

Local council electoral structure review

# Final Report

Port Phillip City Council

September 2023

## Acknowledgement of Country

The electoral representation advisory panel acknowledges the Bunurong and Wurundjeri as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters for which it held this review and pays respects to ancestors and Elders past, present and emerging. The panel acknowledges their custodianship for many thousands of years and their continuing living culture.

## Report approval:

Version	Date approved	Approved by	Brief description
1	15 September 2023	The Honourable Frank Vincent AO KC	
1	15 September 2023	Ms Janet Dore	
1	18 September 2023	Ms Máiréad Doyle	
1.2	2 October 2023	The Honourable Frank Vincent AO KC	Approved a correction on page 25 (addition of one paragraph regarding uncontested elections).

## Version approval:

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1	26 September 2023	Program Sponsor	Final proofread and confirmed to be sent.
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# Contents

Executive summary.....	4
Recommendation.....	4
<b>Summary of approach .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Developing electoral structure models .....	5
Preliminary report.....	5
Response submissions .....	5
Public hearing .....	5
<b>Background.....</b>	<b>6</b>
About the 2023–24 electoral structure reviews.....	6
The electoral representation advisory panel.....	6
Public engagement .....	7
Developing recommendations.....	7
<b>About Port Phillip City Council .....</b>	<b>11</b>
Profile .....	11
Current number of councillors and electoral structure .....	13
Last electoral structure review.....	13
<b>Preliminary report .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Response submissions .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Public hearing .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Findings and recommendation .....</b>	<b>22</b>
Number of councillors .....	23
Electoral structure .....	23
Ward names .....	26
The panel’s recommendation .....	27
<b>References .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Appendix 1: Map of recommended structure.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Appendix 2: Public involvement .....</b>	<b>31</b>
Response submissions .....	31
Public hearing .....	31

## Executive summary

An independent electoral structure review panel appointed by the Minister for Local Government has reviewed the electoral structure of Port Phillip 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), Port Phillip 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 Port Phillip 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 Port Phillip City Council adopt a 9 single-councillor ward structure – 9 wards with one councillor per ward.

The recommended names for the 9 wards in this electoral structure are: Albert Park Ward, Alma Ward, Balaclava Ward, Elwood Ward, Lakeside Ward, Montague Ward, Port Melbourne Ward, South Melbourne Ward and St Kilda Ward.

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

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

## Summary of approach

### Developing electoral structure models

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

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

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

### Preliminary report

The panel published a preliminary report on Wednesday 19 July 2023 with the following electoral structure models for public consultation:

- Model 1: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 9 councillors – 9 wards with one councillor per ward.
- Model 2: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 9 councillors – 9 wards with one councillor per ward, with different boundaries to Model 1.
- Model 3: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 9 councillors – 9 wards with one councillor per ward, with different boundaries to Model 1 and 2.

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 18 submissions responding to the preliminary report. Of these, 5 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 Tuesday 15 August 2023. Eight 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 Port Phillip City Council) must now have single-councillor ward electoral structures.

Port Phillip 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 Port Phillip City Council had 3 members:

- The Honourable Frank Vincent AO KC (Chairperson)
- Ms Janet Dore
- Acting Executive Director, Electoral Functions Ms Máiréad Doyle.

Please note that during the preliminary report preparation of this review, Ms Máiréad Doyle sat as Acting Chairperson while The Honourable Frank Vincent took a period of leave.

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 Port Phillip 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.

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

- targeted social media advertisements at 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 Port Phillip City Council via:

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

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

## Developing recommendations

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

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

- input received during public consultation.

### **Deciding on the number of councillors**

The Act allows local councils to have between 5 and 12 councillors, but neither the Act nor the Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2020 specify how the number of councillors is to be determined. As such, the recommendation put forward by the panel in this report is guided by the Act's intention for fairness and equity in voter representation and the consequent facilitation of good governance.

In examining the appropriate number of councillors for Port Phillip 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 Port Phillip 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 Port Phillip City Council

## Profile

Port Phillip City Council is located to the south of Melbourne's CBD, along the coast of Port Phillip Bay. It covers an area of 21 km<sup>2</sup>, stretching from Port Melbourne in the north to Elwood in the south. The council area shares its borders with Melbourne and Stonnington city councils in the north, Glen Eira City Council in the east, Bayside City Council in the south, and Port Phillip Bay in the west.

The Traditional Custodians of the lands in Port Phillip City Council are the Bunurong and Wurundjeri peoples.

## Landscape

Port Phillip City Council is the most densely populated council in Victoria, at a rate twice the metropolitan Melbourne average (DTP 2023). While highly urbanised, the council supports a range of land uses and patterns, including high-density and apartment living, reclaimed industrial areas, large commercial and retail centres, and significant coastal and park lands.

The council area includes the suburbs of South Melbourne and parts of Port Melbourne, Southbank, and Melbourne to the north, Albert Park, Middle Park, and St Kilda West in the centre, and St Kilda, Balaclava, Ripponlea, Elwood, and parts of Windsor and St Kilda East in the south (.id 2022a). Its neighbourhoods are distinct and serviced by several retail areas and shopping precincts along Bay Street in Port Melbourne, Carlisle Street in Balaclava, Clarendon Street in South Melbourne, and Fitzroy and Acland streets in St Kilda (.id 2022a).

