

Local council electoral structure review

Final Report

Greater Shepparton City Council

September 2023

Acknowledgement of Country

The electoral representation advisory panel acknowledges the 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.

Report approval

Version	Date approved	Approved by
1	23 August 2023	The Honourable Frank Vincent AO KC
1	21 August 2023	Ms Máiréad Doyle

Version approval:

Version	Date approved	Approved by	Brief description
1	25 August 2023	Program Sponsor	Final proofread and confirmed to be sent

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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 Shepparton 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 Shepparton 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 Shepparton 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 Shepparton City Council adopt a 9 single-councillor ward structure – 9 wards with one councillor per ward.

The recommended names for the 9 wards in this electoral structure are: Balaclava Ward, Goulburn River Ward, Kialla Ward, Lower Goulburn Ward, McEwen Ward, Midland Ward, Pine Lodge Ward, Poplar Ward, Yanha Gurtji 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 9 councillors – 9 wards with one councillor per ward.
- Model 2: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 9 councillors – 9 wards with one councillor per ward, and different boundaries to Model 1.

The full preliminary report is available on the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) website at vec.vic.gov.au

Response submissions

The panel received 5 submissions responding to the preliminary report. Of these, one submission included a map.

A full analysis of response submissions received can be found on [page 14](#).

Public hearing

An online public hearing for those wishing to speak about their response submission was scheduled for 2 pm on Tuesday 1 August 2023. As no submitters asked to speak, the hearing did not go ahead.

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 Shepparton City Council) must now have single-councillor ward electoral structures.

For Greater Shepparton 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 Shepparton City Council had 3 members:

- The Honourable Frank Vincent AO KC (Chairperson)
- Ms Liz Williams PSM
- Acting Deputy Electoral Commissioner Ms Máiréad Doyle.

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 Shepparton 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, 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 Shepparton City Council was also offered but did not take up 2 optional 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 Shepparton 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 Shepparton 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 Shepparton 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 Shepparton City Council

Profile

Greater Shepparton City Council is in north-eastern Victoria and covers an area of 2,422 km². It is bounded by Campaspe Shire in the west, Moira Shire in the north, Benalla Rural City in the east, and Strathbogie Shire in the south. The Traditional Custodians of the Shepparton area are the Yorta Yorta peoples.

Landscape

The city of Shepparton is the main and central focus of the council area. With a population of 49,862 (including Mooroopna on the fringe to the west and Kialla to the south) it is home to 72.8% of the residents and is the commercial and administrative hub in the region (ABS 2022a). Tatura in the west is the second biggest locality, with a population of 4,955 (ABS 2022b). Other smaller localities surrounding Shepparton include Dookie, Katandra West, Tallygaroopna, Merrigum, Toolamba, Murchison, Kialla West and Shepparton East.

The major geographic feature of the council is the Goulburn River, which runs north to south, with Broken River and Seven Creeks meeting it just south of Shepparton. The council area is serviced by the Goulburn Valley Highway, which runs north to south, and the Midland Highway which runs east to west.

Community

At the 2021 census, Greater Shepparton's population was 68,409 (ABS 2022c), a significant increase from 63,837 in 2016 and 60,449 in 2011 (ABS 2011, 2016). From 2022 to 2028, this is projected to increase to 73,074. The median age of residents is 39, lower than the median of 43 found in regional Victoria but greater than the state median of 38 (ABS 2022b, 2022d, 2022e).

Of the population, 75% were born in Australia and 74.7% speak only English at home, lower than the respective rates of 81% and 86.4% for regional Victoria (ABS 2022c, 2022d). The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at the 2021 census was 2,686 or 3.9% of the population, nearly double the regional Victoria figure of 2% (ABS 2022c, 2022d).

The major industries in Greater Shepparton are manufacturing, construction, and agriculture, which combined account for over 50% of economic output in the council area (.id 2023a). In 2021-2022, Greater Shepparton's gross regional product was \$4.14 billion (.id 2023b).

Home ownership is common in Greater Shepparton, with 34.3% owning their property outright, and a further 33.3% owning with a mortgage. This contrasts to the regional Victoria average rates of 39.3% outright ownership, and 33.2% owned with a mortgage, with more people renting in Greater Shepparton (27.8%) than in regional Victoria (23.6%) (ABS 2022c, 2022d).

The weekly median income of Greater Shepparton is \$1,400, slightly higher than the weekly median of \$1,386 for regional Victoria (ABS 2022c, 2022d).

