

Local council electoral structure review

# Final Report

Warrnambool City Council

August 2023

### Acknowledgement of Country

The electoral representation advisory panel acknowledges the Eastern Maar people 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

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1	23 August 2023	Ms Julie Eisenbise
1	23 August 2023	Mr Tim Presnell
1	22 August 2023	Ms Dana Fleming

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## Executive summary

An independent electoral structure review panel appointed by the Minister for Local Government has reviewed the electoral structure of Warrnambool 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), Warrnambool 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 Warrnambool 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 Warrnambool City Council adopt a 7 single-councillor ward structure – 7 wards with one councillor per ward.

The recommended names for the 7 wards in this electoral structure are Botanic, Central, Hopkins River, Pertobe, Platypus Park, Russells Creek and Wollaston.

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 7 councillors – 7 wards with one councillor per ward.
- Model 2: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 7 councillors – 7 wards with one councillor per ward.
- Model 3: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 7 councillors – 7 wards with one councillor per ward.

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

### Response submissions

The panel received 11 submissions responding to the preliminary report. Of these, 2 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 Wednesday 2 August 2023. 2 people spoke at the hearing.

## Background

### About the 2023–24 electoral structure reviews

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

The Act introduced several changes to local government representation, including the types of electoral structures local councils may have. All metropolitan, interface and regional city councils (including Warrnambool City Council) must now have single-councillor ward electoral structures.

For Warrnambool 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 Warrnambool City Council had 3 members:

- Ms Julie Eisenbise (Chairperson)
- Mr Tim Presnell
- Acting Electoral Commissioner Ms Dana Fleming.

The purpose of the review is to advise the Minister on the appropriate number of councillors and electoral structure, including ward names, for the council. The panel is independent of councils and the Victorian State government.

Under the Act, the VEC is not responsible for reviewing council electoral structures but must provide administrative and technical support to the panel. The Electoral Commissioner (or their delegate) must be a member of each panel.

## Public engagement

### Public information program

On behalf of the panel, the VEC conducted a public information and awareness program to inform the public about the Warrnambool City Council electoral structure review. This included:

- public notices in state-wide newspapers
- public information sessions to outline the review process and respond to questions from the community
- media releases announcing the start of the review with the release of the preliminary report
- information on social media channels
- updated website content on [vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au), including:
  - current information on the review process
  - submission guide and fact sheets for each council under review with background information
  - response submissions from the public.

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

- targeted social media advertisements in the council area
- notifying voters in the council area subscribed to the VEC's VoterAlert service about the start of the review and release of the preliminary report.

### **Public consultation**

The panel encouraged public input to the review of Warrnambool 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.

In examining the appropriate number of councillors for Warrnambool 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 Warrnambool 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 Warrnambool City Council

## Profile

Warrnambool City Council is a regional city in the Barwon South West region of Victoria, about 260 km west of Melbourne. It is the smallest regional city council in Victoria at 121 km<sup>2</sup> and is surrounded by Moyne Shire Council and the Southern Ocean. The Traditional Custodians of the Warrnambool area are the Eastern Maar people.

## Landscape

Warrnambool City Council is part of south-west Victoria's Shipwreck Coast. Its landscape includes the ancient dune systems of Thunder and Pickering points, the Merri and Hopkins river estuaries, and the expansive Lady Bay (DTP 2023). Southern right whales frequent the Logans Beach area, which acts as a whale nursery in winter and spring (DTP 2023). The Warrnambool foreshore, botanic gardens, and Lake Pertobe provide recreational space for residents and tourists (Warrnambool Council 2022a).

At the 2021 Census, Warrnambool City Council's population was 35,406 (ABS 2022a). By far, most of the population lives in Warrnambool and Dennington (DTP 2023). The Warrnambool urban centre, an area of concentrated urban development, includes the suburb of Dennington on the western boundary of the council area, and the suburb of Warrnambool including Sherwood Park Station and Deakin University in the east. It had a population of 32,894 in 2021 or almost 93% of the municipality's total population (ABS 2022d).

In the east of the council area, the Hopkins River runs through Allansford, a rural town with a population of 718 (ABS 2022b). Representing an area of concentrated urban development, the urban centre of Bushfield-Woodford (population 619 in 2021) is in the north of the council area, among rolling hills and rural views (Warrnambool Council 2022b, ABS 2022c).

The Princes and Hopkins highways and Great Ocean Road serve the council area, along with several regional bus services and a V/Line train service to Melbourne.

