

Local council ward boundary review

# Final Report

Loddon Shire Council

April 2024



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(Victorian Electoral Commission)  
April 2024

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Level 11, 530 Collins Street  
Melbourne Victoria 3000  
T 131 832  
[info@vec.vic.gov.au](mailto:info@vec.vic.gov.au)  
[vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au)

## Content approval

Version	Date approved	Approved by
1	10 April 2024	VEC panel member
1	10 April 2024	Program sponsor

## Report Approval

Version	Date approved	Approved by	Brief description
1	15 April 2024	Electoral Commissioner	Final approval



### **Acknowledgement of Country**

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) acknowledges the Dja Dja Wurrung 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 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.

Loddon 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 Loddon 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 Loddon Shire Council:

- Inglewood Ward
- Tarnagulla 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 model was presented for community consideration:

- Preliminary model, which proposed changes to the boundaries of Inglewood and Tarnagulla wards.

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

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

### Response submissions

The VEC received 2 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

The VEC held an online public hearing for those wishing to speak about their response submission at 2 pm 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.

Loddon 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 Loddon 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.

Loddon 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 Loddon 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 Loddon Shire Council

## Profile

Loddon Shire Council is in north central Victoria, about 175 km from central Melbourne. Covering almost 6,700 km<sup>2</sup> it is one of Victoria's largest councils by area. With a population of 7,759 it is also one of Victoria's least populated council areas (ABS 2022c). Loddon Shire Council is surrounded by Gannawarra Shire Council to the north, Campaspe Shire Council and Greater Bendigo City Council to the east, Mount Alexander and Central Goldfields shire councils to the south, and to the west, Northern Grampians and Buloke shire councils.

The Traditional Custodians of most of the land in the Loddon Shire Council are the Dja Dja Wurrung People. The Yorta Yorta People are the Traditional Custodians of a small area in the northeast on the fringe of Kow Swamp. There are no formally recognised Traditional Custodians for a northern portion of the council (VAHC 2023).

## Landscape

The council is located to the north of the Great Dividing Range. It sits within the Murray-Darling Basin and includes a section of the Riverine Plain of northern Victoria (AV 2020). The Loddon River is a major watercourse flowing northward through the centre of the council area and to its east the Bullock Creek follows a similar course. The Waranga Western Channel, a major irrigation carrier channel, cuts through the council flowing east from Kamrooka North to its northwest corner. The council contains remnants of forest and native grasslands, with the Terrick Terrick National Park of particular importance. Other state forests and parks stretch between Logan and Inglewood and are also located around Wedderburn and Tarnagulla.

Loddon Shire Council is predominantly rural, with large areas dedicated to farming. It has nearly 100 localities and many small centres serving the surrounding rural areas. The council has no dominant population centre and farming activities are supported by small townships, the main ones being Boort, Bridgewater on Loddon, Inglewood, Pyramid Hill and Wedderburn. Other important localities are Bridgewater, Dingee, Eddington, Korong Vale, Laanecoorie, Mitiamo, Newbridge, Serpentine and Tarnagulla. These small settlements provide important social services and are a residential and community focus within their respective districts (DTP 2023).

Agriculture accounts for about 84% of land use, which in the south is dominated by dryland cropping as well as grazing sheep and beef on modified pastures. More intensive land uses exist in the north, especially irrigated farming, and dairy farming which can be found in a north-south band between the Loddon River and Bullock Creek. In addition, areas of horticultural production exist around Terraplee and Serpentine. The council is a major national tomato producer (by volume) and a major national olive producer. It is also in the top 10 local government areas nationally by gross value for pig, poultry, sheep and lambs, and barley production (ABARES 2022; AV 2018; DAFF 2021).

Three major roads pass through the council, fanning out from Bendigo in the southeast. The Wimmera Highway runs in an east-west direction towards St Arnaud, the Calder Highway



travels through Inglewood and Wedderburn in a northwest direction, and the Loddon Valley Highway travels directly north, following the path of the Loddon River.

Two railway lines run in a north-south direction through the council. One from Bendigo travels through Pyramid Hill. The other travels north to Inglewood, and splits at Korong Vale, west towards Charlton and also north through Boort. Rail is important for transporting agricultural commodities to Melbourne ports (DTP 2023).