Current number of councillors and electoral structure

Greater Shepparton City Council is currently unsubdivided with a total of 9 councillors:

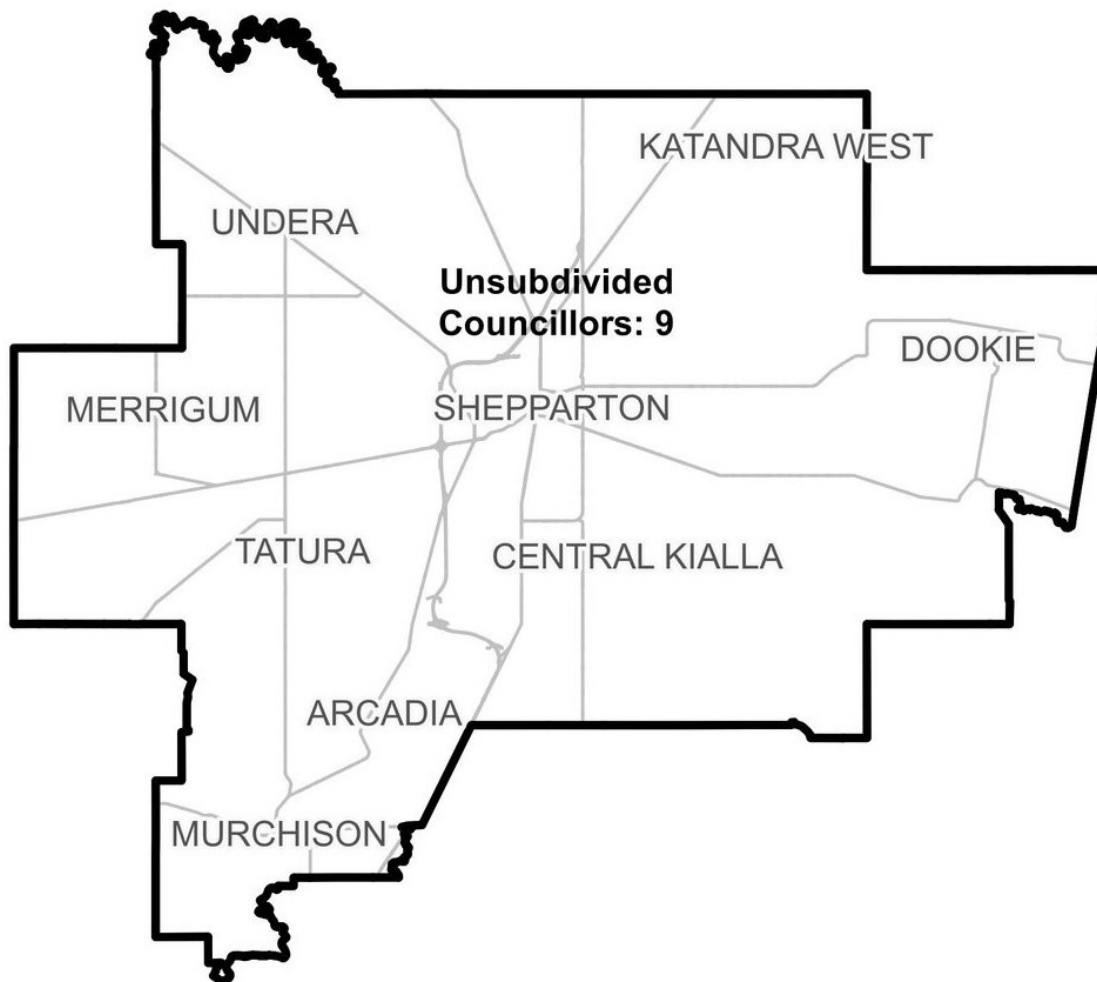


Figure 1: Diagram of current electoral structure of Greater Shepparton City Council.

There are approximately 46,959 voters in Greater Shepparton City Council, with an approximate ratio of 5,217 voters per councillor.

Visit the VEC website at vec.vic.gov.au for more information on Greater Shepparton City Council.

Last electoral structure review

The VEC conducted an electoral representation review of Greater Shepparton City Council in 2015. 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 Shepparton City Council continue to be unsubdivided, but to increase the councillor numbers to 9.

Visit the VEC website at vec.vic.gov.au to access a copy of the 2015 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 9 councillors – 9 wards with one councillor per ward.
- Model 2: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 9 councillors – 9 wards with one councillor per ward, with different boundaries to Model 1.

