

Local council electoral structure review

# Final Report

Northern Grampians Shire Council

May 2023

Revised July 2023

### Acknowledgement of Country

The electoral representation advisory panel acknowledges the Barengi Gadjin and Dja Dja Wurrung peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters for which it is holding this review and pays respects to ancestors and Elders past, present and emerging. The panel acknowledges their custodianship for many thousands of years and their continuing living culture.

### Document history and version control

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2	21 July 2023	Program Sponsor	Revised version with inclusion of good governance wording

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## Executive summary

An independent electoral structure review panel appointed by the Minister for Local Government has reviewed the electoral structure of Northern Grampians Shire Council.

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

The panel looked at:

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

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

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

## Recommendation

The electoral representation advisory panel recommends that Northern Grampians Shire Council adopt a multi-councillor ward structure, with a total of 6 councillors, 3 wards and 2 councillors per ward.

The recommended names for the 3 wards in this electoral structure are Central Ward, Grampians Ward and Kara Kara Ward.

This advice is submitted to the Minister for Local Government as required by the Terms of Reference of the electoral representation advisory panel and the Act.

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

## Summary of approach

### Developing electoral structure models

The panel considered a range of factors when deciding on its final recommendation including:

- research and analysis
- voter growth or decline over time
- public submissions (see below).

More information on the way the panel decided on the models is available on [page 7](#).

### Preliminary submissions

The panel received 11 preliminary submissions. Of these, no submissions included maps.

A summary of the preliminary submissions is contained in the preliminary report, available on the VEC website at [vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au)

### Preliminary report

The panel published a preliminary report on Wednesday 15 March 2023 with the following electoral structure models for public consultation:

- Model 1: an unsubdivided electoral structure with 7 councillors.
- Model 2: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 6 councillors, 3 wards and 2 councillors per ward.

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

### Response submissions

The panel received 15 submissions responding to the preliminary report. Of these, no submissions included maps.

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

### Public hearing

The panel held an online public hearing for those wishing to speak about their response submission at 2 pm on Wednesday 12 April 2023. Five 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 elections.

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

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

For Northern Grampians Shire Council, the electoral representation advisory panel examined:

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

For subdivided structures, it also examined:

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

The Act requires electoral structures to provide fair and equitable representation and facilitate good governance. For subdivided structures, each ward must have an approximately equal number of voters per councillor (within +/-10% of the average). While conducting the review, the panel also noted the role of a councillor as specified under section 28 of the Act.

### The electoral representation advisory panel

The panel that conducted the electoral structure review of Northern Grampians Shire Council had 3 members:

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

The panel is independent of councils and the Victorian State government.

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

## Public engagement

### Public information program

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

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

### Public consultation

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

- preliminary submissions at the start of the review
- response submissions to the preliminary report
- an online public hearing for anyone who made a response submission to speak to the panel and expand on their submission.

Public submissions are an important part of the review process and are considered alongside other factors addressed during the review. These are outlined below.

## Developing recommendations

The panel's final recommendations comply with the Act and were developed through careful consideration of:

- research and analysis conducted by the VEC support team, including geospatial and demographic data
- rates or patterns of population and voter change over time, and relevant forecasts of growth or decline based on forecast information provided by .id (informed decisions, a company specialising in demographics and forecasting)
- input received during public consultation.

### Deciding on the number of councillors

The Act allows local councils to have between 5 and 12 councillors, but neither the Act nor the Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2020 specify how the number of councillors is to be

determined. As such, the recommendation put forward by the panel in this report is guided by the Act's intention for fairness and equity in voter representation and the consequent facilitation of good governance.

In examining the appropriate number of councillors for Northern Grampians Shire Council, the panel considered the following criteria:

- the population and number of voters in the council area compared to other councils with a similar population size and number of voters in the same category (for example, other comparable rural shire councils)
- patterns of population change and voter growth or decline in the council area over time
- the current and past numbers of councillors
- the representation needs of communities of interest in the council area
- whether a particular type of electoral structure requiring a certain number of councillors would best suit the council (see 'Deciding the electoral structure' below)
- any matter raised in public submissions not already listed above.

Generally, local councils with a larger number of voters will have a higher number of councillors. Large populations are often more likely to have greater diversity, both in the type and number of communities of interest and issues relating to representation. However, the ideal number of councillors can also be influenced by the particular circumstances of a council, such as the:

- nature and complexity of services the council provides
- geographic size and topography of the area
- forecast population and voter growth or decline
- social diversity.