## **Community**

Since 2001 the population has decreased by about 400 people (ABS 2001, ABS 2022c) and is forecast to continue to slowly decline.

Overall, about 5,000 people live in largely rural settings and residents typically have an affinity to and identify strongly with their localities. Small urban populations are in Boort (808 people), Inglewood (779), Pyramid Hill (475) and Wedderburn (650) (ABS 2022a, ABS 2022b, ABS 2022c, ABS 2022d, ABS 2022f). Proximity to Bendigo makes the south of the council an attractive lifestyle option and significant areas of rural residential living exist around Inglewood, Bridgewater, Wedderburn, and Newbridge (DPT 2023).

The median age in the council is 52, which is far higher than the median of 43 for regional Victoria. Like regional Victoria, the council has low levels of cultural diversity. Australia is the country of birth for just under 80% of people, similar to regional Victoria (81%). English is the only language used in 86% of households, the same as for regional Victoria. (ABS 2022c, ABS 2022e).

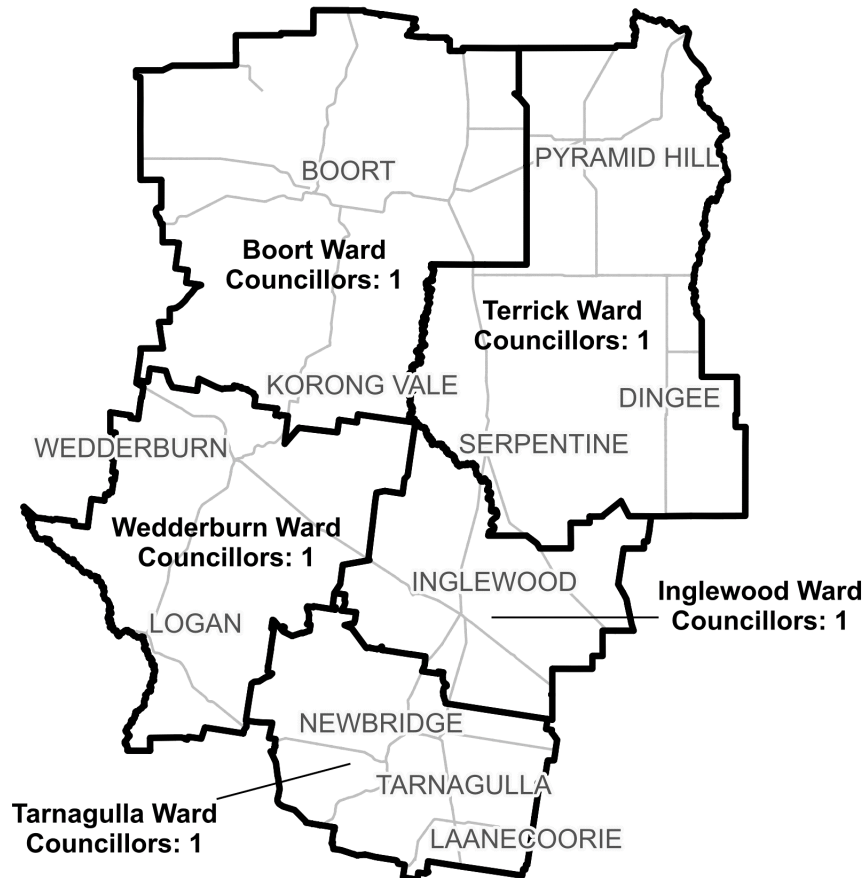
Close to 50% of adults are in the work force, which is low compared to over 57% for regional Victoria. The top 5 occupations are grain-sheep or grain-beef cattle farming, sheep farming, other grain growing, hospitals (except psychiatric hospitals), and dairy cattle farming. Personal, family and household median weekly incomes are \$554, \$1,394, and \$1,039 respectively, well below the \$713, \$1,808, and \$1,386 for regional Victoria (ABS 2022c, ABS 2022e).