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

Response submissions

The panel received 5 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 (9 single-councillor wards)	Model 2 (9 single-councillor wards)	Unsubdivided/out of scope
1*	1	3

*With minor changes to ward boundaries

Most submitters wanted the council to remain unsubdivided, 3 of whom did not preference any of the proposed models. Greater Shepparton City Council's submission was particularly critical of the need to change, stating the adoption of single-councillor wards would have an adverse effect on what they considered a high-performing and culturally diverse council. Nonetheless, one submission supported Model 1 and another supported Model 2.

Model 1

The one submitter in support of Model 1 disapproved of the decision to adopt single-councillor wards, but felt it provided the most sensible ward boundaries. A minor change east of Shepparton city was proposed and mapped so that Orrvale would be transferred into the Pine Lodge Ward on the grounds this would make Poplar Ward an entirely urban ward

Model 2

One submitter was in favour of changing to a single-councillor ward structure supported Model 2. They argued that creating fairer distribution of the city and rural areas would result in a fairer distribution of council funds.

Other options

The council's submission did not support any of the proposed models. It suggested the ward names were not meaningful to the area and that the ward boundaries appeared illogical and unbalanced. It also argued against dividing the community of Mooroopna on the western side of Shepparton city, which was proposed in both models.

Public hearing

An online public hearing for those wishing to speak about their response submission was scheduled for 2 pm on 1 August 2023. As no submitters asked to speak, the hearing did not go ahead.

Findings and recommendation

The panel noted that several submitters criticised the review process, including the need to adhere to the legislated equality requirement and the state-wide approach to determining the appropriate number of councillors for a local council.

As outlined in the submission guide for this review, the panel is committed to the principle of 'one vote, one value', which is a requirement for subdivided electoral structures under the Act. This is to ensure that every person's vote counts equally. 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 the legislated requirement for Greater Shepparton City Council to adopt a single-councillor ward structure. While the panel understands the concerns of these submitters, the panel cannot make exceptions to legislated requirements.

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 Greater Shepparton City Council.

The panel considered the characteristics of the 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.

Greater Shepparton City Council currently has 46,959 voters represented by 9 councillors and covers an area of 2,422 km². Other regional city councils with a similar number of voters usually also have 9 councillors, such as Latrobe City and Mildura Rural City councils. Greater Shepparton City Council increased from 7 councillors at the last review in 2015, due in part to a growing population which placed it in line with comparable 9 councillor councils. As this council is now at the lower end of councils with 9 councillors and is expecting a relatively steady rate of growth over the next decade, the panel considers it appropriate for the total number of councillors to remain unchanged.

Electoral structure

After considering the requirements of the Act, public submissions and the agreed criteria, the panel found Model 1 with modifications (the recommended model) to be the single-councillor ward model with the best potential to promote fair and equitable representation for voters in Greater Shepparton City Council and consequently facilitate good governance.

The recommended model divides the city of Shepparton into 5 wards: McEwen and Balaclava wards capture the northern suburbs of Shepparton, Poplar captures the east, Kialla captures the south, and Yanha Gurtji captures the city centre.

The remaining 4 wards attempt to keep rural communities together in each ward as much as possible. The panel considers this was achieved in the west, with the communities of Tatura and Merrigum and surrounding agricultural land being captured in Midland Ward. Similarly, Pine Lodge Ward in the north-east of the council area includes the towns of Congupna, Tallygaroopna, Katandra West, and Dookie, and uses the strong boundaries of the Goulburn and Broken Rivers. However, to include enough voters in the ward to satisfy the +/-10% requirement, it captures areas on the outskirts of Shepparton North.

The locality of Mooroopna remains divided across 2 wards, using the Midland Highway as a logical and recognisable boundary. Goulburn River Ward takes in the area of Mooroopna south of the Midland Highway, extending into the southern rural areas of the council area including the towns of Murchison and Toolamba. Lower Goulburn Ward takes in the area of Mooroopna north of the Midland Highway and includes the council's northern rural area between the Goulburn River and Echuca and Minchin Roads.

The panel acknowledges the drawbacks of this division, as raised by the council in its submission. Alternative options to contain Mooroopna in one ward in a structure of 9 councillors were explored. However, given the number of voters in Mooroopna, the only workable solution involved dividing the town of Tatura across multiple wards. Moreover, modelling showed that to fulfil the +/-10% requirement Tatura needed to be divided with one quarter of the town in one ward, and three-quarters in another. This was considered an unacceptable outcome for the town, which the panel believed required discrete representation as provided in the recommended model. As such, the panel considered the split of Mooroopna across the Midland Highway to be an acceptable compromise, especially given the large numbers of Mooroopna residents found in both wards and the connections the town has with surrounding rural areas, which are evidently strongest to the south.