## Community

Warrnambool City Council area is a main service centre for health, education, retail, and business (RDV 2023). Tourism is an important economic driver, as are the dairy, beef, and lamb industries (DTP 2023). Health care and social assistance remains an important industry sector employing 23% of total employment (Remplan 2022b).

Between 2011 and 2021, the population of the council area increased from 32,029 to 35,406 (ABS 2011, ABS 2022a). The trend of modest growth is expected to continue at an average rate of about 1.1% per year and the population is estimated to reach 39,900 by 2036 (RDV 2023).

People aged 60-to-64 years were the largest age group in the council at 6.6% of the population in 2021, while the proportion of those aged 70-to-74 years increased the most between 2016

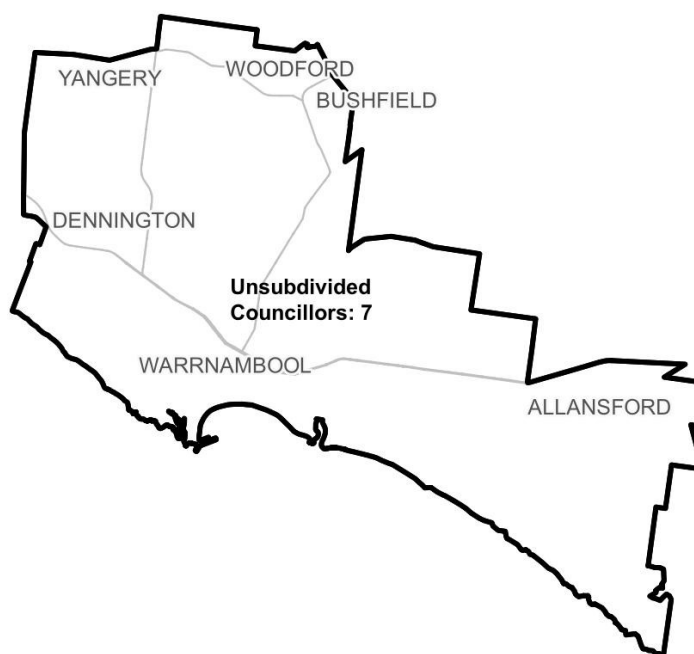
and 2021 (Remplan 2022a). The median age was 42 which is slightly lower than the regional Victorian median of 43. (ABS 2022a).

In 2021, almost 85% of Warrnambool City Council residents were born in Australia and residents who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people accounted for 2.1% of the municipality's population. English was the only language spoken at home for 89% of residents, compared with 86.4% for regional Victoria overall (ABS 2022a).

Most people in the municipality (68.9%) owned their own home either outright or with a mortgage in 2021 and the median weekly household income was \$1,396 (ABS 2022a).

## Current number of councillors and electoral structure

Warrnambool City Council is currently unsubdivided with a total of 7 councillors:



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

There are around 27,731 voters in Warrnambool City Council, with an estimated ratio of 3,961 voters per councillor.

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

## Last electoral structure review

The VEC conducted an electoral representation review of Warrnambool 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 Warrnambool City Council continue to consist of 7 councillors elected from an unsubdivided ward structure.

Visit the VEC website at [vec.vic.gov.au](http://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 7 councillors – 7 wards with one councillor per ward.
- Model 2: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 7 councillors – 7 wards with one councillor per ward, with different boundaries to Model 1.
- Model 3: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 7 councillors – 7 wards with one councillor per ward, with different boundaries to Model 1 and 2.

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

## Response submissions

The panel received 11 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: Support expressed in response submissions				
Model 1 (7 single-councillor wards)	Model 2 (7 single-councillor wards)	Model 3 (7 single-councillor wards)	No preferred model indicated	Other
0	0	2	5	2

Of the 11 submissions received for Warrnambool there were 9 unique submitters, 2 of whom provided further details in a second submission. There was a submission from council, two submissions from community groups and 6 from individual residents. All submitters were from the locality of Warrnambool.

Two submissions supported Model 3, while five submissions did not indicate a specific electoral structure preference, and two submissions addressed matters out of scope for the panel, including support for retaining the current structure, which is no longer permitted under the Act. 2 of these submissions were also mapped submissions for 7 councillor, single-member wards with different boundaries to the models presented.

There was also broad support for maintaining the number of councillors at 7, with no submissions against this number, and two submissions in favour.