At 95%, nearly all dwellings are separate houses, which is high even for regional Victoria (90%). The occupancy rate in private dwellings of about 78% is low, compared to 86% for regional Victoria. Family households account for about 64% of households, 4 percentage points below that of regional Victoria. Mortgage rates are low with just over 55% of houses owned outright, about 15 percentage points higher than for regional Victoria. Nearly 52% of families are couples without children, about 6 percentage points higher than regional Victoria. Whereas the percentage of couple families with children is low at 34% relative to regional Victoria at over 38%. The proportion of one parent families at 12.6% is also low compared to 16% for regional Victoria (ABS 2022c, ABS 2022e).

Loddon has localities that are amongst the most disadvantaged in Victoria. Korong Vale is Victoria's second most disadvantaged, and of the more populated localities, Wedderburn, Pyramid Hill, and Inglewood all have scores on the SEIFA Index of 1, which is the lowest score (ABS 2023).

## Current electoral structure

Loddon Shire Council has a total of 5 councillors and is divided into 5 single-councillor wards (Boort, Inglewood, Tarnagulla, Terrick, and Wedderburn wards).



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

There are an estimated 6,978 voters in Loddon Shire Council, with an estimated ratio of 1,396 voters per councillor.

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

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

## Last review

The VEC conducted an electoral representation review of Loddon Shire Council in 2011. That review was carried out under the *Local Government Act 1989* (Vic), which was replaced by the *Local Government Act 2020* (Vic).

After conducting the review, the VEC recommended that Loddon Shire Council adopt a structure of 5 councillors elected from 5 wards (5 single-councillor wards).

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

## Preliminary findings and response

The current ward boundary review of Loddon Shire Council was required due to the voter-to-councillor ratios in Inglewood and Tarnagulla wards, which were projected to be outside of the legislated +/-10% range at the October 2024 local council election.

### Preliminary report

The VEC's ward boundary review of Loddon 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 Loddon Shire Council and chose the strongest model for public consultation. The following model was presented for community consideration:

- Preliminary model, which proposed changes to the boundaries of Inglewood and Tarnagulla wards.

### Preliminary model

Due to a relatively stable rate of population growth across most of the council area, only a minor ward boundary adjustment was needed to bring Inglewood and Tarnagulla wards within deviation for the 2024 and 2028 local council elections. This involved moving the boundary between Tarnagulla and Inglewood wards north, to run along minor roads and property and locality boundaries.

The proposed changes were necessary to accommodate the relatively high rate of growth in and around the town of Inglewood, resulting in most of Derby, Leichardt, and part of Inglewood and Bridgewater transferring from Inglewood Ward to Tarnagulla Ward. All other boundaries were left unchanged.

## Response submissions

The VEC received 2 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		
Preliminary model	No preferred model indicated	Other
1	0	1

Submissions were received from the Loddon Shire Council and the Loddon Herald. The Loddon Shire Council submitted in favour of the preliminary model, while the Loddon Herald submitted a written and mapped submission with alternative boundaries to the current and preliminary models.

### Preliminary model

The Loddon Shire Council submission stated that councillors made a resolution in favour of the preliminary report. The submission did not include the reasons why council supported the preliminary model.

### Other options

The Loddon Herald made a submission with considerable changes to the existing ward boundaries. This proposed 2 large northern wards, Boort and Terrick, with the remaining 3 southern wards running from east to west. The submission argued that this approach would better group communities of interest than the preliminary model. Additionally, the submitter considered the number of voters per councillor in each ward to be well within +/-10% of the average number of voters per councillor for all wards and felt it would better accommodate future population change over the next 10 years.

The Loddon Herald further suggested that shifting Korong Vale from Boort Ward to Wedderburn Ward, would be an improvement because of the “ample and demonstrable community of interest” it captured. Tarnagulla Ward was modified to bring together Newbridge and Bridgewater on Loddon, which the submission suggested had commonalities as Loddon River towns. This change required rearrangements to Inglewood Ward, which had its eastern side absorbed into Tarnagulla and Terrick wards, and the western portion extending to cover areas such as Kooyoora State Park, Wehla, and most of Cochrane's Creek.

Boort Ward lost a north-eastern section to Terrick Ward and extended into Terrick Ward in the south to include part of Serpentine. The Loddon Herald's model had Terrick Ward stretching south to Campbells Forest, creating what it described as a "real broadacre farming ward with commonality of aspirations and needs".