Compared with neighbouring councils, Port Phillip City Council has a significantly larger proportion of its land dedicated to public and open space, including the foreshore, and Albert Park reserve and lake (Port Phillip City Council 2023). The south and east of the council area are mostly residential, while commercial and retail activities are more prominent in its north and west alongside high-density and apartment living (.id 2022a). Other major features in the council area include Catani Gardens, Gasworks Art Park, the Jewish Museum of Australia, Luna Park, and the Palais Theatre (.id 2022a).

The council area is serviced by an extensive public transport network including the Sandringham train line, St Kilda and Port Melbourne light rails, and multiple tram and bus routes. Major arterial roads, such as St Kilda and Brighton roads, run along its eastern boundary and through its south, while Canterbury Road runs through its centre.

## Community

The population in the council area increased from 100,863 in 2016 to 101,942 in 2021 (ABS 2016, ABS 2022a). Beginning in the 1960s rapid growth and development changed the industrial character of its north, and throughout the 1980s and 90s much land was converted from commercial to residential (.id 2022a). Recent growth overall has been more modest and is expected to continue at an annual rate of around 1.1% until 2028. However, the Fishermans Bend Urban Renewal Area will experience significant rates of growth, mainly in Montague and

Wirraway growth precincts, until 2041 (DTP 2023). For example, growth in Fishermans Bend is expected to grow over 800% in this time and the area around the Domain will increase at nearly 80%. Along an area of St Kilda Road and in South Melbourne growth is expected to be 20–25% (.id 2022b).

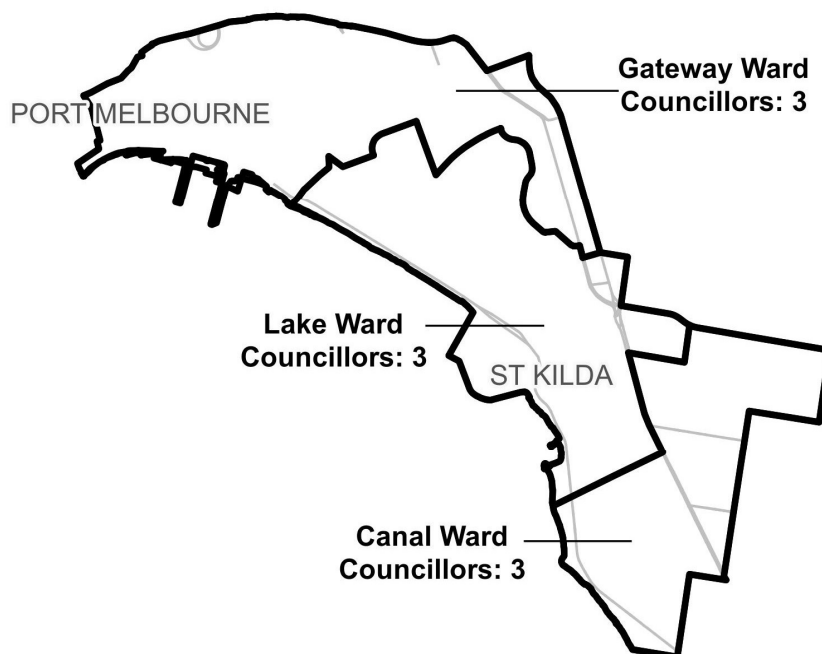
The median age of residents in the council area was 38 in 2021, with the largest age group 30–34 years (11.7%) (ABS 2022a). Overall, 33.1% of the population was born overseas compared with 35.7% for Greater Melbourne overall (.id 2022a). Residents who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people accounted for 0.5% of the council's population, which is slightly less than the 0.7% across Greater Melbourne (ABS 2022a, ABS 2022b). English was the only language spoken at home for 72.5% of residents and 21% of people used a language other than English at home (.id 2022a).

Over 52% of housing was high density (DTP 2023) and just under 49% of residents were renting in 2021 (.id 2022a), at a median weekly rate of \$420 (ABS 2022a). Port Phillip City Council residents have significantly higher mortgage repayments and rental costs compared with average housing costs for Greater Melbourne overall (DTP 2023).

## Current number of councillors and electoral structure

Port Phillip City Council is currently divided into 3 wards with a total of 9 councillors:

- 3 wards with 3 councillors each (Canal, Gateway, and Lake wards)



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

There are an estimated 97,755 voters in Port Phillip City Council, with an estimated ratio of 10,861 voters per councillor.

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

## Last electoral structure review

The VEC conducted an electoral representation review of Port Phillip 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 Port Phillip City Council adopt a structure 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 report

A preliminary report was released on Wednesday 19 July 2023. The panel considered research findings and the requirements of the Act when formulating the models presented in the preliminary report.

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

- Model 1: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 9 councillors – 9 wards with one councillor per ward.
- Model 2: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 9 councillors – 9 wards with one councillor per ward, with different boundaries to Model 1.
- Model 3: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 9 councillors – 9 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 18 response submissions to the preliminary report from the public by the deadline of 5 pm on Wednesday 9 August 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* (9 single-councillor wards)	Model 2* (9 single-councillor wards)	Model 3 (9 single-councillor wards)	No preferred model indicated	Other*
1	8	5	1	5

\*Two submitters indicated support for more than one option

There were 13 submissions from individuals, 4 from community groups and one from Port Phillip City Council (Council). Model 2 was the most preferred with 8 submissions, followed by Model 3 with 5. One submission was supportive of Model 1, while 5 submissions proposed and mapped alternative electoral structures.