### Model 1

There were no submissions supporting Model 1 but 6 were opposed or raised objections about it.

Council was concerned Model 1 grouped the distinct communities of Dennington, Merrivale and South Warrnambool into just Marrang Park Ward. Submissions from Lynne Carter, Phil Carter and Max Taylor also opposed Model 1 because of Marrang Park, all stating South Warrnambool was split and grouped with too many others in this single ward. Warrnambool Ratepayers Association further stated opposition to Model 1 because of the poor representation of Allansford and outer-Warrnambool communities in the large Hopkin's River Ward.

Two submissions also provided feedback on ward names for Model 1. Lynne Carter suggested that Moyjil is not an appropriate name for areas south or west of the city, as it is a distinct locality and not all areas within the Moyjil ward would identify with the name. The Council suggested that Brierly Basin name had negative community connection to a former mental

health facility (asylum) of the same name. Council put forward the alternative name of 'Russells Creek' for this ward.

## **Model 2**

There were no submissions in support of Model 2 and 5 individual submissions critical of it. Council submitted a map that was based on Model 2, however there were significant boundary differences and Council did not support Model 2 in its proposed form.

Submissions from Lynne Carter, Phil Carter and Max Taylor shared the same concerns as they had for Model 1, stated that the division of South Warrnambool into two wards split a distinct community. Warrnambool Ratepayers Association and Council submissions were also concerned that Model 2 split Dennington between two wards, and then grouped it with two distinct communities of East Warrnambool and Woodford.

The submission from Council further mentioned that Yangary was split from Woodford and Bushfield, which are localities with common community interest. Council also took issue with the grouping of Warrnambool city residents south of Russells Creek and rural Allansford in a single ward. According to Council, these two communities are distinct and different, and should ideally be in separate wards.

Two submissions also provided feedback on ward names for Model 2. Lynne Carter suggested Moyjil was not an appropriate name, as not all areas in the Moyjil Ward would identify with the name. Council was also opposed to the name Marrang Park, concerned that it was not recognisable to residence.

## **Model 3**

Model 3 was supported by two submissions.

Lynne Carter felt it was important when considering boundary changes to recognise local communities that had worked to maintain their identifies by keeping them together in wards. As a member of the South Warrnambool Residents Group, Carter favoured Model 3 because it did the best job at keeping this community united in the one ward. It was also felt that Merrivale should be in the same ward as South Warrnambool, as these communities had strong ties.

The Warrnambool Ratepayers Association addressed a range of factors in support of Model 3. They felt it was the best option for accommodating the varying rates of growth likely to occur across the council area and that it had the most appropriate ward boundaries overall. Further, Model 3 was preferred because it captured the Dennington community, along with Bushfield and Woodford to the north, in the same ward. They also considered to be a good fit for those communities in the eastern parts of the council area in Hopkins River Ward.

The Council was critical of Model 3 for the inclusion of Bushfield and Woodford in the same ward as Dennington. The council also argued Moyjil Ward, which captured much of the coastline, was too long and included in the same ward communities with different interests, namely Merrivale and Hopkins Heights.



There were 3 submissions that commented on the proposed ward names. As with feedback on Model 1 ward names, the council suggested Brierly Basin might have negative connotations being the name of a former mental health facility (asylum). Both the council and the Warrnambool Ratepayers Association suggested Russells Creek would be more appropriate. The same submitters also commented Platypus Park would not be recognisable to residents. Two other submitters felt Moyjil was not appropriate for the area captured in the proposed ward and suggested Botanic, Coastal or Merri as alternatives.

### **Other options**

The Council mapped a different electoral structure, which was argued would better reflect communities of interest and accommodate future growth. Based largely on Model 2, key features of the council's alternative structure included:

- Uniting all of Dennington community in the same ward and not including the communities of Bushfield and Woodford to the north
- Adjusting Russell Creeks Ward to make it flatter, similar to that proposed in Model 3, to maintain more of the northern corridor of the city in the one ward and make use of an effective boundary in Aberline Road
- Moving the boundary of Botanic Ward north to Russells Creek to better capture communities in the vicinity
- Adjusting Wollaston Ward to make it more balanced in shape and more effectively a rural-focused ward
- Balancing Hopkins Rover Ward to make it more focused on the river and not to include communities that fit more with the urban wards
- Creates a ward dedicated to South Warrnambool and Merrivale.

