

Local council ward boundary review

# Final Report

Baw Baw Shire Council

April 2024



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(Victorian Electoral Commission)  
April 2024

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## Content approval

Version	Date approved	Approved by
1	3 April 2024	VEC panel member
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## Report Approval

Version	Date approved	Approved by	Brief description
1	8 April 2024	Acting Electoral Commissioner	Final approval



### **Acknowledgement of Country**

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) acknowledges the Bunurong, Gunaikurnai and the Wurundjeri 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.

Baw Baw 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 Baw Baw 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 Baw Baw Shire Council:

- Central Ward
- East Ward
- West 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 14 February 2024. The following 2 models were presented for community consideration:

- Model 1, which proposed changes to the boundaries of all wards.
- Model 2, which proposed changes to the boundaries of all wards but with different ward boundaries to Model 1.

A summary of the models presented can be found on [page 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 did not receive any submissions responding to the preliminary report.

### Public hearing

An online public hearing for those wishing to speak about their response submission was scheduled for 2 pm on Friday 15 March 2024. As there were no submissions, the hearing did not go ahead.

## 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.

Baw Baw 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 Baw Baw 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.

Baw Baw Shire Council was also offered 2 optional methods to promote the reviews:

- printed public notices in local newspapers
- targeted social media advertisements for the council area.

Baw Baw Shire Council took up the option for local newspaper notices but not the option for targeted social media.

### Public consultation

The VEC encouraged input to the ward boundary review of Baw Baw 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 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 Baw Baw Shire Council

## Profile

Baw Baw Shire is a large rural council in the Gippsland region of Victoria, located about 90 km east of central Melbourne. The shire covers an area of 4,028 km<sup>2</sup> and has a population of 57,626 (ABS 2022a). It is bordered by Mansfield and Yarra Ranges shire councils to the north, Wellington Shire Council and Latrobe City Council to the east, South Gippsland Shire Council to the south, and Cardinia Shire Council to the west.

The shire consists of 98 localities, ranging from major population centres to remote localities with very few or no residents at all. Warragul (19,134) and Drouin (14,764) are the 2 main population centres and account for nearly 60% of the shire's total population (ABS 2022a, ABS 2022c, ABS 2022d). There are several medium-sized townships, including Longwarry, Trafalgar, and Yarragon along the Princes Highway, and Neerim South to the north of Warragul. Many small townships and rural settlements service surrounding primary industries (DTP 2023).

The Traditional Custodians of the land in the Baw Baw Shire Council area are the Bunurong, Gunaikurnai and the Wurundjeri peoples. However, Traditional Custodians for the area north of Drouin and into the Great Dividing Range have not been formally recognised (VAHC 2023).

## Landscape

Bordered by the Great Dividing Range to the north and the Strzelecki Ranges to the south, the shire stretches from Toongabbie in the east to Longwarry in the west. Most of the shire's population centres are located along the Princes Highway and the Melbourne-Bairnsdale railway line, which cross the south of the council area from east to west.

Four reservoirs provide water to both Melbourne and the Gippsland region, including the Thomson Reservoir, which provides around 60% of Melbourne's water storage capacity (Melbourne Water 2024). Much of the shire's north is designated as conservation reserves, state and national parks, or forest plantations. The Baw Baw National Park covers 135 km<sup>2</sup> of the Baw Baw Plateau.

Forests and plantations make up 50% of the total council area, or nearly 60% when including nature reserves (ABARES 2022). A third of the land is used for agriculture (ABARES 2022), most of which is in the southern half of the council. The Baw Baw Shire area is one of the most productive council areas in Australia for dairy and potatoes (DAFF 2022).

## Community

The population of Baw Baw Shire Council is projected to increase by nearly 30,000 residents by 2041, to reach over 87,000 (.id 2022b). Most of this growth is expected in Warragul and Drouin (DTP 2023), with moderate growth in the towns of Trafalgar, Yarragon, Longwarry, and Neerim South. The council is actively working to restrict growth in its rural towns because of environmental constraints, as well as difficulties in servicing these areas and a desire to maintain their rural character (DTP 2023).



The median age in the council at the last Census was 41, which was lower than the median of 43 for inner regional councils overall but higher than the Victorian average of 38 years (ABS 2022a, 2022b). The main ancestry groups reported at the last Census were English, Australian, Scottish and Irish. Australia was the country of birth for nearly 82% of the shire's residents, similar to other inner regional Victorian councils, but higher than Victoria as a whole which is 65% (ABS 2022a, 2022b).