Council opposed the move to single-councillor wards, asserting that a multi-councillor ward structure was more suitable and capable of representing communities of interest, as well as adapting to population growth and changes. In contrast, Ben Morgan, Rosemary Jones, Peter Tapp, Margaret Bride and the Port Melbourne Historical and Preservation Society argued in favour of a single-councillor ward structure.

Submitters often emphasised the interests specific to their own neighbourhoods, and while many didn't offer extensive feedback on areas with which they had less familiarity, they were engaging from their unique perspectives. There was a notable amount of opposition to the proposed models, particularly when they directly affected submitters' local areas.

Some submitters that took a broader view encompassing larger sections of the council area also expressed criticism towards the proposed models and suggested alternative electoral structures. Many were not happy with the choice of models put forward for public comment, but nonetheless nominated a preferred model usually with suggested changes improvements.

Numerous submitters were concerned about unequal numbers of electors in some wards across the proposed models. Questions were put forward about the equality and/or legality of setting some wards with elector numbers beyond +/-10% the average number per ward. While this issue is dealt with in more detail below, the discrepancies observed with elector numbers across different wards is to ensure all would be within the tolerance by the next local council election in October 2024.

## **Model 1**

Council's submission provided measured support for Model 1 and noted this position was backed by most councillors but was not unanimous. Council favoured this model as it was considered to have comparatively better boundaries. It proposed some ward boundary changes, such as shifting Gateway West Ward to Williamstown Road and Bridge Street. This change was proposed to ensure Albert Street could be included in Gateway West Ward and to provide clearer, more familiar ward boundaries.

There were 3 submissions opposed to Model 1 due to concerns about dividing the historic suburb of Port Melbourne across Gateway Central and Gateway East wards. It was also suggested Gateway Central Ward failed to coherently reflect the local neighbourhood.

Progressive Port Phillip Inc, argued that because the proposed wards were not based on localities councillors would find it difficult to know who they represented. It objected specifically to dividing Middle Park, extending St Kilda Ward beyond the centre of the suburb, and bringing together parts of Port Melbourne, Fishermans Bend and Albert Park into the one ward.

Morgan was not in favour of splitting South Melbourne across two wards, suggesting the use of Park Street as a ward boundary in this area was only to satisfy the demands of statistics. More generally, Michael Sabada felt it was too flawed in its representation and electors per ward to be repaired. The Victorian Pride Lobby opposed it on the basis that it did not adequately capture communities of interest.

## **Model 2**

Most submitters supported Model 2 as the best structure to capture and represent Port Phillips communities of interest, many of whom advocated for the community in and around St Kilda.

Five individuals and one local community group connected to St Kilda argued it was the most appropriate for the community of interest centred around the suburb. Most felt the proposed St Kilda Ward captured the community reasonably well, but suggested boundary changes to improve it.

There was general agreement that these changes would see St Kilda Ward expand north to encompass Fitzroy, Acland and Victoria streets and the Esplanade. Many felt strongly about including Fitzroy Street in the ward - a hub of major commercial and community activities and seen as integral part of the culture of St Kilda. To compensate for this adjustment and increase in electors, it was suggested the southern boundary should move from Dickens Street to Blessington Street. unChain supported this move to bring the ward closer to the overall average of electors in each ward, and proposed that elector deviations be kept within 5% of the average.

Sabada supported Model 2, stating that the deviations in this model were the most preferable. He also proposed changes to ward boundaries to improve elector deviations in Elwood, Lakeside, and South Melbourne wards by shifting the Lakeside Ward and St Kilda East Ward boundary to Brighton Road. In turn, the boundaries of South Melbourne and Lakeside wards



would move from Toorak Road to Albert Road, and the eastern Elwood Ward boundary from Southey Street to Tennyson Street.

Bride opposed Model 2 as it used Graham Street to split suburbs in Port Melbourne Ward. Council stated that while the southern wards reflected communities of interest, this was not reflected in the north. They argued that a redraw, similar to Model 3, would be necessary to better align with these needs. The Victorian Pride Lobby opposed it for the same reasons stated above. Janet Bolitho argued against it because it combined more recent housing developments in Wirraway and Sandridge wards with well-established areas of South Melbourne where there is little or no historical connection, and separates Fishermans Bend from Port Melbourne.

### **Model 3**

Bolitho, Bride, Vicki Turnbull and the Port Melbourne Historical and Preservation Society Inc supported Model 3, because it contained most of the Port Melbourne locality within Sandridge Ward. Some proposed changing the ward boundaries in this area to use Pickles and Graham streets to capture a greater part of 'historical' Port Melbourne in the one ward. This would allow a section from Rouse Street (along the beach through to Pickles Street and northwest along Graham Street) to be included in Sandridge Ward.