### **Deciding the electoral structure**

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

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

When developing electoral structure models for Northern Grampians Shire Council, the panel considered these criteria:

- whether the structure would comply with section 15(2) of the Act (see below), and for how long it would likely comply
- the appropriate number of councillors, as outlined above
- whether meaningful and effective ward boundaries can be established and whether these would be easily identifiable to local communities



- representation of communities of interest
- the voter distribution and physical features of the area, and the impact these may have on the shape and size of any wards
- past elections for the council, including:
  - numbers of candidates nominating
  - incidences of uncontested elections
  - rates of informal voting.
- other matters raised in public submissions not already listed above.

Under section 15(2) of the Act, subdivided structures must aim for an approximately equal number of voters per councillor in each ward. This means the number of voters represented by each councillor in a ward should be within +/-10% of the average number of voters per councillor for all wards.

During this review, the panel aimed to recommend a structure that would comply with section 15(2) at the time of the 2024 local government elections and, if possible, also comply based on voter numbers at the time the review was conducted. The panel used forecasts of population and voter change to assess compliance at the 2024 elections with as much accuracy as possible. In some cases, population change and other factors impacting voter numbers mean it is not always possible to create a subdivided structure that complies with section 15(2) based on voter numbers that were current at the time of the review as well as forecast voter numbers. In these instances, the panel prioritised compliance at the 2024 local government elections to ensure each vote will have approximately equal value at the 2024 election.

One of the factors that may impact compliance with section 15(2) is the number of current and forecast voters with ratepayer-based voting entitlements. Voters' rolls are a combination of state electors (making up the majority of a voters' roll) and a smaller number of ratepayer-based voting entitlements. The Act introduced changes to ratepayer-based entitlement categories, which come into full effect at the 2024 local government elections. As this will change the makeup of voters' rolls, and therefore compliance with section 15(2) of the Act, this is a consideration of the panel during this review.

### **Deciding on ward names**

The panel has taken the following approach to naming wards.

1. Existing ward names were retained where possible and appropriate (if the name was still relevant to the area covered by a ward).
2. Where a new name was required, the panel based this on features such as:
  - places (registered under the *Geographic Place Names Act 1998*) located in the ward
  - compass directions
  - native flora or fauna.

### **Use of Aboriginal language**

The panel recognises that there should first be meaningful consultation with local Aboriginal communities and groups before a ward be named using Aboriginal language. Meaningful consultation is a significant and important process which the panel is not able to undertake within the timeframes of the current review program.

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

Unregistered names using Aboriginal language have not been put forward by the panel as new ward names. While the panel supports the adoption of names based on Aboriginal language, an appropriate consultation process should be followed before doing so.

# About Northern Grampians Shire Council

## Profile

Northern Grampians Shire Council is in central-western Victoria, approximately 230 kms from Melbourne. It covers an area of 5,730 km<sup>2</sup> and shares its borders with Yarriambiack and Buloke shires to the north, the Loddon, Central Goldfields and Pyrenees shires to the east, the Rural City of Ararat and Southern Grampians Shire to the south and the Rural City of Horsham to the west.

The Traditional Custodians of the land within Northern Grampians Shire are the Barengi Gadjin and Dja Dja Wurrung peoples.

## Landscape

The shire borders contain significant national parks, including the well-known Gariwerd (Grampians) in the south-east and Kara Kara in the north-east. The Wimmera River flows in a north-west direction through the shire and the Avoca River comprises part of shire's eastern boundary.

Stawell and St Arnaud are the 2 largest towns – home to over 70% of the shire's population. The towns are approximately 74 km apart, with no direct main road connecting them. Smaller towns in the shire include Halls Gap, Great Western, Glenorchy, Navarre and Marnoo.

The main transport corridor is the Western Highway, which links Horsham, Stawell and Nhill with Melbourne and Adelaide. The Sunraysia Highway (running north-south) and the Wimmera Highway (running east-west) pass through St Arnaud, providing direct access to Bendigo and Maryborough.

Two rail lines run through the shire. These are the east-west interstate railway line connecting Melbourne and Adelaide, which runs through the towns of Stawell and Glenorchy, and a freight line, which connects Maryborough and Mildura and runs through St Arnaud.