The top 5 employment industries are health care and social assistance, construction, education and training, retail, and agriculture, forestry, and fishing. Dairy farming and forestry have been important industries for the shire, but the number of people employed in these industries has declined, particularly with the end of native forest harvesting from January 2024 (ABS 2017, VicForests 2023). Personal and household median weekly incomes are \$726 and \$1,495 respectively, similar to other inner regional councils but lower than the Victoria as a whole at \$803 and \$1,759 respectively (ABS 2022a, 2022b).

As in other regional councils, Baw Baw Shire Council has a high proportion of separate dwellings at 91.5%, compared to the rest of Victoria at 73%. There is also a rate of home ownership of 78% which is higher than average in Victoria of 68.3% (ABS 2022a). There is a slightly higher proportion of family households in the shire at 38.4% of total households than compared to regional Victoria where family households make up 34.7% of total households (.id 2022b).

## Current electoral structure

Baw Baw Shire Council has a total of 9 councillors and is divided into 3 wards with 3 councillors per ward (Central, East, and West wards).



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

There are an estimated 46,101 voters in Baw Baw Shire Council, with an estimated ratio of 5,122 voters per councillor.

By October 2024, the voter-to-councillor ratio of East Ward is forecast to be outside -10%.

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

## Last review

The VEC conducted an electoral representation review of Baw Baw Shire Council in 2015. 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 Baw Baw Shire Council continue to consist of 9 councillors elected from 3 wards (3 wards with 3 councillors each)

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 findings and response

The current ward boundary review of Baw Baw Shire Council was required due to the voter-to-councillor ratio in East Ward, which was projected to be outside of the legislated +/-10% range at the October 2024 local council election.

Major considerations of this review were the geographic features of the council, as well as the uneven population distribution and rate of growth across the council area. The population concentration and growth around Drouin and Warragul is far higher than anywhere else in the shire, and this pattern of growth is forecast to continue into the future. Because of these factors, it was a challenge to create wards of similar size that would adequately capture and provide representation for communities of interest across the shire.

To correct the deviation of East Ward, it was necessary to adjust the boundaries of all wards of the council.

## Preliminary report

The VEC's ward boundary review of Baw Baw Shire Council began with the release of a preliminary report on Wednesday 14 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 Baw Baw Shire Council and chose the strongest 2 models for public consultation. The following 2 models were presented for community consideration:

- Model 1, which proposed changes to the boundaries of all wards.
- Model 2, which proposed changes to the boundaries of all wards but with different ward boundaries to Model 1.

### Model 1

In Model 1, both West and Central wards were reduced in area and had a greater urban focus, while the rural-dominated East Ward increased in size. Central and West wards captured areas zoned predominantly for residential development in the vicinity of Drouin and Warragul. Of the 2 preliminary models, the wards proposed under Model 1 had a higher likelihood of remaining within the +/-10% deviation range until at least 2028.

In this model, Central Ward's southern boundary was shifted north to follow the Warragul locality boundary and East West Road between Butlers Track and Lardners Track. As a result, most of the Warragul South locality was in the rural-focused East Ward. The adjusted ward boundary was also easier to identify.

Changes to West Ward were more substantial, with areas in the north and south transferred to East Ward. In the north, the boundary was adjusted to follow the Tarago River. South of Drouin, the ward boundary was adjusted to follow the Drouin and Longwarry locality boundaries. The

one exception to this was a small section of Drouin South, north of Ringin Road, that was included in West Ward to capture areas zoned for residential development within the ward.

## **Model 2**

In Model 2, the southern boundary of Central Ward was shifted north to follow the Warragul locality boundary, bringing all of Warragul South into the proposed East Ward.

The only changes suggested to the boundaries of West Ward were north of Drouin, where a new boundary was created following locality boundaries. Ada, Brandy Creek, Gentle Annie, and Jindivick moved from West Ward to East Ward and the southern boundaries of Jindivick and Gentle Annie formed the new ward boundary. Although Brandy Creek and Jindivick are close to both Drouin and Warragul, their more rural characteristics suggested these localities may have common interests with communities in the rural East Ward.

Compared to Model 1, Model 2 proposed fewer changes to the current boundaries and would not impact as many voters compared with Model 1. However, a major drawback of Model 2 was that the wards of this model were less likely to remain within the legislated +/-10% range through to 2028.

## **Response submissions**

The VEC accepted response submissions to the preliminary report from Wednesday 14 February 2024 until 5 pm on Wednesday 6 March 2024. The VEC did not receive any submissions from the public responding to the preliminary report.

## **Public hearing**

An online public hearing for those wishing to speak about their response submission was scheduled for 2 pm on Friday 15 March 2024. As there were no submissions, the hearing did not go ahead.