Council argued against Model 3, stating that Alma, Botanical, Carlisle, and Ormond wards would divide communities of interest. Progressive Port Phillip Inc raised a similar point about the splitting of communities in some areas, and parts of St Kilda being included with Middle Park and Elwood where community connections were not particularly strong. It also felt that including a large part of Port Melbourne in a ward with Fishermans Bend was not aligned with communities of interest. It also objected to some of the proposed ward boundaries as arbitrary, including Raglan Street in South Melbourne and Charnwood Road in St Kilda East, and commented that there were better options.

Morgan was opposed to having Port Melbourne in Gasworks Ward and South Melbourne in Lakeside Ward due to these wards not aligning with locality boundaries. Sabada suggested there were issues relating to representation and voter deviations that could not be resolved with boundary changes and Trevor White stated plain opposition to Model 3. The Victorian Pride Lobby opposed it for the same reasons it did the other models.

### **Other options**

Various alternative options were put forward, ranging from adjustments to ward boundaries in any one of the proposed models and to entirely new electoral structures. Council mapped their changes to Model 1 to provide clearer boundaries mainly in the north of the council area. It proposed shifting the Albert Street boundary to Williamstown Road, to include the former in Gateway West Ward. It suggested using main roads as boundaries would be clearer for residents.

A submission from the Victorian Pride Lobby contained a map to acknowledge, capture, and provide better representation to LGBTQIA+ communities in Balaclava, Ripponlea, St Kilda and St Kilda West. Using data on the number of same-sex married couples recorded at the recent

Census, it sought to show a community of interest in areas where the rate was significantly higher than average. It argued distinct communities in and around Balaclava, Ripponlea, St Kilda and St Kilda West needed to be represented in any ward structure.

Justin Halliday submitted a map of an electoral structure based largely on locality boundaries, using parklands and main roads as ward boundaries. Key features of the map were the use of Brighton Road as the western boundaries for Carlisle and Alma wards, containing both to just north of St Kilda Junction.

Progressive Port Phillip Inc submitted a mapped alternate version of Model 2, using major roads and transport links as boundaries with the intent of making ward divisions more recognisable to the community, the number of voters in each ward more equal (or closer to the overall average) and to be better capture communities of interest.

Sabada provided a map of a ward encompassing most of the residential areas of Port Melbourne to capture and represent this community of interest.

## Public hearing

The panel held an online public hearing for those wishing to speak about their response submission at 2 pm on Tuesday 15 August 2023. Eight people spoke to 7 submissions at the hearing.

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

Paul Morgan spoke first on behalf of unChain Inc. and began by outlining the history of the Port Phillip area and the origins of the current suburbs as ‘old villages’. Over time, distinct communities and identities developed and continue as the strong connections with St Kilda demonstrate. Morgan identified Model 2 as the best fit to the ‘contours’ of these suburbs and the communities built around them. He spoke on the deviation permitted across wards and argued that the elector numbers should all be within 5%, which unChain suggested was achievable. When asked by the panel whether population numbers or suburb identity were more important to consider when deciding on ward boundaries, Morgan indicated a preference to keep suburbs together.

Morgan provided additional detail on the nature of unChain as an organisation, including its community-based outlook, focus on local council matters and support for candidates to represent community. While unChain originated in St Kilda, Morgan pointed out that its membership has grown to encompass residents from all parts of the council area.

Bride spoke on behalf of both her own submission as a Port Melbourne resident and as a member of the Port Phillip Historical and Preservation Society (PPHPS). Bride acknowledged her presentation would focus only on Port Melbourne. She highlighted the importance of ensuring ward boundaries represented communities, and that Port Melbourne had historic significance and a strong sense of community and local identity. On this basis Model 3 was preferred as it best captured the suburb of Port Melbourne within one ward and kept the community around Bay Street together. Bride also requested a boundary change to Model 3, so that the area east of Pickles Street and south of Graham Street was included with Port Melbourne in a ward where she felt they belonged.

Bride recognised other communities will identify more suitable boundaries and wards in the different models but reiterated Model 3 worked best for Port Melbourne as it did not split the locality. Following questions from the panel, Bride also noted that while deviations were important, in her view, capturing whole suburbs should be the priority when drawing boundaries in Port Phillip.

John Spierings, Ann Byrne and Simon Kosmer spoke on behalf of the Progressive Port Phillip (PPP). They began by highlighting PPP as a community organisation with a newsletter, focused on local government matters, and emerging in the aftermath of the 2020 Local Government

elections. They requested the panel consider ways to incorporate a First Nations voice on Council, and account for the impacts of climate change-induced flooding on Port Phillip.

Of the proposed models, PPP preferred the boundaries of Model 2 as best able to capture key community activity areas, especially those within St Kilda. Byrne and Kosmer also spoke to the mapped submission. They stated that while the boundaries were based on those presented in Model 2, use of traffic data helped identify the key areas of activity around important shopping and recreational areas and ensure these were not divided between wards (such as Fitzroy Street).

Serge Thomann, a St Kilda resident, former councillor and former deputy mayor of Port Phillip, spoke to his individual submission and provided more detail about the unChain group, of which he is a member. Thomann emphasised unChain had a membership of over 100 people, with a mailing list exceeding 2,000 people. He highlighted his principle for ward boundaries is for people to know who represents them without needing a map and echoed the remarks made by other submitters and speakers, describing Port Phillip as different to other councils because it is made up of a 'patchwork' of former villages-turned-suburbs. Based on this, Thomann supported Model 2 as satisfying his key principle, because residents most identify with their localities.