This last feature of the council's submission was also proposed by various other submitters and the basis for many of the criticism of the proposed models. Most were residents of the South Warrnambool or Merrivale communities and felt their strong identities should be recognised by a ward focused on and containing these communities.

Robert Dart also mapped an alternative structure. Dart argued it was important for areas outside of the main town centre and beyond the coast to be effectively represented. This was reflected in the map provided and in the suggestion for one ward (Lady Bay Ward) capturing the Warrnambool CBD and coastal area around Lady Bay. This, in turn, allowed the creation of other wards to capture and provide a voice on council for the communities of Allansford, Woodford, Dennington, South Warrnambool and Merrivale.

## Public hearing

The panel held an online public hearing for those wishing to speak about their response submission at 10 am on 2 August 2023. Councillor Debbie Arnaud (Mayor), Andrew Mason (Council CEO) and James Plozza (Council Manager for Governance) spoke on behalf of the council's submission and Councillor Max Taylor spoke as an individual submitter.

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

Cr Arnaud opened for the Council and highlighted the importance of ensuring good governance when considering electoral structure changes. The councillor also commended on the proposed models generally, that council could see many known communities of interest had been considered during the development of each. However, council was concerned that there were some communities, both emergent and established, that were not properly accounted for in the models proposed.

Council highlighted both South Warrnambool and Merrivale as established communities which the panel may not have been aware of but were worth considering in the creation of wards and ward boundaries. Merrivale was identified as a large community to the southwest of the city centre, sitting either side of the railway line; South Warrnambool was described as a 'gentrifying' community sought after by Warrnambool home buyers, west of Lake Pertobe and east of Merrivale.

Mr Plozza spoke extensively on the council's written submission and their concerns about the 3 proposed models, especially the splitting of Dennington, and the combination of rural communities with urban areas in wards, as proposed for Allansford and North Warrnambool. Criticisms about using Russells Creek as a boundary for North Warrnambool was reinforced, as were concerns about adopting the name of a past mental health facility for Brierly Basin Ward.

While the council acknowledged their proposed model would split South Warrnambool as a locality, the primary focus of this and other communities of interest, such as Merrivale, would be maintained within their own wards. Dividing South Warrnambool between the south-eastern and south-western wards was described by council as unfortunate but necessary to maintain other communities in their wards and reflect communities of interest overall.

Cr Max Taylor spoke after Council as a resident of South Warrnambool, independent of his role as deputy mayor. Taylor described in detail the historical significance of South Warrnambool in connection to the establishment of Warrnambool as a major seaport. It's importance in terms of heritage and tourist was outlined, as was the strong sense of identity residents of the area had developed. Cr Taylor expressed concern with any model which divided South Warrnambool or did not appropriately account for it as a community of interest.

## Findings and recommendation

The panel noted that several submitters criticised the review process, including the requirement of regional cities to adhere to the single-member ward structure as specified in the Act. Submitters suggested such a structure would be a 'step backwards' and not appropriate for the City of Warrnambool, given the council was functioning well under a unsubdivided structure. Whilst the panel understands these concerns, the panel cannot make exceptions to the legislated requirements of the Act.

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. The equality requirement exists to support fair and equitable representation for all voters within a local council and is the main aim of the review process.

The panel is aware of the difficulties adhering to the equality requirement for single-councillor electoral structures in regional city councils where the population is distributed unevenly, usually concentrated in a town or city centre and dispersed across rural areas. Significant differences in the areas covered by each ward can result. While ward size is a factor considered during the review process, particularly as it impacts councillor travel and workload, it must be balanced with other requirements, including the equality requirement, communities of interest and use of effective wards boundaries. Each of the 3 models strike a different balance across the various factors considered.

### Number of councillors

After considering the requirements of the Act, public submissions and the agreed criteria, the panel found 7 councillors to be an appropriate number for Warrnambool City Council.

The panel considered the characteristics of Warrnambool City Council in relation to similar regional city councils, including its size and geography, population and the number and distribution of voters across the council area.

Warrnambool City Council currently has 27,731 voters represented by 7 councillors and covers an area of 121 km<sup>2</sup>. Other regional city councils with a similar number of voters usually also have 7 councillors. Forecasts indicate modest population growth is expected however this growth is anticipated to remain in Warrnambool urban area. Given this, and the relatively small size of the council area and concentration of the population in Warrnambool city, the panel considered it appropriate for the total number of councillors to remain unchanged.