The panel considered public feedback on the wards proposed to capture the Shepparton suburban areas and city centre and felt that some of these did not fit community expectations. In particular, the proposed Poplar Ward in Model 1 extended out to capture the peri-urban locality of Orrvale, which it was argued had little in common with suburban Shepparton. In response to this feedback, the panel decided to revise Poplar Ward to make it mostly urban-focused. The revised ward's eastern edge is along Doyles Road. It connects with the eastern edge of the Balaclava Ward, making a straight line down Doyles Road from Ford Road in the north to River Road in the south.

As a trade-off, the western boundaries of the revised Poplar Ward needed to be modified to adhere to the +/-10% requirement. The western boundary now runs south down Archer Street, before heading west on St Andrews Road, south on St Georges Road, east on Wilmot Road, and then south back on to Archer Street. On balance, the panel considered that this change would create stronger ward boundaries by using a recognisable road in the east that would cater better for communities of interest in this area of suburban Shepparton.

Ultimately, the panel considered the benefits of the recommended model to be:

- the use of strong, recognisable road and geographic features as boundaries
- creating wards to have either a suburban or rural focus to reflect the council's communities of interest (and the boundaries proposed for dividing the city of Shepparton likewise provided 5 roughly equal wards using strong features as boundaries)
- it is the most stable model when considering the +/-10% requirement rule.

While it is difficult to predict the number of candidates likely to stand at future elections, especially in councils changing from an unsubdivided electoral structure to one consisting of single-councillor wards, past election results provide some indication. The panel examined election results for Greater Shepparton City Council, including numbers of candidates nominating, incidences of uncontested elections and rates of informal voting, and found there to be relatively strong candidate numbers across the council area. The panel assumes this trend will continue under a structure of 7 single-councillor wards, minimising the risk of uncontested or failed elections.

The panel notes valid arguments for and against the different single-councillor ward structures examined in this review. However, the panel considers Model 1 with modifications to be the single-councillor ward model with the best potential to promote fair and equitable representation for voters in Greater Shepparton City Council and consequently facilitate good governance under the requirements of the Act.

Ward names

After considering public feedback, the panel decided to change Flinders Park Ward to McEwen Ward and Showgrounds Ward to Balaclava Ward.

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

- All ward names are new and are based on natural features, built features or localities found within each ward.

The panel's recommendation

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

The recommended names for the 9 wards in this electoral structure are: Balaclava Ward, Goulburn River Ward, Kialla Ward, Lower Goulburn Ward, McEwen Ward, Midland Ward, Pine Lodge Ward, Poplar Ward, Yanha Gurtji 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 was designated as Model 1 in the preliminary report.

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

References

.id (2023a) [Shepparton, Output by Industry](#), .id website, accessed 6 June 2023.

— (2023b) [Shepparton, Gross Regional Product](#), .id website, accessed 6 June 2023.

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) (2022a) [2021 Census All Person Quickstats, Shepparton-Mooroopna](#), ABS website, accessed 6 June 2023.

— (2022b) [2021 Census All Person Quickstats, Tatura](#), ABS website, accessed 6 June 2023.

— (2022c) [2021 Census All Person Quickstats, Greater Shepparton](#), ABS website, accessed 6 June 2023.

— (2022d) [2021 Census All Person Quickstats, Rest of Vic.](#), ABS website, accessed 6 June 2023.

— (2022e) [2021 Census All Person Quickstats, Victoria](#), ABS website, accessed 22 June 2023.

— (2016) [2016 Census All Person Quickstats, Greater Shepparton](#), ABS website, accessed 6 June 2023.

— (2011) [2011 Census All Person Quickstats, Greater Shepparton](#), ABS website, accessed 6 June 2023.