Thomann also suggested the boundaries of St Kilda Ward be altered to use Mary Street as a north-western boundary, keep Fitzroy Street in one ward, and move the southern boundary from Dickens to Blessington Street. He also highlighted his opposition to the Kirrip Park Ward name, and requested it be reconsidered, and suggested the historic First Nations Ngargee Tree be used as a naming basis. Following questions from the panel, Thomann stated that although the area between Blessington and Dickens Street is in the St Kilda locality, the Fitzroy Street area is more important to the community of St Kilda.

Sabada spoke to his own mapped submission. He highlighted that his submission was based on the proposed Model 2, which he thought had value. Given potential growth areas within the council, he believed changes could be made to this model to improve its longevity. Changes included alterations to ward boundaries for the 'lakeside' residential areas, and requests for simpler ward names. He specifically highlighted Kirrip Park as a name unknown to local residents. Responding to questions from the panel, Sabada further highlighted that of the proposed models, Model 1 was the least satisfactory, and Model 2 had the best boundaries on balance of the three.

Dr. Sean Mulcahy spoke on behalf of the submission from the Victorian Pride Lobby (VPL). He highlighted the role of the VPL in local government elections, supporting LGBTQIA+ candidates at election in 2020 through their Rainbow Local Government campaign. Port Phillip is a council of particular importance to VPL because of its cultural value to the LGBTQIA+ community, as

the Pride Centre and the annual Pride march are both on Fitzroy Street St Kilda. He also pointed to the rate of same-sex registered relationships, especially in Balaclava (6.6%) and Ripponlea (5.5%), up to three times the average rate for the rest of the State (2.1%). He noted also that the VPL understands that these numbers would be indicative of a much higher population, and LGBTQIA+ peoples will gather and live as a community in spaces where they feel safe and settled.

Mulcahy indicated the VPL did not support any of the proposed models, as none appropriately captured the LGBTQIA+ communities of interest in areas indicated by ABS data. He spoke to the VPL's mapped submission, which attempted to capture the suburbs where these communities were most prevalent. Responding to questions from the panel, he highlighted that the role of council both as representation, and for service provision, were important and relevant to the LGBTQIA+ community, especially given the importance of Fitzroy Street culturally, and for practical provision of services such as gender-inclusive bathrooms in public recreation facilities. When asked by the panel which of the proposed models the VPL would select if necessary, he indicated Model 2 would be most preferred, with the stated boundary changes to include all of Fitzroy Steet in one ward.

## Findings and recommendation

While there tends to be strong support for maintaining the structures of councils being reviewed, there was significant support to change to a single-councillor ward structure. It was argued that this structure would better reflect and capture communities of interest. In most other metropolitan councils, interests generally centre around established suburbs. However, due to high population densities, voter numbers within these suburbs often exceed what is permitted within a single-councillor ward.

Where it is not possible to capture the whole of these communities within one ward, the panel may need to determine what parts to include and what parts are best located in a different ward. Communities not defined by connections to a suburb, but by other characteristics are usually more dispersed over larger areas and cannot be contained within single-councillor wards. As there is usually more than one community of interest to consider, accommodating the claims of one will likely impact another. Balancing competing claims in submissions is difficult, but essential.

As outlined in the submission guide for this review, the panel is committed to the principle of 'one vote, one value', which is a requirement for subdivided electoral structures under the Act. This is to ensure that every person's vote counts equally. When undertaking an electoral structure review, the panel must adhere to the Act's legislated equality requirement to seek to ensure the number of voters per councillor in a ward to be within +/-10% of the average number of voters per councillor in any other ward.

The panel noted that several submitters, while not critical of the need to adhere to the legislated equality requirement, questioned the deviations of wards of the proposed models. The uneven distribution of growth across the council and high number of council-enrolled voters means there will be large discrepancies in current ward numbers for all wards to be in balance by October 2024.

Perhaps due to this concern for deviations, another submission called for the panel to go further (to +/-5%) than this legislated equality requirement. The equality requirement exists to support fair and equitable representation for all voters within a local council. Having a +/-10% tolerance allows for other factors, such as communities of interest and use of suitable ward boundaries, to be considered. It provides a realistic approach towards the drawing of electoral boundaries and an acceptable level of stability. The panel pointed out lowering the allowable deviation below 10% could significantly reduce the stability and longevity of ward structures, especially when there is uneven growth across a single-member ward electoral structure.

To satisfy a +/-5% population deviation, more suburbs and potential communities would have to be divided. This is because council-enrolled voter numbers and the uneven distribution of both these voters and expected population growth. The panel's recommendations for all wards must meet these legal requirements by the time of the 2024 local council elections. While the panel understands the concerns of these submitters, the panel must comply with legislated requirements.

## Number of councillors

After considering the requirements of the Act, public submissions and the agreed criteria, the panel found 9 councillors to be an appropriate number.

The panel considered the characteristics of this council in relation to similar metropolitan councils, including its size and geography, population and the number and distribution of voters.