Due to the challenges involved in developing appropriate single-councillor ward structures, in some circumstances the panel has considered whether fewer or more councillors would enable a favourable electoral structure to be developed. Given there was no such structure put forward for comment at the preliminary stage and no suggestions or support from the public for a structure based on a different number of councillors, the panel is confident 7 councillors is the best option for Warrnambool City Council

## Electoral structure

After considering the requirements of the Act, public submissions and the agreed criteria, the panel found Model 3 to be the single-councillor ward model with the best potential to promote fair and equitable representation for voters in Warrnambool City Council.

The panel considered the benefits and drawbacks of each model, including public feedback provided through submissions. The panel also explored the suggestions put forward in some submissions to change ward boundaries. This included the alternative structures mapped by Warrnambool City Council and Robert Dart's. In particular, the panel welcomed submissions alerting the panel to the established and emergent communities of Merrivale and South Warrnambool. The distinct communities of interest within the Warrnambool council area formed a key part of the panel's final deliberations and decision.

The panel acknowledges the drawbacks identified by submitters of the proposed models, particularly the splitting of Dennington and the grouping of communities in the south-west and north-west of the council area that occurred in some of the wards of the models. The panel also considered Council's feedback regarding Russells Creek and North Warrnambool. It was acknowledged that the inclusion of communities south of the Russells Creek boundary in both Model 1 and 2 split the northern Warrnambool communities, grouping them in Model 1 with rural localities in the case of Model 2 with the rural township of Allansford on the eastern edge of council area.

The panel explored various options to Models 1 and 2 in an attempt to incorporate all of the communities of Merrivale and South Warrnambool. However, the panel notes that the boundaries of both models cannot be changed to include all of Merrivale and South Warrnambool without wards deviating beyond legislated requirements. Moreover, changing either Model 1 or 2 to capture these communities would have knock-on effects, altering both to such a degree they would be considered new models. It would be unfair to recommend essentially new structures without allowing for public feedback

The mapped structures proposed by Robert Dart and the Council were considered in light of concerns about splitting some of Warrnambool's communities of interest. The panel noted that Mr Dart's submission divided the Dennington community, and both submissions split parts of South Warrnambool and Merrivale. Additional modelling explored whether changes to these mapped submissions might allow these communities to be contained in single-councillor wards as proposed in submissions. However, the changes needed to keep all wards within the +/-10% deviation would have impacted other wards rendering Mr Dart's and Council's models unrecognisable. The panel was also concerned with certain aspects of the Council's proposal: part of boundary at the western edge separating Dennington and Merri River wards; and, the western section of the Hopkins River Ward, which included significant urban areas east of the Warrnambool town.

Of the proposed 3 models, the boundaries of Model 3 were considered by the panel to best capture the community of Dennington, and to avoid the division of the northern urban

community of Warrnambool along Russells Creek. Model 3 also captured all of South Warrnambool in one ward and avoided grouping large outer urban areas with the rural Allansford in the east.

The Panel recognises the challenge of grouping Dennington in a ward with the northern, rural communities around Woodford, and acknowledges that this is not ideal in Model 3. However, the panel reflected on a point raised in submissions, and agreed that because Dennington is an area of high projected growth, it is likely the Wollaston Ward may be split, with Dennington captured in a new future ward. Model 3 also groups the coastal areas across the mouth of the Hopkins river with the more urban areas of South Warrnambool and Merrivale in the east. As above, the panel notes the Clifton area to the east of the Hopkins is projected to grow considerably and future boundaries may need to be redrawn as new communities emerge. Finally, the panel acknowledged that Merrivale as it was defined in submission, is split in Model 3. However, it was noted that this split occurs along the very recognisable feature of the major trainline, and the two parts of Merrivale were already naturally divided by a significant area of parkland.

The panel understands that there is some community sentiment for Warrnambool City Council to retain its current unsubdivided structure, and that the council is functioning well. The Warrnambool council area has a unique set of geographic features, with strong communities of interest, some of which are emerging in areas of increased urban growth. The panel also notes that it can be challenging to capture these important geographic communities, while also maintaining the legislated +/-10% population deviation limits as required by the Act. For these reasons, the panel also acknowledges that there may well be no perfect single-member ward structure for regional city councils like Warrnambool. However, the panel must comply with the legislative requirements of the Act.

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 Warrnambool 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. However, the panel notes that prior to changing to an unsubdivided electoral structure in 2004, the council had a history of uncontested elections under a structure of single-councillor wards.

