Map prepared by:



Data use:



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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.

Preliminary submissions

Preliminary submissions were made by:

Brown, Sandra

Kyabram Deakin Ratepayers Residents and Development Group Inc.

Maddock, Glenn

McKenzie, Don

Nichol, Glenda

Norris, Jack

O'Connor, Leo

Salter, Joy

Stanhope and District Development Committee Inc.

Weeks, Alan

Response submissions

Response submissions were made by:

Cook, Zoe

Murphy, Tony

Public hearing

The following person spoke at the public hearing:

Murphy, Tony

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