Port Phillip City Council currently has 97,755 voters represented by 9 councillors and covers an area of 21 km<sup>2</sup>. Other metropolitan councils with a similar number of voters usually also have 9 councillors. However, 25,053 of voters are council-enrolled voters that are unevenly distributed across the council, concentrated in some suburbs and city blocks. The council area also has select pockets of increased development and high predicted growth. Owing to these factors, the panel recognised that the geographic features and uneven distribution of voters and growth across the council area make developing a satisfactory single-councillor ward structure challenging.

The panel considered whether increasing or decreasing the number of single-councillor wards, and therefore councillors, would better capture communities of interest distributed over large areas. Decreasing the number of councillors would allow for larger single-councillor wards and increase the likelihood of whole-suburb communities being captured in a single ward, as some submitters preferred. However, this would not be feasible or fair, given the number of voters in council and the workload of councillors.

There is no guarantee that lowering the number of wards would keep whole suburbs together. Further, any increase in wards would require the council area be divided into more, and smaller, single-councillor wards. Reducing the size of wards makes them more susceptible to population changes, and further reduces the stability and longevity of single-councillor ward structures.

The panel also noted there was no opposition to maintaining the current number of councillors in public submissions. The panel acknowledged the submission from Progressive Port Phillip to incorporate a First Nation's voice on council. The representation and empowerment of First Nations Australians is an important issue; however, this matter is not within the scope of the panel's legislative requirements to recommend.

## Electoral structure

After considering the requirements of the Act, the restriction to single-member ward structures, public submissions and the agreed criteria, the panel found Model 2, with modifications based on public feedback, to be the single-councillor ward model with the best potential to promote fair and equitable representation for voters.

The panel acknowledged and thanked submitters who provided their own individual mapped submissions. These suggestions were tested and measured against the population predictions for growth and voter distribution, and were not viable without significant alteration based on the required deviations. However, these submissions provided valuable insight into several important communities of interest and aided the panel in coming to their final decision.

The panel also acknowledged the Victorian Pride Lobby's concerns about the proposed models and understands the cultural importance and presence of the LGBTQIA+ community. The panel noted the significant proportion of same-sex couples distributed across St Kilda, Balacava and Ripponlea, and considered the barriers posed to minority community representation in single-councillor wards. The panel also noted the importance of council representation for the provision of LGBTQIA+ specific services, such as the Pride Centre space in Fitzroy Street, or gender-neutral and safe changing spaces in recreational facilities. For these reasons, the panel considered this communities concerns to be best addressed and represented in structures supporting proportional representation.

The panel also discussed the challenge of creating good boundaries due to the unique mix of population features. Issues arose when trying to account for concentrated areas of development growth, especially in Fishermans Bend, north of South Melbourne and along St Kilda Road. This challenge was increased by the very high number of council-enrolled voters, unevenly spread over council. Nine single-councillor wards are also highly sensitive to these shifts and changes. These aspects make voter numbers highly dynamic over time, and even small shifts in boundaries create large changes to voter deviations as soon as 2024. The three proposed models are very finely balanced, and the panel acknowledges the concerns of submitters where this balance has necessitated boundaries not always following locality identity.

Having considered the above matters, the panel discussed the benefits and drawbacks of each proposed model, including public feedback provided through submissions. The panel explored the suggestions put forward in some submissions to change ward boundaries. This included boundary changes to Gateway West and Gateway Central Ward in Model 1, and St Kilda Ward in Model 2. More extensive changes to Model 3 were mapped to incorporate feedback about the Kirrip Park and Sandridge Ward boundaries, and the Elwood and Botanic Ward boundaries. These changes could be accommodated within the required +/-10% deviations and were logical from a communities of interest perspective. While the panel considered these alternatives to Models 1, 2 and 3, it also noted these shifts required alterations to boundaries elsewhere.

The panel acknowledged Council's support for Model 1, noting the model used current boundaries to create 3 sets of single-councillor wards within the current 3 ward structure.

The panel also acknowledged many submitters were unified in their rejection of Model 1, including both those focused on one community, and those who took a broader view. These submitters felt some of Model 1's boundaries were arbitrary. Furthermore, the panel acknowledged that while Model 1 does follow the logic of the current boundaries, dividing each of the multi-councillor wards up while still maintaining their outer boundaries splits key community localities, especially around St Kilda and Port Melbourne.

Support for Model 3 from Port Melbourne based submissions were considered, and the panel noted Model 3's clear boundary divide capturing Port Melbourne and South Melbourne well. The panel also considered including the area west of Pickles Street in Sandridge Ward, as some feedback suggested. This change was feasible with some alterations to Model 3. However, the panel noted that even without this change, the southern boundaries were less



coherent according to submitters from around and south of St Kilda. Changes made to the model to better capture the Port Melbourne community of interest further exacerbated challenges in the south to balance deviations with community of interest representation.

The panel considered Model 2 taking into account the substantial support it received in public submissions. Resident submitters focused on the St Kilda community, including unChain Inc, felt this best captured their community of interest. The panel also discussed the suggested alteration to include Fitzroy Street and the Esplanade. The panel noted Progressive Port Phillip's support when considering boundaries which best capture areas of heightened community activity across whole of council. The Victorian Pride Lobby indicated their in-principle support for an alteration to include Fitzroy Street in a single ward. The panel further noted Model 2 better captured the port Melbourne shoreline community between Princes and Pickles Street.