After considering a range of factors, including public feedback, communities of interest, two mapped submissions and the boundaries used in each model, the panel recommends Model 3 as the most acceptable structure to promote fair and equitable representation for voters in the Warrnambool City Council under the requirements of the Act.

## Ward names

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

- Botanic Ward: new name based on a place (gardens) within the ward. This place name is registered in the VICNAMES register. This name was used for a ward in the council area prior to 2004.
- Central Ward: new name based on the central Warrnambool CBD area. The naming of wards based on cardinal directions is allowed under the terms of reference for the panel.
- Hopkins River Ward: new name based on a geographic feature (river) within the ward. This name of the geographic feature is registered in the VICNAMES register.
- Pertobe Ward: new name based on a geographic feature (lake) within the ward. This place name is registered in the VICNAMES register. This name was used for a ward in the council area prior to 2004.
- Platypus Park Ward: new name based on a place (park) within the ward. This place name is registered in the VICNAMES register.
- Russells Creek Ward: new name based on a geographic feature (creek) within the ward. The of this geographic feature is registered in the VICNAMES register.
- Wollaston Ward: new name based on a place within the ward. This place name is registered in the VICNAMES register. The name was used for a ward in the council area prior to 2004.

There were two ward name changes to Model 3 following feedback from written submissions and the hearing. The panel changed the Brierly Basin Ward name and acknowledged concerns that were raised, changing the ward name to Russells Creek as suggested by submissions. The panel further recognised that submissions suggested the ward name 'Moyjil' did not relate to large areas contained within the ward. Instead, the panel elected to name the ward 'Pertobe' after the significant geographic feature of Lake Pertobe, located in the centre of the ward. Finally, the panel acknowledges concerns 'Platypus Park' may not be recognisable to residents. However, the panel notes the suggested alternatives do not comply with naming requirements, and Platypus Park is a named park within the ward boundaries. Furthermore, the panel notes there have been a rise in platypus sightings within the Merri Creek, which runs through the ward in question.

## The panel's recommendation

The electoral representation advisory panel recommends that Warrnambool City Council adopt a 7 single-councillor ward structure – 7 wards with one councillor per ward.

The recommended names for the 7 wards in this electoral structure are Botanic, Central, Hopkins River, Pertobe, Platypus Park, Russells Creek and Wollaston.

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 3 in the preliminary report.

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

## References

- ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) (2022a) [2021 Census All Person QuickStats, Warrnambool \(LGA\)](#), ABS website, accessed 15 May 2023.
- (2022b) [2021 Census All Persons QuickStats, Allansford \(UCL\)](#), ABS website, accessed 15 May 2023.
- (2022c) [2021 Census All Persons QuickStats, Bushfield - Woodford \(UCL\)](#), ABS website, accessed 15 May 2023.
- (2022d) [2021 Census All Persons QuickStats, Warrnambool \(UCL\)](#), ABS website, accessed 15 May 2023.
- ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) (2011) [2011 Census All Person QuickStats, Warrnambool \(LGA\)](#), ABS website, accessed 15 May 2023.
- DTP (Department of Transport and Planning) (2023) [Warrnambool Planning Scheme](#), DTP website, accessed 15 May 2023.
- Electoral Act 2002 (Vic)
- Geographic Place Names Act 1998 (Vic)
- Local Government Act 1989 (Vic)
- Local Government Act 2020 (Vic)
- Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2020 (Vic)
- RDV (Regional Development Victoria) (2021) [Regional City of Warrnambool](#), RDV website, accessed 15 May 2023.
- Remplan (2022a) [Our Place – Our Community Population](#), Remplan website, accessed 15 May 2023
- (2022b) [Economy, Jobs and Business Insights](#), Remplan website, accessed 15 May 2023.
- Warrnambool City Council (2022a) [Public Spaces](#), Warrnambool Council website, accessed 15 May 2023.
- (2022b) [Council news – Strategic Framework Plan Bushfield-Woodford](#), Warrnambool Council website, accessed 15 May 2023.

