



CORANGAMITE
SHIRE

Minutes

Council Meeting

**Tuesday 14 February
2023**

Held in the Killara Centre
At the Camperdown Community
Centre
Commenced at 5:30 pm

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Order of Business

Minutes of the meeting of the Corangamite Shire Council
held in the Killara Centre at the Camperdown Community Centre,
210-212 Manifold Street, Camperdown Victoria 3260
At 5:30 pm on Tuesday 14 February 2023

The Mayor, Cr Ruth Gstrein declared the Special Council Meeting open at 5:30 pm.

Present

Councillors

R. Gstrein (Chairperson), J. Beard, N. Cole, G. Conheady, L. Hickey, K Makin, J Vogels

Officers

Michael Tudball, Chief Executive Officer
Justine Linley, Director Sustainable Development
Brooke Love, Director Works and Services
David Harrington, Director Corporate and Community Services
James Plozza, Executive Services and Governance Coordinator

1 Prayer

We ask for guidance and blessing on this Council. May the true needs and wellbeing of our communities be our concern. Help us, who serve as leaders, to remember that all our decisions are made in the best interests of the people, culture and the environment of the Corangamite Shire.

Amen.

2 Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land around Corangamite Shire, the Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung people.

We pay our respects to all Aboriginal Elders and peoples past, present and emerging.

3 Apologies

Nil

4 Declarations of Conflict of Interest

No conflicts of interest were declared

5 Confirmation of Minutes

RECOMMENDATION

That the minutes of the Corangamite Shire Council meeting held on Tuesday 24 January 2023 be confirmed as correct.

COUNCIL RESOLUTION

Moved: Cr Nick Cole
Seconded: Cr Kate Makin

That the recommendation be adopted.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY 7 / 0

6 Deputations and Presentations

The Mayor, Cr Ruth Gstrein, invited members of the public who had requested to address Council to make their presentations.

The following item/s was/were submitted:

- Agenda Item 9.1 – Corangamite Shire Electoral Structure Review – Preliminary Submission:
 - Wendy Matheson (written submission)

In relation to the electoral review for the Corangamite Shire, I firmly believe that we need to retain our current ward structure. I completely understand that due to the changes to the Local Government Act that a single multi member ward is no longer allowed, however, due to the significant diversity in countryside within our shire, I feel we are best suited to be represented by individual ward councillors. We have sheep and cropping to the north, and then dairy, beef and coastal communities to the south. It is critical that our main 12 communities are represented by those that actually understand their needs and can relate to those residents that live there. I am concerned knowing what has occurred in neighboring shires, that we could end up with total misrepresentation, and more isolated communities will miss out on their voice at the council table, as well as having elected reps not at their community activities etc. We have a great system here in Corangamite that works and I have never heard anyone say otherwise. I implore the panel to please have regard for our unique situation and the people that live here in Corangamite Shire, and please keep us best represented as can be.
 - Ken and Nola Farquharson (written submission)

Unfortunately we are unable to attend the meeting regarding this review. We have lived locally for 59 years and have always been satisfied with our elected members and the ward system. The Corangamite Shire councillors are easily contacted, communicate, consult and listen. Most importantly, they do not push party political or radical personal agendas. To have an unsubdivided Shire would be like having a committee of ten football reps and one netball rep - very unbalanced and open to having groups with personal agendas banding together to be elected. Therefore we are strongly of the view if change is forced on us that the ward system is far preferable in rural Shires such as Corangamite.
 - John Glazebrook

7 Committee Reports

Nil

8 Planning Reports

Nil

9 Officer's Reports

9.1 Corangamite Shire Electoral Structure Review – Preliminary Submission

Directorate: Executive Services

Author: James Plozza, Executive Services and Governance Coordinator

Previous Council Reference: Nil

Attachments:

Nil

Declaration

Chief Executive Officer – Michael Tudball

In providing this advice to Council as the Chief Executive Officer, I have no interests to disclose in this report.

Author – James Plozza

In providing this advice to Council as the Executive Services and Governance Coordinator, I have no interests to disclose in this report.

Summary

Corangamite Shire Council's existing ward structure is no longer compliant with the passage of new legislation. As a result, the Minister for Local Government has established an Electoral Representation Advisory Panel (ERAP) to undertake an electoral structure review of Corangamite Shire Council.