## Community

As is common throughout regional Victoria, the shire's median age of 49 years is higher than the state average and varies across the shire. Halls Gap has a median age of 45 years, while St Arnaud has a median age of 52 years (ABS 2021). The shire has declined in population, from 12,054 in 2011 to 11,948 in 2021, with this trend forecast to continue. By 2028, the population is projected to be approximately 11,700 (ABS, 2021a; ABS, 2021d; ABS, 2021c; REMPLAN, 2023b).

The unemployment rate in the shire sits at 3.7%, which is lower than the regional Victoria average. The largest contributor to annual economic output in the shire is manufacturing, representing 21.1% of total output. More than half the population participates in the labour force, with the main employment sectors being health care and social assistance (17.7%), agriculture, forestry and fishing (13.2%) and manufacturing (11.5%). Accommodation and food services (7.4%) is an important employment sector in the tourist region of Gariwerd (Grampians

National Park) and specifically for the town of Halls Gap (ABS, 2021a; ABS, 2021d; REMPLAN, 2023a).

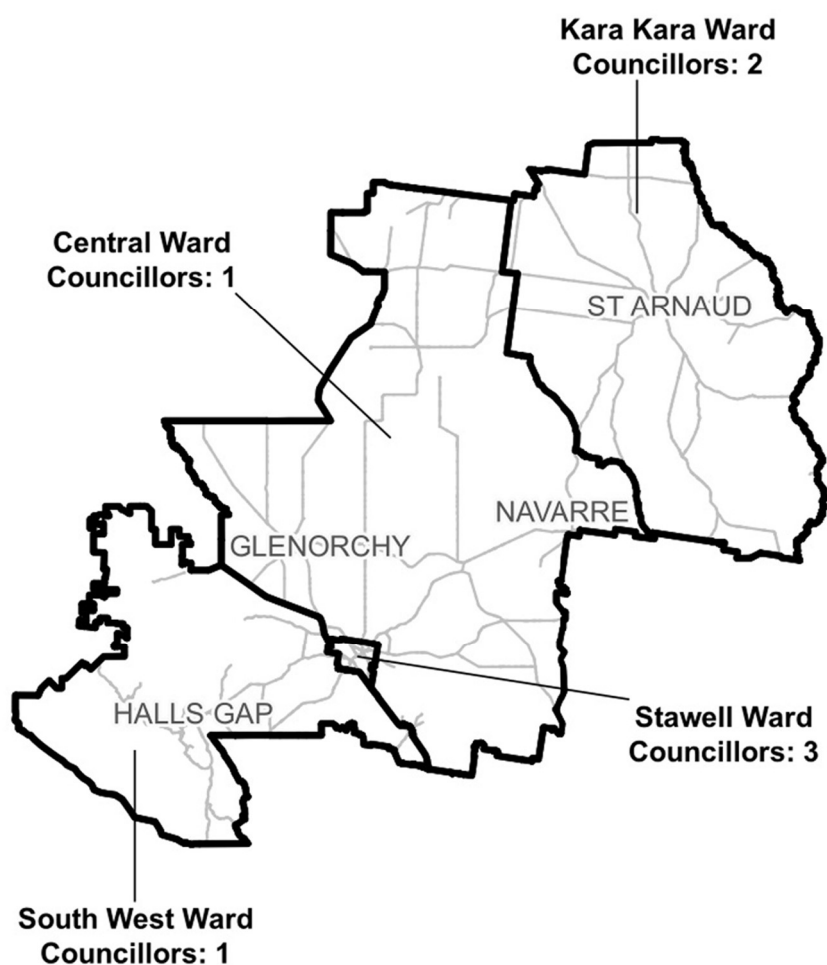
Of the population, 81.2% were born in Australia, and 85.9% speak only English at home, which is slightly below the regional Victoria average (ABS, 2021a; ABS, 2021e). People of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander heritage are 1.9% of the population, close to the regional Victoria average (2.0%) (ABS, 2021a; ABS, 2021e).

Across the shire, median personal, family and household incomes are lower than the regional Victoria averages. Home ownership is widespread, with about 48% of homes owned outright and a further 27% owned with a mortgage. Fewer people rent within the shire (20.1%) than in regional and rural Victoria overall (23.6%) (ABS, 2021a; ABS, 2021e).

## Current number of councillors and electoral structure

Northern Grampians Shire Council is divided into 4 wards with a total of 7 councillors:

- one ward with 3 councillors (Stawell)
- one ward with 2 councillors (Kara Kara)
- 2 wards with one councillor each (Central and South West).