## 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 did not receive any community submissions commenting on the models presented in the preliminary report. It considers that either of the proposed ward boundaries presented in each would likely represent the council's communities of interest, however on balance Model 1 was deemed to be the stronger of the two models presented in the preliminary report. After considering the models presented in the preliminary report and the requirements of the Act, the VEC has chosen to put forward Model 1, with minor adjustments, as the VEC's recommended model.

In Model 1, the Tarago River forms the entirety of the new northern boundary of West Ward and creates a strong physical boundary between the new East and West wards. The southern boundary, which largely follows the Longwarry and Drouin locality boundaries, Main South Road and Ringin Road, allows for the entirety of the Drouin urban growth zone to be contained within West Ward.

The northern, eastern and western boundaries of Central Ward are essentially unchanged. Central Ward's adjusted southern boundary largely follows the Warragul locality boundary, diverging from it along East West Road in the south-west corner of the ward to include the entirety of the Warragul urban growth zone within Central Ward.

East Ward retains all areas currently within the ward, and expands to take in the localities of Ada, Gentle Annie, Jindivick and Labertouche, and portions of Longwarry North and Drouin West north of the Tarago River. In the south, the localities of Athlone, Heath Hill, Modella and Ripplebrook move into East Ward in their entirety, as do the areas of Drouin South and Warragul South that are south of Ringin Road and East West Road respectively.

A major benefit of Model 1 is the likely longevity of the wards, which are forecast to remain within the legislated +/-10% deviation range until at least the 2028 council elections. Although Model 2 presented a minimal change approach to the existing boundaries, a major drawback of the model was the higher likelihood of the wards in Model 2 moving outside +/-10% by 2028, which would likely result in the council needing another ward boundary review prior to the 2028 elections. As such, Model 1 was preferred as it provides boundaries with greater longevity and therefore greater continuity for communities in the council.

Another benefit of Model 1 is the creation of wards that are primarily urban or rural, which may help facilitate effective representation for these distinct interests. A theme that has emerged

from previous reviews is that residents have tended to form communities of interest based on land use as much as geographical location, and the ward boundaries of Model 1 aim to reflect these communities. The Central and West ward boundaries capture all residential and urban land zones of Warragul and Drouin respectively, while the areas that East Ward gains from the other two wards are areas zoned for farming and rural activities.

A final benefit of Model 1 is the limited impact of the ward boundary changes on voters. Despite West Ward being reduced to around one-fifth of its existing land size, only 3.8% of currently enrolled electors in Baw Baw Shire would be affected by the changes to ward boundaries. Based on enrolments at the time of the review, Model 1 results in 1,759 voters becoming part of East Ward – 1,690 of those from West Ward and 69 from Central Ward. While even fewer voters would be impacted under Model 2 (702), on balance the longevity of ward boundaries in Model 1 was considered a more favourable outcome for the council as a whole.

It is noted that, in the effort to create wards that will comply until 2028, the area of East Ward is significantly larger than Central and West wards. East Ward was also very large under Model 2. This is a continuation from the current ward boundaries, as a large rural ward is unavoidable due to the uneven population distribution and rate of growth across the council area. The majority of the council area, captured within East Ward, is sparsely populated and experiencing low growth, while in contrast the western area of the council around Drouin and Warragul is more densely populated with higher rates of growth. Given the forecast growth for Drouin and Warragul, this ward size discrepancy is likely to increase even further over time. While this issue for the structure of Baw Baw Shire Council cannot be addressed via a ward boundary review (which can only adjust the location of existing ward boundaries) it may be able to be resolved in the future via a full electoral structure review.

While no submissions were received suggesting any further boundary adjustments to Model 1, 2 minor improvements to strengthen boundary lines have been incorporated into the final recommendation, which adjust small sections of Central and West wards. In Central Ward, the current northern boundary follows the locality boundary for Warragul that was in place when this boundary was first created at the time of the 2008 electoral representation review. This locality boundary has subsequently changed. The old locality boundary runs through one property, and to rectify this the Central Ward boundary has been adjusted to follow the northern boundary of the property, ensuring it sits entirely within Central Ward. In West Ward, the Longwarry locality boundary is used as the ward boundary in the south-west of the ward. This locality boundary runs through one property, and to rectify this the West Ward boundary has been adjusted to follow the northern boundary of the property, ensuring it sits entirely within West Ward. These adjustments do not impact any voters.

The panel notes that the name of East Ward may no longer be appropriate under the recommended boundary adjustments, given that the new ward would reach from the east to the west of the council. However, ward name changes are not a consideration of this review. The minister may wish to consider a future ward name change for this council.

While the VEC acknowledges there are both potential benefits and drawbacks for this recommended model, it considers the boundary adjustments of this model to have the best potential to promote fair and equitable representation for voters in Baw Baw 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 Baw Baw Shire Council:

- Central Ward
- East Ward
- West Ward

The recommended adjustments were presented as Model 1 in the preliminary report, with one minor adjustment incorporated.

