

Response Submission

Maroondah City Council
Representation Review

Cr. Alex Makin

22nd April 2008

I would like to thank the Victorian Electoral Commission for the opportunity to provide a response submission to the findings currently presented for Maroondah City Council's representation review.

It is encouraging that the Victorian Electoral Commission has found that substantial changes are required to Maroondah's ward structure as demonstrated through the three options brought forward in the preliminary submission. It is imperative that Maroondah's ward boundaries are restructured to combine communities of interest, rather than the current case where communities are clearly being divided.

In providing a response to the three options proposed by the VEC I have assessed the models against the issues listed within my preliminary submission to ensure a consistent and systematic approach.

I would welcome the opportunity to speak in support of this submission and look forward to the release of the VEC's final report.

Thanking you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Makin". The signature is stylized and cursive.

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1.0 Comparison of options

The Victorian Electoral Commission has proposed three options for the structure of Maroondah City Council:

- Seven Councillors to be elected from one three-councillor ward and two councillor wards;
- Seven Councillors, to be elected from seven single-councillor wards with different boundaries to those in the current structure;
- Nine councillors, to be elected from three three-councillor wards

These three models, all of which have differing boundaries to those currently in place, confirms that Maroondah's current structure follows arbitrary ward boundaries that are confusing for residents and divides communities of interest.

1.1 Ringwood – a suburb divided

Within my preliminary submission I cited concerns in regard to the current boundaries which divide the suburb of Ringwood between Loughnan's Hill and Clocktower wards.

While each of the three options presented rectify this situation by removing Wantirna Road as a ward boundary, the first alternative option, with seven single member wards, creates further divisions due to the usage of locality boundaries to distinguish wards. This model will perpetuate the current confusion that exists with ward boundaries and hence should be avoided.

1.2 Activity centres – needing consistent representation

It is important that areas designated as activity centres under Melbourne 2030 are provided with consistent representation. These areas, namely the Ringwood Transit City and the Croydon Town Centre are zoned for higher density development and hence require consistency in their

representation and the decisions that are applied.

The first alternative option, with its single member wards, divides the community of interest within the Croydon Town Centre and hence would not meet this criteria.

1.3 Required redistributions

The Victorian Electoral Commission, as per its assessment criteria has factored in required redistributions.

1.4 Arbitrary ward boundaries

The usage of arbitrary ward boundaries needs to be avoided to ensure that residents are able to distinguish council wards and hence identify their local elected representatives.

The usage of locality boundaries within the two alternative options is a concern. In the case of the first alternative option the number of wards further adds to the complexity of the structure.

1.5 The Ringwood and Croydon divide

While governance largely relates to the processes and procedures of a particular council, concise and easily identifiable ward boundaries can assist in delivering good governance. While none of the three models entirely remove the Ringwood and Croydon divide, the preferred option and the second alternative option reduce this division through providing larger wards that combine communities of interest.

Single member-ward structures, similar to those currently in place or the first alternative option as proposed by the VEC, divide rather than combine communities of interest.

1.6 The need to strengthen good governance

Even though governance may not be within the immediate scope of the Victorian Electoral Commission's representation review, it is important to give this issue consideration when assessing the options brought forward.

As previously mentioned the usage of single member wards within Maroondah has resulted in cases of running mates and situations, such as the current Wyreena ward, where the incumbent was unopposed twice out of the last three elections. These factors diminish interest in local democracy and would demonstrate that the community does not hold an affinity for the current single-member ward structure.

The continuation of single member wards will perpetuate these issues and hence should be avoided. Larger wards will ensure a more holistic level of representation and ensure that communities, at both a local and municipal level, are adequately represented. Furthermore, a consistent number of councillors per ward would ensure equitable representation across Maroondah.

1.7 Community support for change

As detailed previously, the broader community supports a change in Maroondah's ward structure, with a preference towards multi-member wards. While the City of Maroondah is attempting to advocate to retain a modified version of the status quo its campaign is clearly biased. As an example, the City of Maroondah website accepts a simple one-click email message to agree with council but requires someone to author a submission if they disagree.

An image demonstrating the relevant page of the Maroondah City Council website (<http://www.maroondah.vic.gov.au/WardStructurePetition.aspx>) is provided on the following page.

VEC preliminary report

The VEC does not propose to increase the number of Councillors overall, however, it does have a preferred option to divide Maroondah into 3 Wards:

- » 1 Ward with 3 Councillors and
- » 2 Wards with 2 Councillors

Council's view

Maroondah City Council believes that 7 individual wards each with its own Councillor is already working well and would continue to do so.

- » With single Councillor Wards it is easy to judge the performance of the Councillor
- » With more than one Councillor in a Ward how can we know who is effective and in effect 'doing their job'
- » The number of votes to be elected also change:
 - o 2 member ward candidates require 33% + 1 of valid votes
 - o 3 member ward candidates require 25% + 1 of valid votes
 - o Single member wards candidate requires 50% + 1 of valid votes.

Have your say - before Tuesday 22 April

Electoral structures have a direct impact as to how Council operates and interacts with the community. Maroondah residents are urged to provide feedback and their view on the proposed changes.

Register online

If you agree with Council's view, please [register your opinion via email - entering your name and address](#)

Lodge your own submission

Or you can contact the VEC and lodge your own submission. Submissions can be forwarded by post to Victorian Electoral Commission, Level 8, 505 Little Collins Street, Melbourne, 3000. Email to maroondah.review@vec.vic.gov.au or fax to 9629 9330.

Submissions can be as simple as a short letter or as long as an essay, and must be received before 6pm Tuesday 22 April.

Further information

For more information on the electoral representation review, or to obtain a guide to making a submission, please call the Victorian Electoral Commission on 13 18 32 or visit their website at www.vec.vic.gov.au/

This is clearly biased in favour of council's submission, to the detriment of encouraging people to express differing opinions on the representation review.

Furthermore the model presented by Maroondah City Council was not adopted unanimously by council, demonstrating that councillors are not united on this issue. It should be noted that the petition circulated by Maroondah City Council failed to provide respondents with information on the alternative models that have been proposed by the VEC.

The series of workshops conducted by the City of Maroondah in November 2007 resulted in qualitative data that provided a clear preference towards multi-member wards and a desire for change. While sample size in the council's initial consultation was low, the onus was on council to expand upon these views rather than simply discard them.

As such the preferred and second alternative option best reflect community sentiments on the proposed structure for the City of Maroondah.

1.8 Ward names

Given that all three models substantially alter ward boundaries, new ward names would ease any potential confusion with this restructuring. Indigenous wording should be used to reflect the origins of the Maroondah name, which was derived from an Aboriginal word for leaf.

2.0 Conclusion

In assessing the three models against the issues highlighted within my preliminary submission I contend that the second preliminary option, consisting of nine councillors, to be elected from three three-councillor wards, will provide a structure that ensures equitable representation that is robust enough to remain relevant throughout the next eight years.

While Maroondah is currently on the cusp between seven or nine member councils, the anticipated growth of the municipality will result in the need for a higher number of councillors. Given that substantive changes have been proposed by the Victorian Electoral Commission it makes sense to future proof the municipality by providing three wards with three councillors each.

Should the Victorian Electoral Commission deem that seven is more suitable for this eight year period, then I contend that the preferred option of seven councillors, to be elected from one-three councillor ward and two two-councillor wards would also be a suitable option. This would ensure a more gradual change for the municipality with a switch to multi-member representation within this current cycle, followed by a likely increase to nine councillors for the next review due in 2016.