The window for making preliminary submissions to the electoral structure review opened on 1 February 2023 and close on 22 February 2023. Council has the opportunity to make a submission advocating for either one large unsubdivided electoral structure or a wards based electoral structure.

Introduction

Corangamite Shire currently has a mixed system using a combination of single member wards and a multi-member ward that takes in Camperdown and Terang. This structure suits Corangamite well as it allows for a large community of interest in Camperdown to be accommodated amongst smaller communities of interest like the smaller towns of the North Ward. Unfortunately, the passage of the *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act) rendered the current electoral structure non-compliant.

In September the Minister for Local Government established two Electoral Representation Advisory Panels to review and make recommendations to the Minister about the electoral structures of 39 Victorian Councils prior to the October 2024 elections for local government. This includes Corangamite Shire Council.

The review of Corangamite's structure began on 30 January 2023 and will conclude with a final report being released on 17 May 2023. The review includes two submission windows. The first being for preliminary submissions where submissions are invited on the number of Councillors and whether the council should be one large unsubdivided area or subdivided into wards. This will be followed by a response submission window where responses to the ERAPs preliminary report are invited.

This report outlines the strengths and weaknesses of alternative structures that Council may consider submitting to the ERAP as part of Council's preliminary submission.

Issues

The primary consideration in making a submission to the ERAP is determining which electoral structure to advocate for. There are three possible electoral structures provided for by section 13 of the Act. These are as follows:

- An unsubdivided municipality (all Councillors elected to represent Corangamite by the municipal district as a whole)
- Single member wards into which the municipal district is divided (7 single member wards, likely through splitting Central Ward into three distinct single member wards)
- Uniform multi-member wards (uniform multi-member Wards, possibly through three or four wards of 2 Councillors; or two or three wards of 3 Councillors)

Although a uniform multi-member ward structure is allowable, it is unlikely to be a realistic option. These ward structures are increasingly rare across the state and is not well suited to Corangamite's municipal population for a number of reasons. These include it requiring an increase or a decrease of the number of Councillors in Corangamite without a comparable rise or decline in population, and a population distribution that makes it hard to envision how these wards could be set up to capture both communities of common interest and similar catchments of voters in terms of population. For this reason, it is recommended Council only consider a submission advocating for single member wards or for an unsubdivided municipality.

Option 1 – Single member wards

An electoral structure of seven single member wards represents the least disruptive change that could be made and would allow for the broad continuation of a system that is generally supported by the municipal community. The most straight forward way of bringing this about would be through largely maintaining the single member wards of the current structure and splitting the Central Ward into three distinct single member wards.

There are many benefits to such a system which include:

- Councillors are more likely to be truly local representatives of their ward, be easily accessible to residents, and aware of local issues.
- Major geographical communities of interest are likely to be represented. Preventing towns like Skipton and Lismore being poorly represented.
- Less likely that one particular point of view or sectional interest will dominate the council.
- The avoidance of large ballot papers at municipal elections which can confuse voters and lead to higher rates of informal voting.

However, there are drawbacks of a ward system which include:

- Councillors may be elected on parochial issues and have a lack of perspective of what policy positions benefit the municipality as a whole.
- Voters may get less choice as single member wards are regularly uncontested.
- There are less candidates willing to nominate, reducing the overall talent pool at each election. This is because there can be unwillingness to challenge a specific incumbent in their small community.
- Camperdown is too large to fit in a single ward which will divide a single community of interest into two.

A proposed single member ward structure that divides the Central Ward into three wards is attached.