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

There are currently approximately 10,172 voters in Northern Grampians Shire Council, equating to a ratio of 1,453 voters per councillor.

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

## **Last electoral structure review**

The VEC conducted an electoral representation review of Northern Grampians Shire Council in 2020. 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 Northern Grampians Shire Council continue to consist of 7 councillors elected from 4 wards (one ward with 3 councillors, one ward with 2 councillors and 2 wards with one councillor).

Visit the VEC website at [vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au) to access a copy of the 2020 representation review final report.

Before the 2020 review, a representation review of Northern Grampians Shire Council was completed in 2007. This resulted in the current electoral structure being implemented. Before the 2007 representation review, Northern Grampians Shire Council comprised of 2 wards with a total of 9 councillors (one ward with 3 councillors and one ward with 6 councillors).

## Preliminary submissions

At the close of submissions on Wednesday 15 February 2023, the panel had received 11 submissions for the electoral structure review of Northern Grampians Shire Council. You can find a list of people who made a preliminary submission in [Appendix 2](#).

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

A summary of the preliminary submissions is contained in the preliminary report, available on the VEC website at [vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au)

## Preliminary report

A preliminary report was released on Wednesday 15 March 2023. The panel considered public submissions and research findings when formulating the models presented in the preliminary report.

After careful consideration, the following electoral structure models were put forward for public consultation:

- Model 1: an unsubdivided electoral structure with 7 councillors.
- Model 2: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 6 councillors, 3 wards and 2 councillors per ward.

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

## Response submissions

The panel received 15 response submissions to the preliminary report from the public by the deadline of 5 pm on Wednesday 5 April 2023. You can find a list of people or organisations who made a response submission in [Appendix 2](#).

The table below provides an overview of preferences in response submissions. You can read an analysis of submissions below this table.

Table 1: Preferences expressed in response submissions			
Model 1 (unsubdivided, 7 councillors)	Model 2 (3 wards with 2 councillors per ward)	Subdivided but no preferred model indicated	Other
3	8	1	8

\*5 submitters indicated support for more than one option.

Just over half of the submissions supported one of the models that the panel considered during the preliminary stage but did not put forward for further comment in the preliminary report (see 'Other options' below). Of those supporting one of the other options, 5 submissions felt Model 2 was the best alternative. One submission, while firmly arguing against an unsubdivided electoral structure, did not offer support for Model 2 or a different multi-councillor ward structure.

### Model 1

The 3 submissions supporting Model 1 generally argued that it would provide better representation for the communities of interest across the shire. For example, Rebekah Dickinson suggested an unsubdivided structure would allow the council to have more direct and genuine connections with local communities.

Northern Grampians Shire Council argued in its submission that, with 7 councillors, Model 1 would help avoid the chance of tied votes at council meetings and, importantly, reduce the likelihood of uncontested elections. Two other submitters commented that an unsubdivided electoral structure would remove any need for costly boundary alterations in the future.

Arguing against Model 1, some submitters believed that an unsubdivided structure would see the majority of elected councillors coming from Stawell. Peter Rose commented that an unsubdivided structure would disadvantage the town of St Arnaud and those living in the current Kara Kara Ward.

### Model 2

A total of 8 submitters supported Model 2, though most saw it only as an alternative to one of the preliminary report models the panel considered but did not put forward.

Ian Moerman argued that the 3 wards proposed in Model 2 would be more equitable, as a separate ward for the communities in and around the current Kara Kara Ward would better

allow a St Arnaud candidate to achieve the required quota of votes to be elected to council. Despite not wanting to reduce councillor numbers, Peter Rose felt that having 3 wards with 2 councillors each was the best option for the shire's communities.

Northern Grampians Shire Council argued against Model 2 for two main reasons:

- the division of Stawell along the railway line would create an artificial demarcation of the town
- reducing councillor numbers to 6 would mean an unstable platform for decision-making.

### **Other options**

Several submitters supported a 7 single-councillor ward model, which was not put forward for public comment in the preliminary report.

Halls Gap Residents and Ratepayers Association argued that this option would best serve the community of Halls Gap, given the ward boundaries and council representation would be unchanged. The association also commented that having single-councillor wards across the shire would help spread councillor workload. A submission from Great Western Future Committee also supported this option, arguing that a 7 single-councillor ward model is closest to the current structure and would serve the residents in the shire far better than the models proposed in the preliminary report.