For the above reasons, the panel considered an altered Model 2 to have the strongest and most logical boundaries of the 3 models. The panel acknowledges this was not preferred by some submitters, and that Port Melbourne is an important community with a historic value to the council. The heritage of Port Melbourne will continue to be cared for and maintained despite boundary changes, as it has in the past. The panel also notes that given the requirements of the Act and the uneven and dynamic growth of voter distribution, ward boundaries are not likely to remain unchanged for long.

The panel notes the significant challenge of creating a single-councillor ward structure that both complies with the legislated +/-10% requirement and captures geographic communities within wards. Due to the uneven distribution and growth of population, it is also challenging for any single-councillor ward structure to comply with the +/-10% requirement through to or beyond the 2024 local council elections.

While it is difficult to predict the number of candidates likely to stand at future elections, past election results provide some indication. The panel examined past election results for Port Phillip City Council including numbers of candidates nominating, incidences of uncontested elections and rates of informal voting. It found there to be relatively strong candidate numbers under the current electoral structure and under a single-councillor ward structure. The panel assumes this trend will continue under a structure of 9 single-councillor wards, minimising the risk of uncontested or failed elections.

The panel notes valid arguments both in favour of and against the different single-councillor ward structures examined in this review. However, the panel considers a modified Model 2 to be the model with the best potential to promote fair and equitable representation for voters under the requirements of the Act.

## Ward names

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

- Albert Park Ward: New name based on a locality in the ward. This locality name is registered in the VICNAMES register.
- Alma Ward: New name based on a road in the ward. This name is registered in the VICNAMES register.
- Balaclava Ward: New name based on a locality in the ward. This locality name is registered in the VICNAMES register.
- Elwood Ward: New name based on a locality in the ward. This locality name is registered in the VICNAMES register.
- Lakeside Ward: New name based on a road in the ward. This name is registered in the VICNAMES register.
- Montague Ward: New name based on a road in the ward. This name is registered in the VICNAMES register.
- Port Melbourne Ward: New name based on a locality in the ward. This locality name is registered in the VICNAMES register.
- South Melbourne Ward: New name based on a locality in the ward. This locality name is registered in the VICNAMES register.
- St Kilda Ward: New name based on a locality in the ward. This locality name is registered in the VICNAMES register.

The panel considered feedback from public submissions and changed 2 ward names from those in the proposed Model 2. White and Morgan suggested Parks as a potential alternative for Catani Ward. Progressive Port Phillip suggested Beaconsfield, Sabada suggested Albert Park, and Thomann and Edwina Green suggested Middle Park. Parks and Beaconsfield are not registered in the VICNAMES register, and the panel decided Albert Park was a more unifying name for the ward than Middle Park, as it was a key shared parkland along the north-eastern boundary of the ward.

Progressive Port Phillip, Morgan, Thomann and Sabada all expressed concerns with the proposed name Kirrip Park Ward. Of the names suggested, all were registered in VICNAMES. However, Fishermans Bend is registered outside of the council area, and the panel felt that Montague was a more appropriate name than North Port.

Progressive Port Phillip suggested Alma as an alternative name for St Kilda East Ward, which the panel agreed with and changed. It also suggested Carlisle and Junction as potential names for Balaclava Ward and Lakeside Ward respectively, but neither of these were registered in VICNAMES. Finally, the panel noted the suggestion from the public hearing to change Kirrip Park Ward to Ngargee Ward, however this name has not been registered in VICNAMES.

## **The panel's recommendation**

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

The recommended names for the 9 wards in this electoral structure are Albert Park Ward, Alma Ward, Balaclava Ward, Elwood Ward, Lakeside Ward, Montague Ward, Port Melbourne Ward, South Melbourne Ward and St Kilda Ward.

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

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

## References

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) (2022a) [2021 Census All Person QuickStats, Port Phillip \(LGA\)](#), ABS website, accessed 24 May 2023.

—(2022b) [Region summary: Greater Melbourne](#), ABS website, accessed 24 May 2023.

—(2016) [2016 Census All Person QuickStats, Port Phillip \(LGA\)](#), ABS website, accessed 24 May 2023.

DTP (Department of Transport and Planning) (2023) [Port Phillip planning scheme](#), DTP website, accessed 14 June 2023.

Electoral Act 2002 (Vic)

.id (informed decisions) (2022a) [Welcome to City of Port Phillip Community Profile](#), .id website, accessed 24 May 2023.

— (2022b) [Welcome to the City of Port Phillip population forecasts](#), .id website, accessed 24 May 2023.