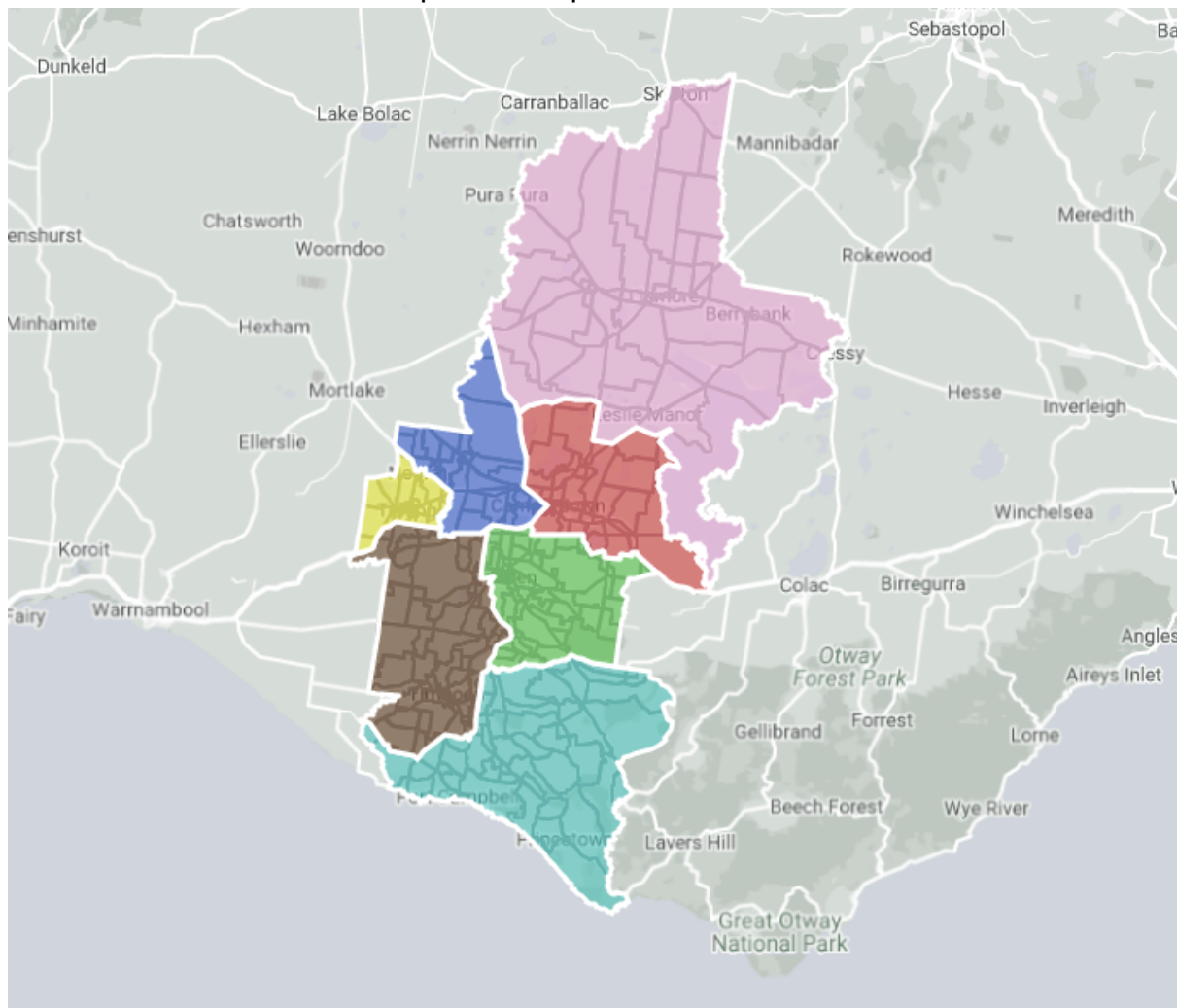
This structure creates a Terang-Noorat based ward (called West Ward) and splits the rest of the Central Ward into an east and west Camperdown and surrounds wards (called East-Central Ward and West-Central Ward respectively).

The West Ward follows the Mount Emu creek in the east, the Princes Highway and Bend Road in the south, and Mackinnons Bridge and Terang-Mortlake Roads in the North. It keeps Terang and Noorat in the same ward which is crucial as they make up a single community of interest because of their strong community links and geographic closeness.

The East-Central and West-Central ward split Camperdown along the Camperdown-Cobden Road into Camperdown and then along the Princes Highway. This provides very logical and easy to understand natural boundaries and splits Camperdown's population into roughly even halves. The northern part of the central boundary follows the Darlington-Camperdown Rd to the North Ward and Mount Emu Creek. This effectively gives Camperdown two Councillors whilst also providing for a roughly even geographic split between the two wards for the geographic representation for residents on rural and farming properties.