## Public hearing

The panel held an online public hearing for those wishing to speak about their response submission at 2 pm on Wednesday 12 April 2023. A total of 5 people spoke at the hearing. Each speaker was given 10 minutes to speak, with an additional 5 minutes for the panel to ask questions of the speaker.

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

Speaking on behalf of Northern Grampians Shire Council, Councillor Eddy Ostarcevic commented that while the current electoral structure had served the community well, the council understood the necessity under the Act for a new, compliant electoral structure. Ostarcevic stated all councillors supported Model 1, an unsubdivided electoral structure of 7 councillors as the preferred structure moving forward. The council argued a 6-councillor electorate may increase incidences where the mayor needed to cast a deciding vote and could create disharmony for the shire. Additionally, the council felt the proposed new Kara Kara Ward, increasing in size from 1,763 km<sup>2</sup> to 3,267 km<sup>2</sup>, would exacerbate the challenges councillors currently experience serving residents across this ward. The council also pointed out that all councillors, irrespective of the ward they currently represent, already spread themselves across the shire and are involved in issues that impact all of the shire's residents.

Bruce Ahchow, speaking on behalf of the Great Western Future Committee, sought to have a 7 single-councillor ward structure reintroduced for further consideration. Ahchow stated the committee did not support Model 1 due to the shire's distinct and diverse economic regions, where, for example, the towns of Great Western and Halls Gap were centred on viticulture and tourism. As such, the committee believed that having one councillor represent a ward covering the Great Western and Halls Gap areas would best serve these towns and industries.

Kevin O'Donoghue spoke on behalf of the Halls Gap Residents and Ratepayers Association and also supported an alternative 7 single-councillor ward model. O'Donoghue suggested the current structure and South West Ward had served its communities well, and argued that an unsubdivided electoral structure (Model 1) or a multi-councillor ward structure (Model 2), which grouped communities in the current South West Ward with part of Stawell, would lead to decreased representation for the Halls Gap area. Responding to a question from the panel about the 2 councillors that would represent the Halls Gap and south-east Stawell areas under Model 2, O'Donoghue said both councillors would more likely support the interests of Stawell when it came to issues impacting communities in the proposed Grampians Ward.

Representing the Community Association of Halls Gap, David Witham first detailed the many Halls Gap groups the association advocated for. Witham explained that the association generally supported the points raised by representatives of the Great Western Future Committee and the Halls Gap Residents and Ratepayers Association. Witham also argued the workload of councillors would increase under an unsubdivided structure, and this would directly impact the representation provided by their current councillor. In response to a question from

the panel about the community accepting Model 2, Witham said they would have to ‘live with it’ but believed they would have better representation under a single-councillor ward structure.

Peter Rose from St Arnaud, the final speaker to present to the panel, expressed support for Model 2 and reiterated the arguments in his preliminary and response submissions. Rose’s core argument was that Model 1 would group the Stawell, Halls Gap and Great Western communities with the St Arnaud community when, he felt, there were no strong connections between St Arnaud and the south-west areas of the shire. Rose contended that a separate ward should be retained to give the distinct communities in the current Kara Kara Ward strong representation. When asked about the history of uncontested elections in Kara Kara Ward, Rose suggested these occurred because the community was happy with its existing councillors, not because residents weren’t willing to nominate as candidates.

Before the public hearing ended, the Chair of the panel clarified why a 7 single-councillor ward model was not put forward for further comment in the preliminary report. This is summarised in the ‘Findings and recommendation’ section of this report on [page 19](#).

## Findings and recommendation

The panel noted that several response submissions criticised the panel's decision not to put forward a 7 single-councillor ward structure for further consideration.

While no preliminary submissions proposed a 7 single-councillor ward structure, the panel did examine such a model when deciding which to put forward for public feedback in the preliminary report. This structure was initially considered because it would maintain the current number of councillors, the ward boundaries followed geographical features and they appeared to capture communities of interest to some degree. However, this model was not put forward for public comment for the following reasons.

The panel viewed splitting the town of Stawell between 4 wards and the town of St Arnaud between 2 wards would be unfavourable for the representation of those communities. More importantly, the model presented a high risk that the voter-to-councillor ratios in various wards would move outside of the legislated +/-10% tolerance before the 2024 local government elections. The panel acknowledges that this important reason for not including this as a preliminary model was not fully explained in the preliminary report and so sought to clarify this at the public hearing. The following paragraphs add more detail to this reason.