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.

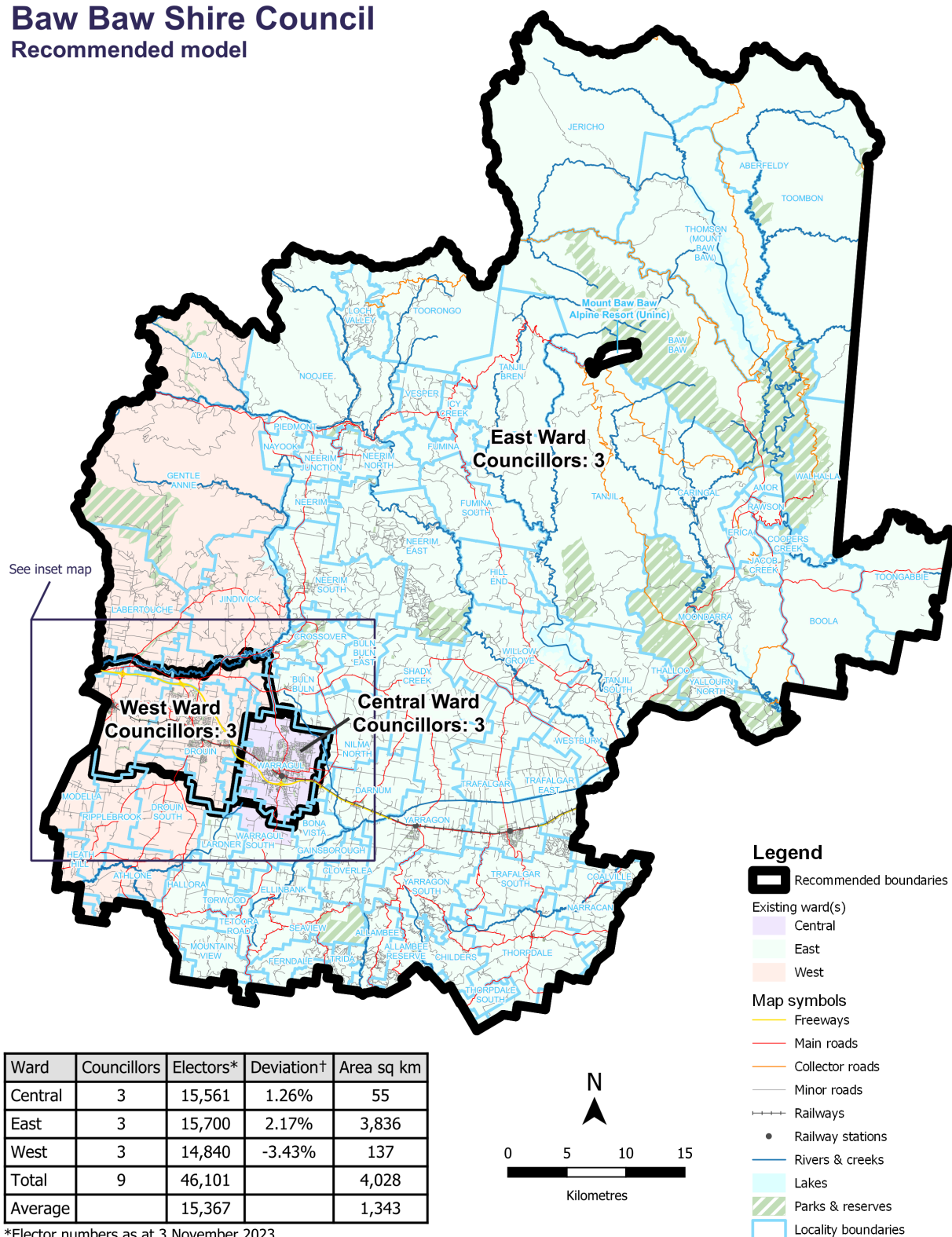
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# Appendix 1: Map of recommended model

## Baw Baw Shire Council Recommended model



\*Elector numbers as at 3 November 2023

†The deviations of all wards are projected to be within +/-10% by the time of the 2024 local government elections.

Map prepared by:



Data used:



Layers for alignment:  
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### Data for recommended model

Ward	Electors*	Deviation†	Area# (square km)
Central	15,561	+1.26%	55
East	15,700	+2.17%	3,836
West	14,840	-3.43%	137
<b>Total</b>	<b>46,101</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>4,028</b>
<b>Average</b>	<b>15,367</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>1,343</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**

### **Response submissions**

There were no submissions received.

### **Public hearing**

As there were no submissions, the public hearing did not go ahead.

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