## Public hearing

The VEC held an online public hearing for those wishing to speak about their response submission at 2 pm 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 Chris Earl, Managing Editor at the Loddon Herald, spoke on behalf of the Loddon Herald.

Mr Earl began by suggesting the preliminary report, which described some council residents as likely to travel outside of the council area to Bendigo for some services, misrepresented the reality in Loddon. Instead, the regular services used by Loddon residents - supermarkets, schools, hospital, and pharmacies - were in Loddon. He stated that a key aspect of local government should be strengthening local communities and economies, and as he did not feel the preliminary model supported this, he was motivated to prepare an alternative model.

Mr Earl expressed frustration regarding the VEC ward boundary review public consultation process, stating that the information the VEC made available for its proposal was not easily accessible to members of the public. He argued this constrained the community being able to genuinely engage in the process and develop alternative models.

Mr Earl went on to state that the model he proposed was developed through an understanding of on-the-ground realities, and through community feedback received as a newspaper editor. For example, he described how the people of Kooyong Vale did not see themselves as being strongly linked to Boort but would have closer linkages to Wedderburn. He further reiterated that Bridgewater on Loddon is a river town and shares interests and flooding concerns with Newbridge, and that it was more suitable to group these towns in the same ward. In comparison, Bridgewater on Loddon and Inglewood, despite being geographically close, were described as communities with different needs and could be situated in different wards.

To balance the numbers, Mr Earl felt it appropriate for Serpentine township to be moved into Boort Ward because the Loddon Valley Highway provided a strong connection with northern areas. Additionally, common interests existing between these communities were identified, such as through sport. Terrick Ward was described as reaching much further south than in the VEC model, but it was argued that this was justified, as the localities covered by the ward were identified as consistently broadacre and grazing communities of interest. Kooyoorra State Park was proposed for inclusion in Inglewood Ward because the park was most strongly linked to Inglewood through tourism.

## 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 put forward a preliminary model with minor boundary adjustments, sufficient to address the requirements of the Act, and which made minimal changes to existing boundaries and groupings of communities of interest contained in those wards.

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

The VEC would like to acknowledge the submission from the Loddon Herald, which proposed substantial boundary adjustments that emphasised communities of interest. While the VEC considered the arguments put forward in the submission to have merit, it was felt this proposal could not be a recommendation of this review due to 2 major factors:

- The Loddon Herald model proposed significant change to the ward boundaries which would have affected 23.8% of currently enrolled voters (1,661 voters). The submission proposed a major reconfiguration of the current wards that goes beyond the focus of the current review, which is to balance ward deviations. This level of change could be disruptive for voters, whereas the preliminary model would result in a clear majority of voters being maintained in familiar wards and ward boundaries.
- Relatedly, it was felt that change of this scale would not be appropriate to adopt without further community consultation. While the model might reflect an improved grouping of communities of interest, these communities of interest were not given adequate opportunity to consider or comment on the changes. For the VEC to recommend the model could have raised issues of procedural fairness.

In light of this, and due to the scale of change and need for additional consultation to occur, overall, the VEC noted the Loddon Herald proposal would be more appropriate for consideration by an Electoral Representation Advisory Panel at the next full electoral structure review of Loddon Shire Council.

As such, the VEC identified the boundary adjustments of the preliminary model as most appropriate for the following reasons. It achieved compliance with the +/-10% requirement by making only minimal changes to ward boundaries that have been in place since 2011, and which voters would most likely recognise and be familiar with. The only change was to make a minor adjustment to the ward boundary between Tarnagulla and Inglewood wards, which

shifted north to incorporate Derby, Leichardt, and part of Inglewood and Bridgewater into Tarnagulla Ward, leaving all other boundaries unchanged. This change will affect a minimal number of voters, about 1.6% of currently enrolled voters (111 voters). The VEC also noted that the submission from Loddon Shire Council supported these adjustments.

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

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 Loddon 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 Loddon Shire Council:

- Inglewood Ward
- Tarnagulla Ward

The recommended adjustments were presented as the preliminary model in the preliminary report, with no further changes.