The Act requires the panel to seek to ensure the electoral structures it recommends comply with section 15(2). This section of the Act specifies that, where an electoral structure has wards, each ward has an approximately equal number of voters per councillor and that this number does not vary from the average number of voters per councillor by more than 10%.

The shire has a relatively low number of electors compared to other Victorian rural shire councils, making voter-to-councillor ratios for wards more sensitive to small changes in population and voter numbers. In addition, projected population change is uneven across the shire. Ratepayer-based voting entitlements are also unevenly distributed across the council area and the number of ratepayers likely to enrol for the 2024 elections is uncertain. These factors mean single-councillor ward structures would be inherently unstable over time.

Nonetheless, the panel tested several versions of the single-councillor ward model in the preliminary phase. The 7 single-councillor ward model discussed in the preliminary report was the most stable version of this structure the panel created, but still carried a significant risk of wards moving outside of the +/-10% tolerance before the 2024 election. As such, the panel felt it would not provide fair and equitable representation at the 2024 election and did not put it forward for community consultation.

## Number of councillors

After considering the requirements of the Act, public submissions and the agreed criteria, the panel found either 6 or 7 councillors to be an appropriate number for Northern Grampians Shire Council.

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

Northern Grampians Shire Council covers an area of 5,730 km<sup>2</sup> and currently has approximately 10,172 voters represented by 7 councillors, equating to a ratio of 1,453 voters per councillor. Under a compliant multi-councillor ward structure with 6 councillors, the ratio of voters per councillor would increase to 1,695, with this being comparable to other rural shires whose ratios range from 1,350 to 2,182 voters per councillor.

In some cases, a local council may have special circumstances that support a recommendation for fewer or more councillors. While the panel did not identify any special circumstances that were new to Northern Grampians Shire Council since the representation review in 2020, the panel also recognised that the geographic features and uneven distribution of voters across the shire make developing a satisfactory subdivided electoral structure for Northern Grampians Shire Council challenging. The Act's requirement for multi-councillor ward structures to have the same number of councillors per ward also poses difficulties, as multi-councillor ward structures are not possible with the current number of councillors. Because of this, the panel also considered subdivided electoral structures with fewer or more councillors. The panel explored whether an increase or decrease in the number of councillors would enable multi-councillor ward structures to be created that may provide more favourable representation for the community. As a result, the panel put forward one option in the preliminary report with fewer councillors: Model 2.

## **Electoral structure**

After considering the requirements of the Act, public submissions and the agreed criteria, the panel found Model 2 the best option for fair and equitable representation for voters in Northern Grampians Shire Council and consequently facilitate good governance.

The panel considered all arguments for and against the proposed models and found Model 2 more likely to offer equitable representation for the different communities across the shire. While Model 1 was a sound and viable model that might have provided good representation for voters across the shire, the panel noted there was substantial support in response submissions for Model 2, and the majority of support in both preliminary and response submissions was for a subdivided electoral structure.

The panel acknowledged the feedback provided by the council in their 2 submissions and at the public hearing, noting the logical arguments provided in support of an unsubdivided structure with 7 councillors.

However, the panel heard concerns that an unsubdivided structure may lead to reduced representation for some areas of the shire, uncertainty about which councillor to approach to discuss issues, and the potential for reduced councillor accountability. The panel was concerned that the councillors might need to travel excessive distances to fulfil their duties across an unsubdivided structure. The panel also recognised the various communities in the

shire might mean a subdivided structure would be more suitable. The panel also noted that there were no thematic concerns raised in response submissions or via the public hearing process in relation to the division of Stawell across 2 wards in Model 2.

While Model 2 reduces councillor numbers from 7 to 6, this is in line with similar councils and was not considered a major drawback by the panel. Rather, the panel considered having fewer councillors may help reduce uncontested elections in the shire, and that having 2 councillors per ward may help councillors in each ward to share workloads equitably. The panel also noted that councillors may not have to travel as far under Model 2 as under an unsubdivided structure and considered this would balance the possible increase in councillor workloads resulting from fewer councillors.

The panel recognised that several submissions referenced the lack of connection between the communities in the north-east of the shire and the main population centres in the south and south-western parts of the shire. The multi-councillor ward structure provided by Model 2 reflects this community feedback.