Geographic Place Names Act 1998 (Vic)

Local Government Act 1989 (Vic)

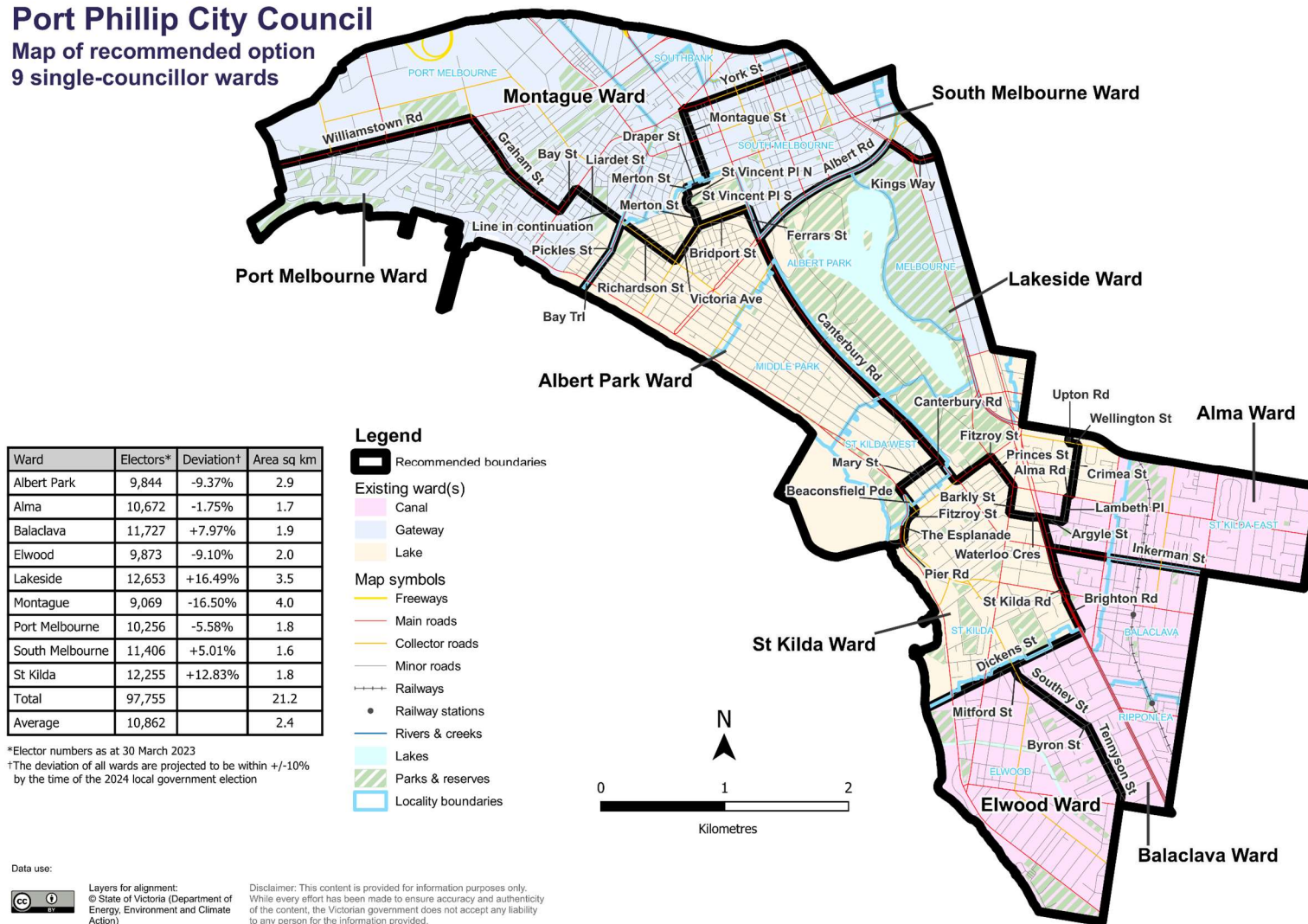
Local Government Act 2020 (Vic)

Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2020 (Vic)

Port Phillip City Council (2023) [Who lives in our City – Demographics – Health Profiles](#), Port Phillip City Council website, accessed 14 June 2023.

# Appendix 1: Map of recommended structure

## Port Phillip City Council Map of recommended option 9 single-councillor wards



Ward	Electors*	Deviation†	Area (square km)
Albert Park	9,844	-9.37%	2.9
Alma	10,672	-1.75%	1.7
Balaclava	11,727	+7.97%	1.9
Elwood	9,873	-9.10%	2.0
Lakeside	12,653	+16.49%	3.5
Montague	9,069	-16.50%	4.0
Port Melbourne	10,256	-5.58%	1.8
South Melbourne	11,406	+5.01%	1.6
St Kilda	12,255	+12.83%	1.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>97,755</b>	-	<b>21.2</b>
<b>Average</b>	<b>10,862</b>	-	<b>2.4</b>

\*Elector numbers as at 30 March 2023

†The deviation of all wards are projected to be within +/-10% by the time of the 2024 local council election

## 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:

Bolitho, Jane	Radcliffe, Vicki
Bride, Margaret	Sabada, Michael
City of Port Phillip	Tapp, Peter
Green, Edwina	Thomann, Serge
Halliday, Justin	Tregurtha, Louise
Jones, Rosemary	Turnbull, Noel
Morgan, Ben	unChain
Port Melbourne Historical and Preservation Society Inc	Victorian Pride Lobby
Progressive Port Phillip Inc	White, Trevor

### Public hearing

The following people spoke at the public hearing:

- Bride, Margaret (on behalf of their own and Port Melbourne Historical and Preservation Society Inc submission)
- Byrne, Ann, Kosmer, Simon and Spierings, John (on behalf of Progressive Port Phillip Inc)
- Morgan, Paul (on behalf of unChain)
- Mulcahy, Dr Sean (on behalf of Victorian Pride Lobby)
- Sabada, Michael
- Thomann, Serge

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