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

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

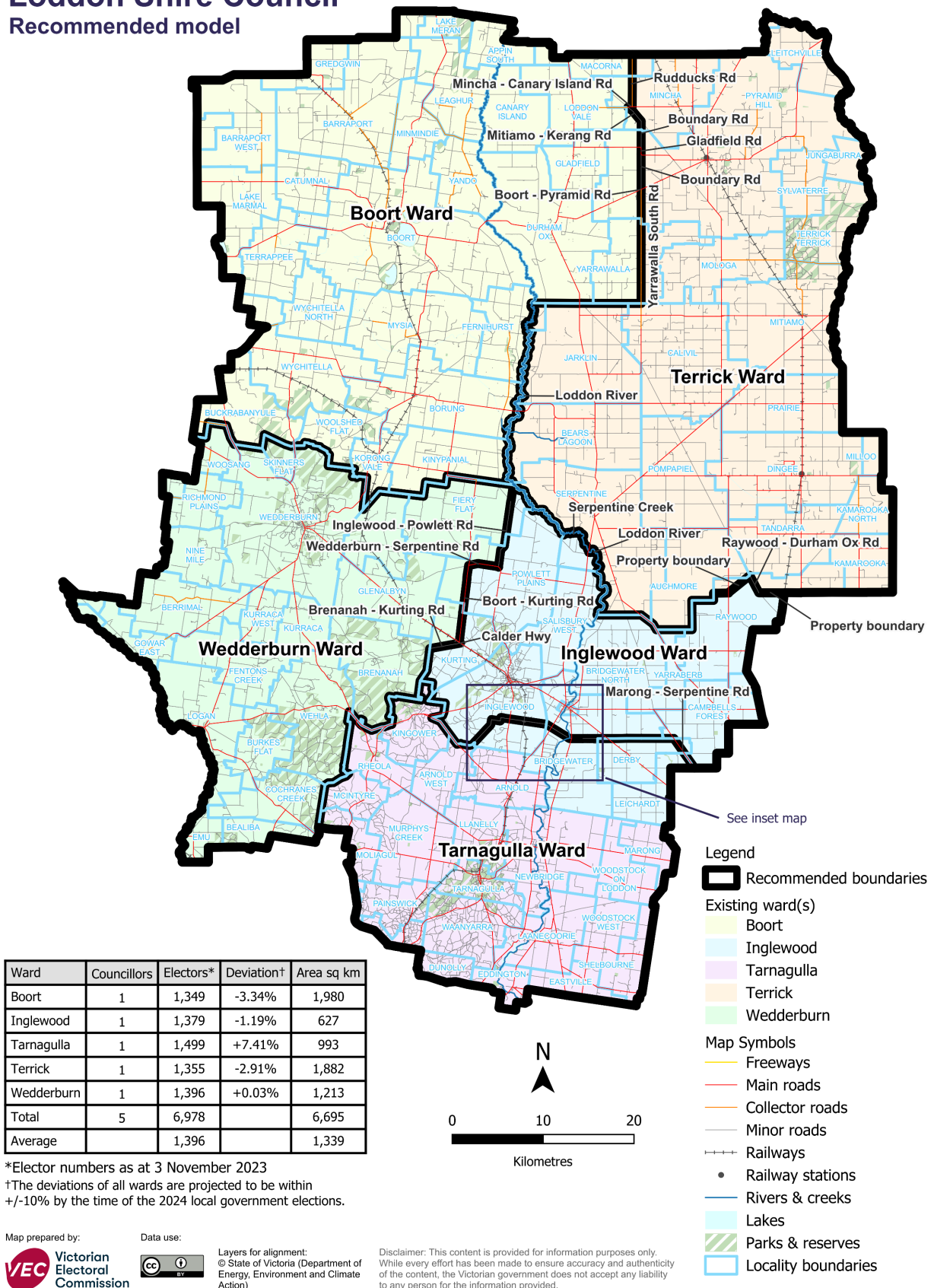


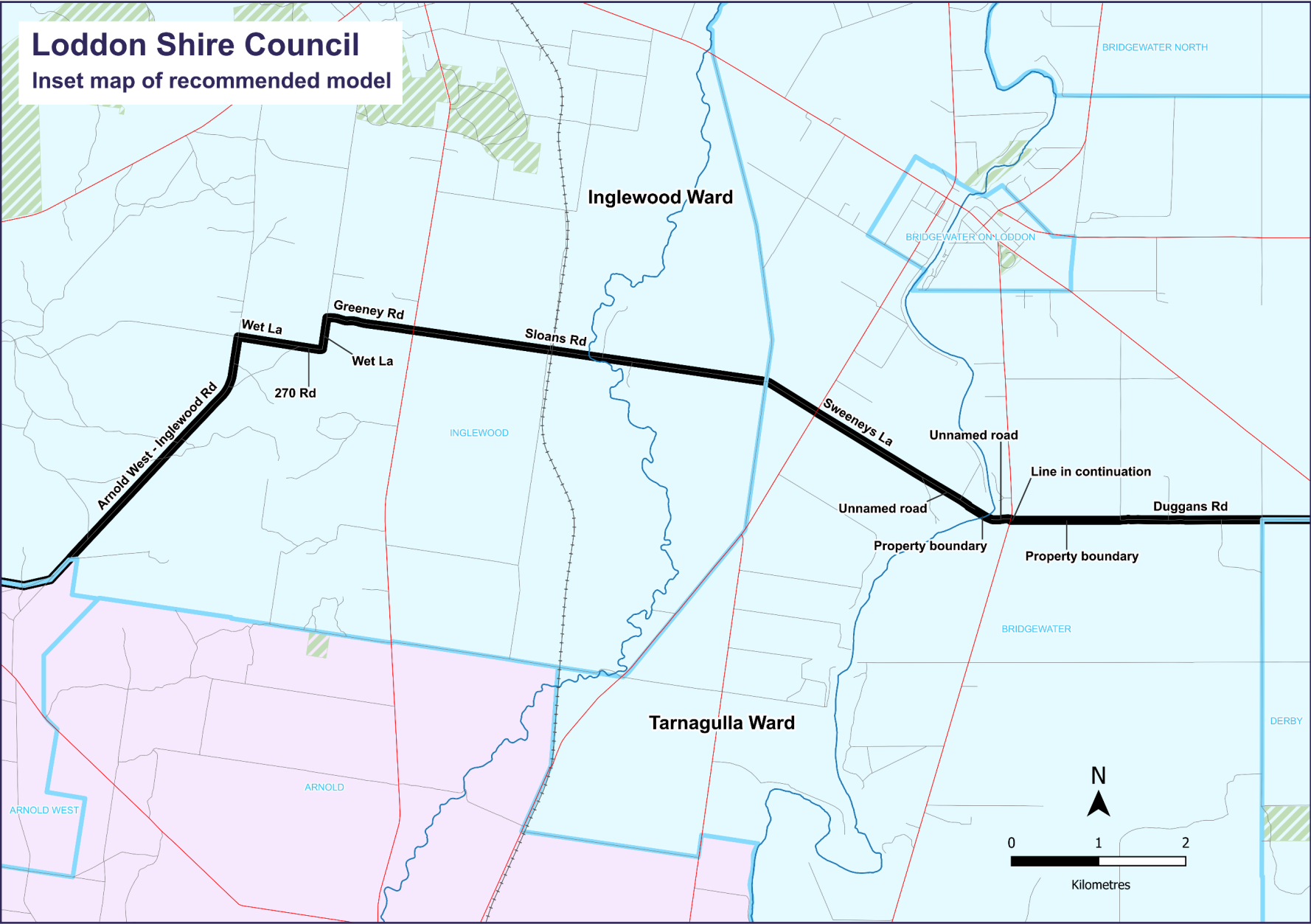
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# Appendix 1: Map of recommended model

## Loddon Shire Council Recommended model





**Data for recommended model**

<b>Ward</b>	<b>Electors*</b>	<b>Deviation†</b>	<b>Area# (square km)</b>
Boort	1,349	-3.34%	1,980
Inglewood	1,379	-1.19%	627
Tarnagulla	1,499	+7.41%	993
Terrick	1,355	-2.91%	1,882
Wedderburn	1,396	+0.03%	1,213
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,978</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>6,695</b>
<b>Average</b>	<b>1,396</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>1,339</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:

Loddon Herald

Loddon Shire Council

### **Public hearing**

The following people spoke at the public hearing:

Earl, Chris (on behalf of the Loddon Herald)

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