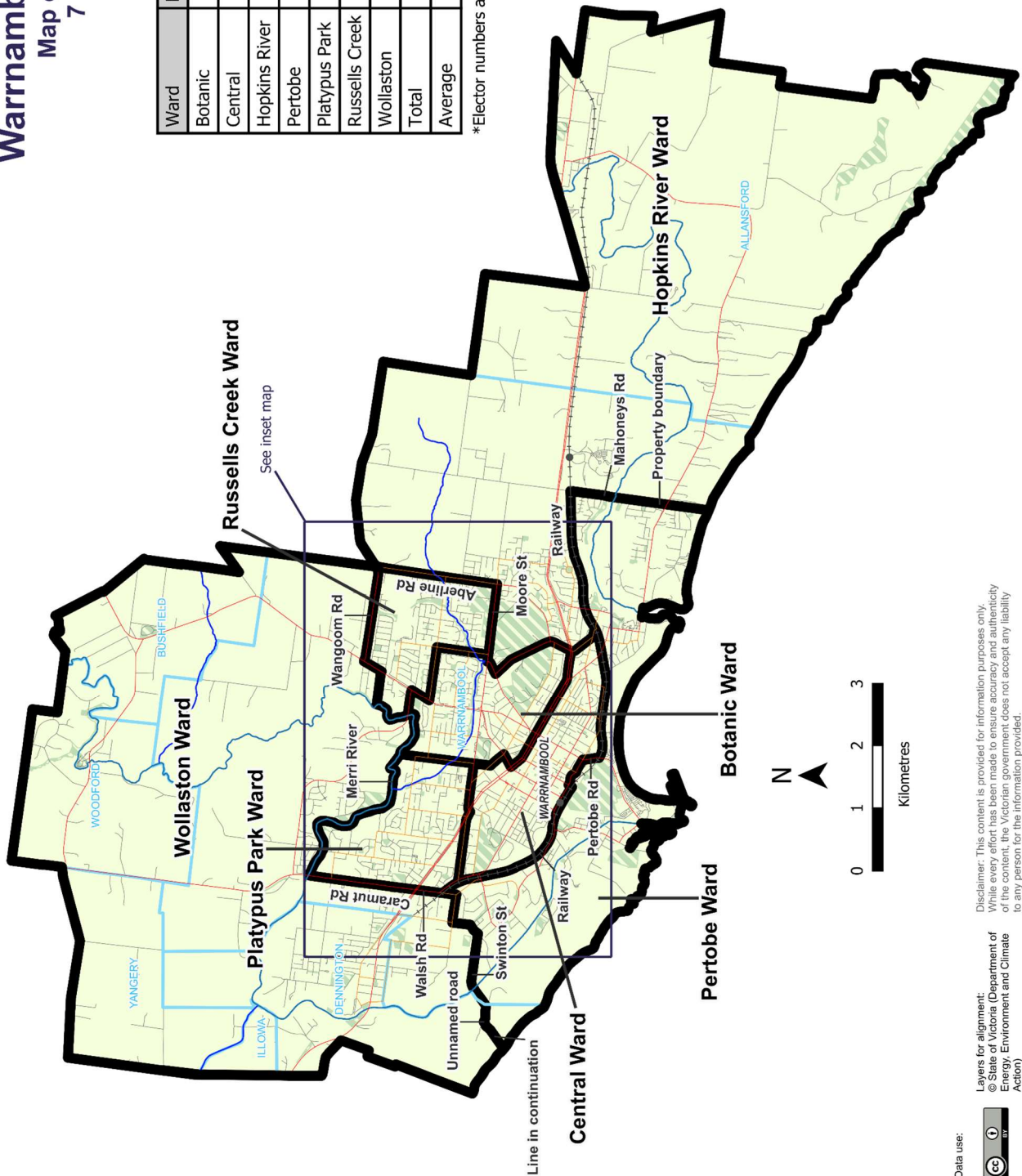


# Appendix 1: Map of recommended structure

## Warrnambool City Council Map of recommended option 7 single-councillor wards

Ward	Electors*	Deviation	Area sq km
Botanic	4,038	+1.93%	4
Central	4,231	+6.80%	4
Hopkins River	3,989	+0.69%	48
Pertobe	3,722	-6.05%	12
Platypus Park	4,250	7.28%	4
Russells Creek	3,839	-3.09%	3
Wollaston	3,662	-7.56%	46
<b>Total</b>	<b>27,731</b>		<b>120</b>
<b>Average</b>	<b>3,962</b>		<b>17</b>

\*Elector numbers as at 30 March 2023



Data use:

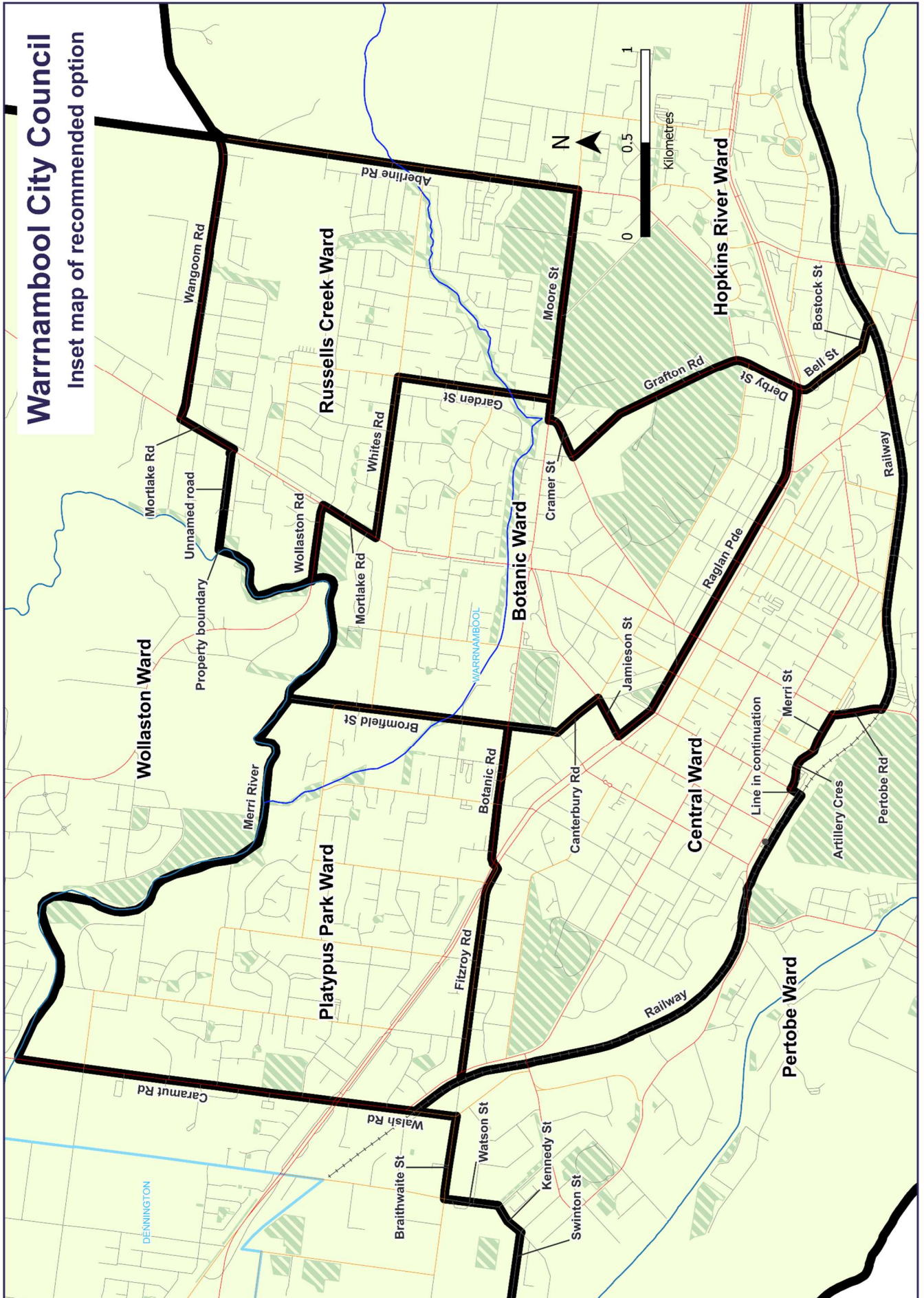
Layers for alignment:  
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\*Elector numbers as at 30 March 2023

#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:

Carter, Lynne  
Carter, Phil (1)  
Carter, Phil (2)  
Dart, Robert  
Graver, Dorothy  
Merrivale Community Association  
Taylor, Max (1)  
Taylor, Max (2)  
Warrnambool City Council  
Warrnambool Ratepayers Association  
Williams, Judith

### Public hearing

The following people spoke at the public hearing:

Taylor, Max  
Cr. Arnaud, Debbie (Mayor, on behalf of Warrnambool City Council)  
Mason, Andrew (Council CEO, on behalf of Warrnambool City Council)  
James Plozza (Council Manager for Governance, on behalf of Warrnambool City Council)

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