Geographic Place Names Act 1998 (Vic)

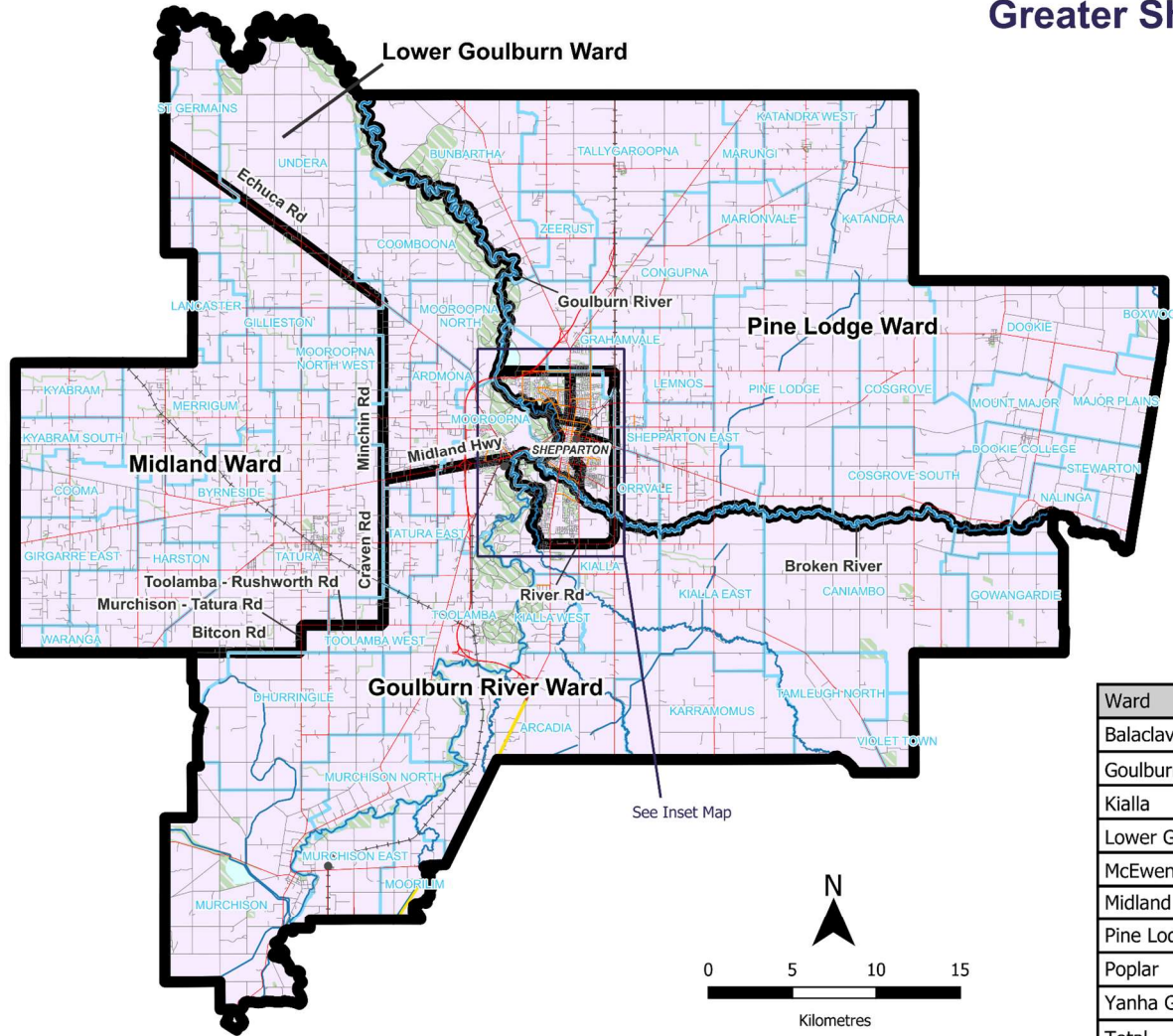
Local Government Act 1989 (Vic)

Local Government Act 2020 (Vic)

Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2020 (Vic)

Appendix 1: Map of recommended structure

Greater Shepparton City Council Map of recommended option 9 single-councillor wards



- Legend**
- Recommended boundaries
 - Existing ward(s)
 - Unsubdivided
 - Map symbols
 - Freeways
 - Main roads
 - Collector roads
 - Minor roads
 - Railways
 - Railway stations
 - Rivers & creeks
 - Lakes
 - Parks & reserves
 - Locality Boundaries

Ward	Electors*	Deviation	Area sq km
Balaclava	5,388	+3.26%	10
Goulburn River	4,976	-4.63%	818
Kialla	5,161	-1.09%	18
Lower Goulburn	5,248	+0.58%	259
McEwen	5,397	+3.44%	9
Midland	5,216	-0.03%	471
Pine Lodge	5,468	+4.8%	821
Poplar	5,026	-3.67%	8
Yanha Gurtji	5,079	-2.66%	6
Total	46,959		2,421
Average	5,218		269