Some other minor changes include shifting the boundary between the South-West and South-Central wards from Cross Forest Road to Forest Park Road. This moves the Cobden Airport and other key Cobden community assets into the same ward as the town of Cobden. There are also small changes to the northern borders of the Coastal and South-Central wards to follow for more natural boundaries.

Option 1 Proposed Structure



Ward	Deviation
North Ward	-7.50%
West Ward*	+6.93%
West-Central Ward*	+0.14%
East-Central Ward*	-0.61%
South-West Ward	+2.27%
South-Central Ward	+4.45%
Coastal Ward	-5.68%

*denotes new ward

Option 2 – Unsubdivided municipality

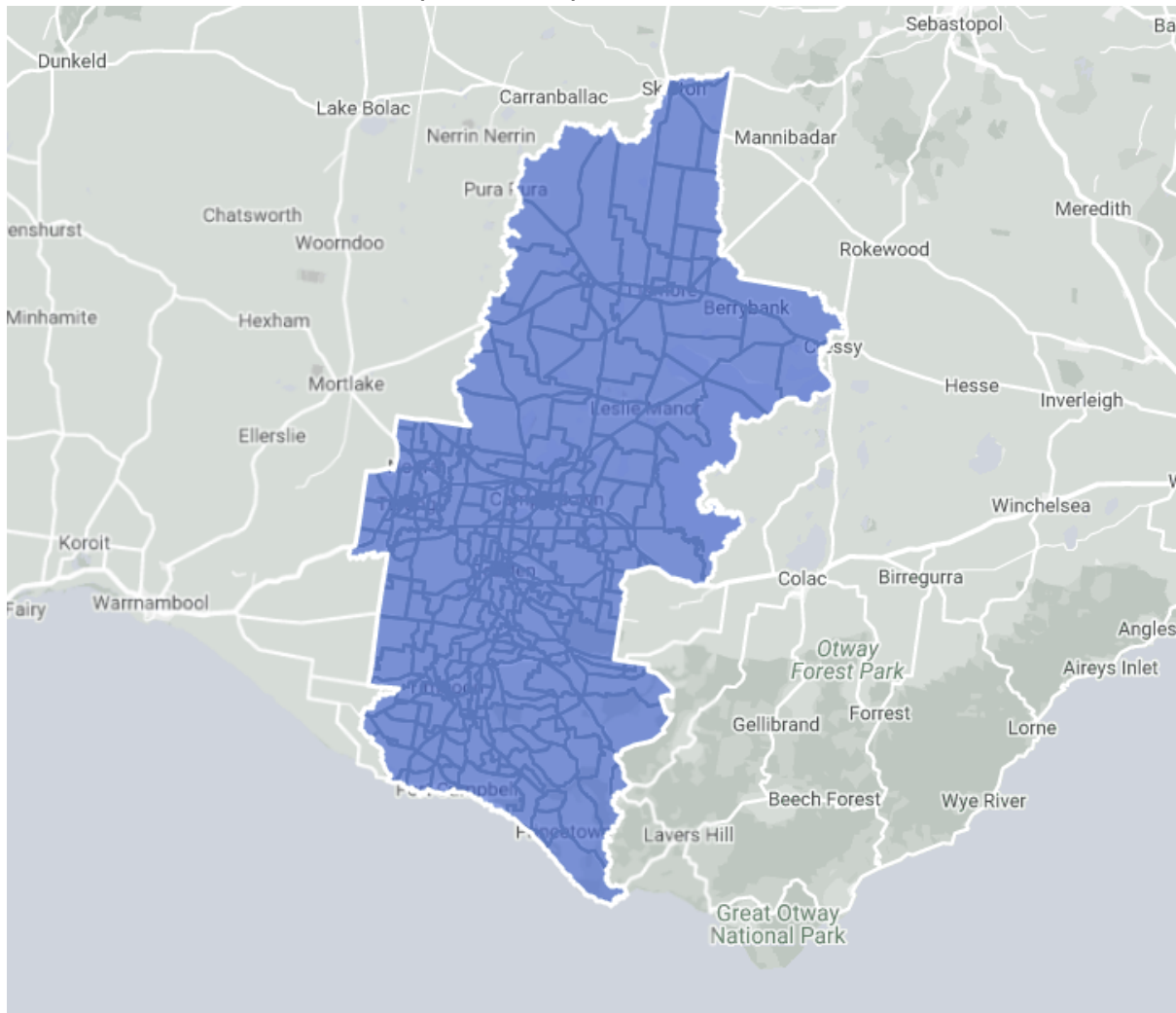
The other option is to do away with a ward system and have Corangamite as a single unsubdivided municipality. Like with the option of single member wards, an unsubdivided municipality comes with strengths and weaknesses. Strengths include:

- Promotes Councillors considering the interests of the Shire as a whole, rather than focusing on their individual ward.
- Gives voters more of a choice as uncontested elections are far less likely and they will be selecting from all the candidates at the election, rather than just the ones standing for their ward.
- Encourages more candidates to stand as they no longer have to stand against a specific incumbent in a small community.
- Gives residents a choice of which Councillors to approach with their concerns.
- Avoids the need to divide Camperdown into two wards.
- Is a simpler and less expensive system that removes the requirement of keeping separate electoral rolls and producing separate ballot papers.

Drawbacks of an unsubdivided structure are:

- Can lead to significant but smaller communities of interest being unrepresented.
- May lead to Councillors being hard to access for residents in more isolated parts of the community.
- Possibility of confusion of responsibilities and duplication of efforts on the part of Councillors.
- Large ballot papers can be confusing for voters.
- Can be difficult for voters to assess the performance of individual Councillors.
- Larger numbers of candidates can lead to dummy candidates running.

Option 2 Proposed Structure



Considering the options

While there are many benefits of an unsubdivided municipality it is important to consider that Corangamite is fairly unique in its level of diversity across the entirety of the Shire and this is hard to capture and ensure representation of without a ward-based system. This diversity exists across numerous measures. There is our topography, with plains in the north, volcanic cones in the centre, and hilly country in the south. There is diversity of industry, with dairy farming in the south, sheep and cattle grazing in the north, and tourism along our southern coastal border. There is economic and age diversity, with Camperdown, Terang, and the Rural North being older and more disadvantaged on average than the southern parts of the Shire.

This lends itself very well to a ward system as our community is made up of very distinct and logical communities of common interest that are easy to define and largely centre around towns who then act as service centers for their surrounding areas. A ward system ensures that all our unique and diverse communities are adequately represented by removing the risk of smaller and more remote communities not having a Councillor who represents them. An unsubdivided municipality is a better option for councils who are more uniform in their industry, topography, and demography.

Policy and Legislative Context

The requirement for a new electoral system and the processes for the review are provided for in the *Local Government Act 2020*.

This report is also in keeping with the commitments in the Council Plan 2021-2025:

Theme Five - Community Leadership
Having strong governance practices

Internal / External Consultation

The Victorian Electoral Commission has provided guidance on the electoral review process and Councillors have provided input into proposed ward structures across multiple briefing sessions.

Financial and Resource Implications

There are significant financial implications in the Victorian Government conducting a review of council's electoral system. This is because Council is required by the Act to reimburse the Victorian Electoral Commission for the cost of undertaking the review. The estimated cost provided to Council by the Commission in December was \$60,633.32.

Options

Council must choose a structure to advocate for in its submission to the ERAP. The two options presented for consideration are:

1. Single Member Wards
2. An Unsubdivided Municipality

Conclusions

While there are many benefits to an unsubdivided municipality it is recommended that Council submits for the retention of a ward structure. Corangamite Shire is made up of very diverse and distinct communities of common interest and a ward system is the only way to ensure a fair and even representation of all our residents and their interests.

RECOMMENDATION - 9.1

That Council instructs the Chief Executive Officer to make a submission to the Electoral Representation Advisory Panel for the retention of a wards-based system using proposed structure Option 1.

COUNCIL RESOLUTION

Moved: Cr Geraldine Conheady
Seconded: Cr Jo Beard

That the recommendation be adopted.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY 7 / 0

10 Other Business

Nil

11 Open Forum

The Mayor, Cr Ruth Gstrein, invited members of the public to ask a question or make a statement.

No items were submitted.

12 Confidential Items

Nil

13 Close Meeting

Cr Ruth Gstrein declared the Special Council Meeting closed at 5:54 pm.

I hereby certify that these minutes have been confirmed and are a true and correct record.

CONFIRMED:

Chairperson

DATE:
