

Nillumbik Electoral Representation Review Final Submission

Council maintains the view it presented to the VEC in its preliminary submission that a seven Councillor structure should be retained with a preference of seven single member wards. Nillumbik Shire Council now provides the following response to the preliminary report produced by the VEC on the 10 April 2019.

1. After several years of instability and a raft of different electoral structural systems at Nillumbik the single-ward councillor structure has provided a strong transparency, accountability and connecting framework between electors and elected members.
2. The composition of multi-councillor wards may encourage political party involvement, because they are well resourced and connected during campaigning. Meaning that the proposed structure may favour privilege political parties above all other candidates and would create a more partisan culture in Nillumbik.
3. Contrary to the VEC's reasons, that the proposed Artisan Hills Ward has both urban and rural populations, the rural area will not receive appropriate representation under the preferred option structure, as the rural representation will be lost to the more populated urban areas. Furthermore, as is the case with any large sized ward, both Councillors could be elected from one area to the detriment of other communities in the ward.
4. Councils are encouraged to make policy decisions as a group and consider as many perspectives as possible. Single-councillor ward structures forces councillors to work cooperatively with fellow councillors and encourages teamwork amongst all councillors, to adequately represent the perspectives of the different communities of interest within the municipality to the Council as a whole. A multi-councillor ward structure would promote division among council members and in particular rural councillors, therefore introducing a divide between the urban and rural areas of the Shire, which would mean that the rural areas might not have an effective voice, making it extremely difficult for the rural councillors to adequately represent their communities. Single-councillor wards is the only way to achieve true local representation.
5. Multi-councillor wards mean that rural communities are effectively disenfranchised. The VEC indicated that most of the submissions commented that the management of the Green Wedge has been a key issue for voters, and there has been a longstanding debate about how to balance the Green Wedge with development priorities. Council believes that regardless of structure, managing the Green Wedge is challenging and can be attributed to stringent state and local government planning laws, minimal high-density housing, and large privately-owned properties and not related to councillor representation and ward structures.
6. Regardless of the challenges that face the Shire, single-councillor wards maximise accountability, which is considered particularly important in a municipality where councillors have to make important decisions due to the municipality's unique setting.

7. In its report, the VEC states that **Option A** was informed by two preliminary submissions that benefited from using the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) to divide wards. Council does not believe this is the best method to use in determining the municipalities structure as the UGB runs through communities and is in some places irregular in shape. The use of the UGB has in some areas displaced communities of interest and split postcodes. The Diamond Creek/Yarrambat area has been split with some voters in the Plenty Valley Ward and others in the Artisan Hills Ward which can cause confusion and be less inclusive because generally people associate with their postcode which can be seen as a community.
8. Where different areas have different needs from the Council, it is important for those areas to have someone on the Council who can best represent the needs and interests of the people of those areas, single-councillor ward structures can offer this certainty.
9. During the 2008 electoral representation review, the VEC previously expressed that the single-councillor ward structure provides the best overall balance of the competing requirements and provides the opportunity for voters to be fairly represented. Given that there has not been significant change to the make-up of townships in the municipality in the Shire since the 2008 review and no overwhelming view to change, Council does not believe the arguments presented by the VEC are persuasive enough to change the current structure.
10. Should the VEC decide to proceed with its preferred option, Council would ask that the suggested names for each ward supports historical, Aboriginal and geographic names.