*Electors numbers as at 30 March 2023

Data use:



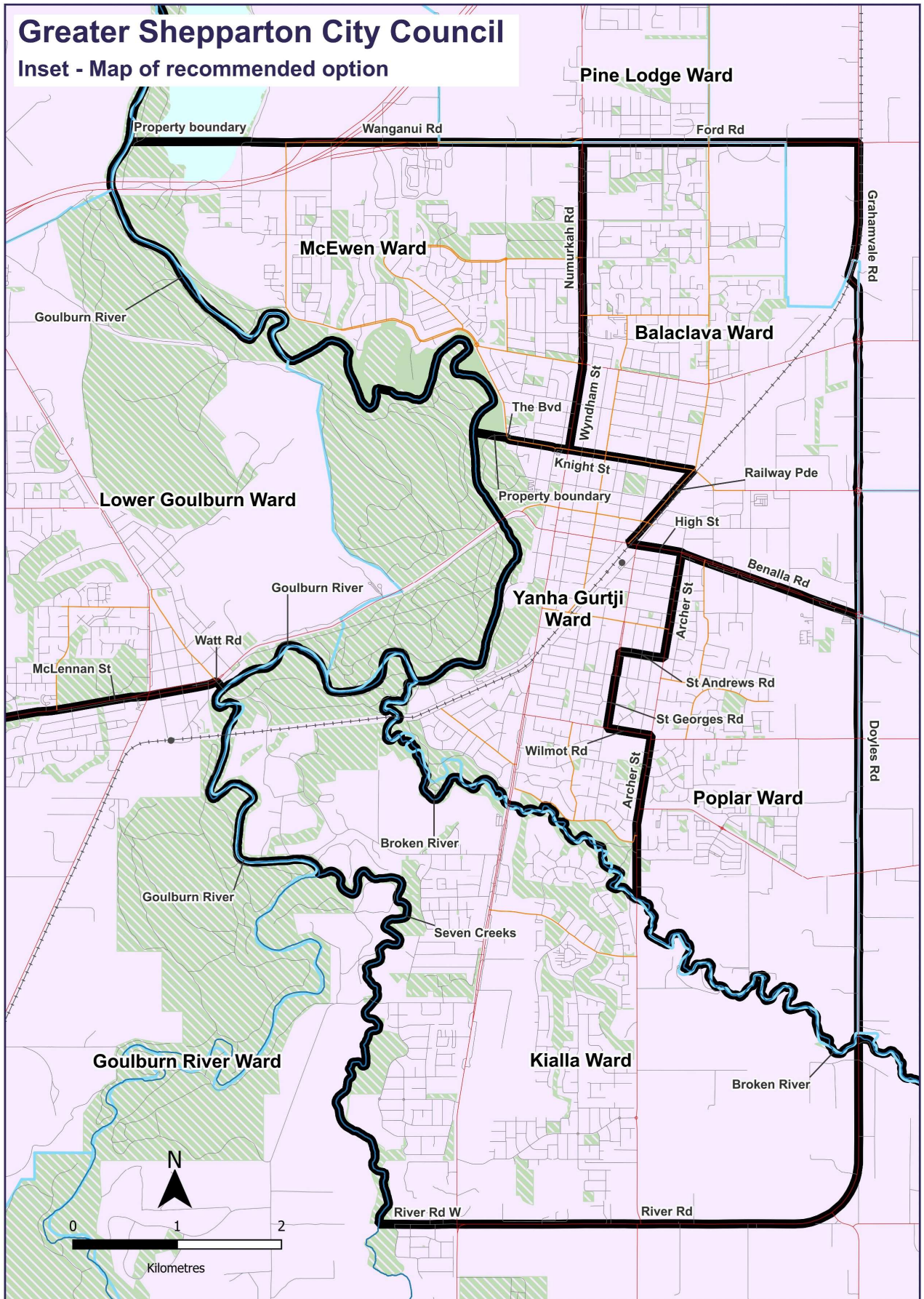
Layers for alignment:
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Ward	Electors*	Deviation	Area# (square km)
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Yanha Gurtji	5,079	-2.66%	6
Total	46,959	-	2,421
Average	5,218	-	269

*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:

Curtis, Michael

Duggan, Lachlan

Egglestone, Peter

Hazelman, Chris

Greater Shepparton City Council

Public hearing

No one choose to speak at the public hearing.

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