Model 2 responds to the community's desire for representation under a ward-based electoral structure and recognises the discrete communities of interest across the shire. This model's structure also complies with the requirements of the Act, with voter projections indicating that all 3 wards are likely to remain within the +/-10% tolerance for both the 2024 and 2028 local government elections.

The panel noted valid arguments in favour of and against the unsubdivided and subdivided electoral structures examined in this review. While it is not possible for an electoral structure to address all the issues in the shire, the panel considers Model 2 best for promoting fair and equitable representation for voters in Northern Grampians Shire Council and consequently facilitate good governance under the requirements of the Act.

## Ward names

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

- Kara Kara Ward and Central Ward: The existing names of these wards under the current electoral structure. Combined the new wards cover similar areas to the existing wards.
- Grampians Ward: New name based on the significant, heritage-listed national park that runs through the south-western part of the shire. This locality name is registered in the [VICNAMES](#) register.

## The panel's recommendation

The electoral representation advisory panel recommends that Northern Grampians Shire Council adopt a multi-councillor ward structure, with a total of 6 councillors, 3 wards and 2 councillors per ward.

The recommended names for the 3 wards in this electoral structure are Central Ward, Grampians Ward and Kara Kara Ward.

This advice is submitted to the Minister for Local Government as required by the Terms of Reference of the electoral representation advisory panel and the *Local Government Act 2020* (Vic). This electoral structure was designated as Model 2 in the preliminary report.

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

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- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2021a). *Census 2021 All persons QuickStats, Northern Grampians*. <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/LGA25810> accessed 24 January 2023.
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- Geographic Place Names Act 1998* (Vic)
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- Northern Grampians Shire Council. (2023). *About Northern Grampians*. <https://www.ngshire.vic.gov.au/Council/About-Northern-Grampians> accessed 18 January 2023.
- REMPLAN. (2023a). Northern Grampians Shire Council. *Economy, Jobs and Business Insights*. <https://app.rempln.com.au/northerngrampians/economy/summary?state=pW7RFx9Xas2YvKWU6xqO2DIQHJH8GM> accessed 27 January 2023.
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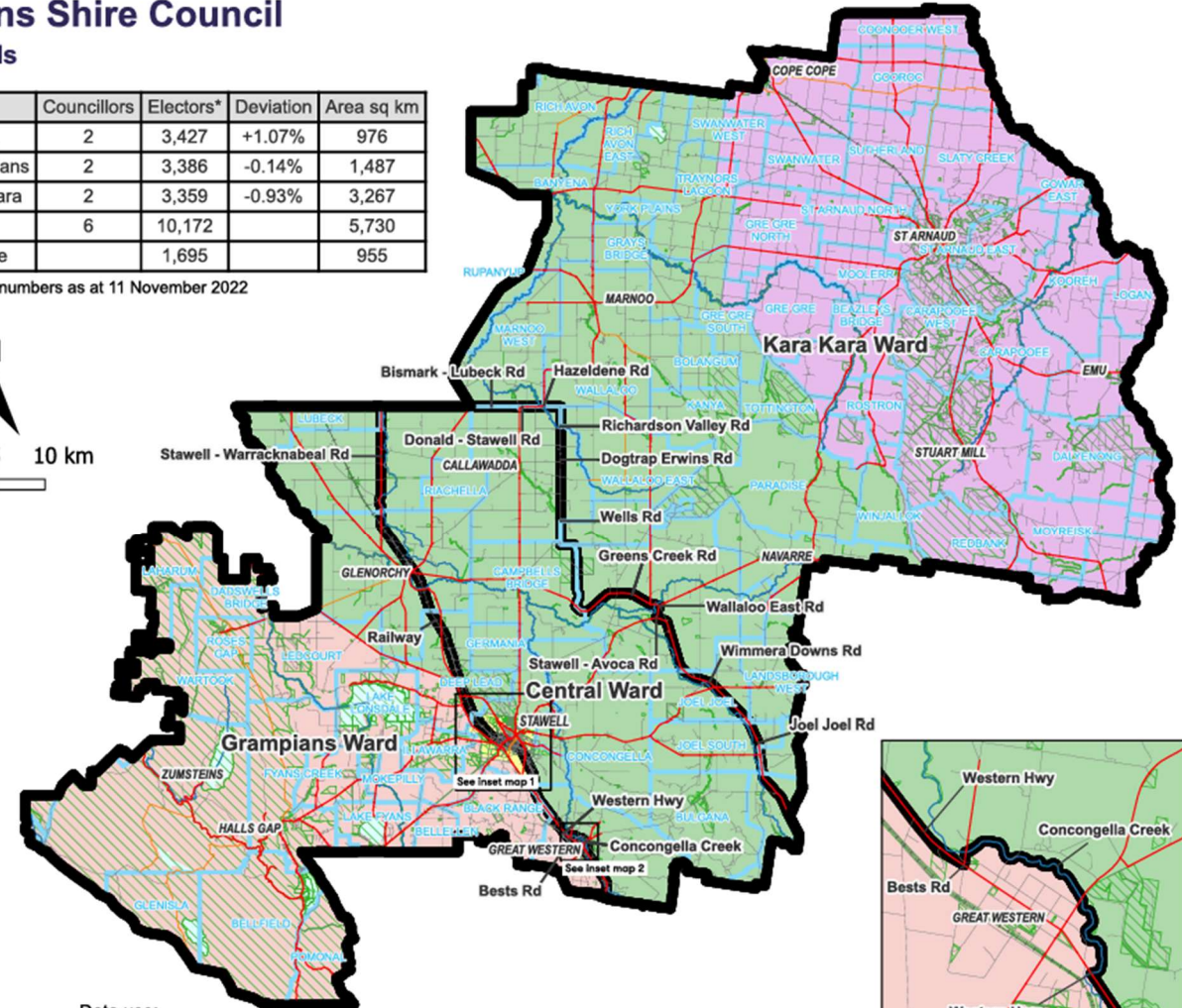
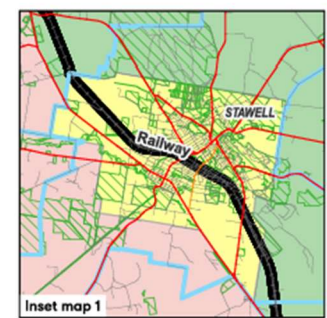
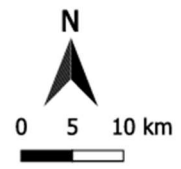
# Appendix 1: Map of recommended structure

## Northern Grampians Shire Council Six councillors, three wards

- Legend**
- Recommended boundaries
  - Existing wards**
    - Central
    - Kara Kara
    - South West
    - Stawell
  - Map symbols**
    - Freeways
    - Main roads
    - Collector roads
    - Minor roads
    - Railways
    - Railway stations
    - Rivers & creeks
    - Lakes
    - Parks & reserves
    - Locality boundaries

Ward	Councillors	Electors*	Deviation	Area sq km
Central	2	3,427	+1.07%	976
Grampians	2	3,386	-0.14%	1,487
Kara Kara	2	3,359	-0.93%	3,267
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>10,172</b>		<b>5,730</b>
<b>Average</b>		<b>1,695</b>		<b>955</b>

\* Elector numbers as at 11 November 2022



Map prepared by:  
 Victorian Electoral Commission

Data use:  
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## Appendix 2: Public involvement

The panel wishes to thank all submitters to the review and speakers at the public hearing for their participation in the review process.

### Preliminary submissions

Preliminary submissions were made by:

Ahchow, Bruce	Kumnick, Anthony
Blatchford, Trevor	Northern Grampians Shire Council
Cairns, Brian	Rose, Peter
Coates, Colin	Ryan, Geraldine
Coles, Sarah	St Arnaud Lions Club
Hughes, Anne	

### Response submissions

Response submissions were made by:

Coleman, Monica and Phil	Lambert, Roderick Bernard
Community Association of Halls Gap	Moerman, Ian
Dickinson, Rebekah	Northern Grampians Shire Council
Feeny, Susanne Noelle	O'Donoghue, Kevin
Great Western Future Committee	Robb, Kerri
Halls Gap Residents and Ratepayers Association	Rose, Peter
Hughes, Anne	Shone, Mary
	Walsh, Tim

### Public hearing

The following people spoke at the public hearing:

- Ahchow, Bruce (on behalf of Great Western Future Committee)
- O'Donoghue, Kevin (on behalf of Halls Gap Residents and Ratepayers Association)
- Ostarcevic, Cr Eddy (on behalf of Northern Grampians Shire Council)
- Rose, Peter
- Witham, David (on behalf of Community Association of Halls Gap)

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