



**geelong**chamber**of**commerce  
*the voice of business*

Response submission to:

**Preliminary Report: 2015-16 Greater  
Geelong City Council Electoral  
Representation Review**

Geelong Chamber of Commerce  
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## **About the Geelong Chamber of Commerce**

The Geelong Chamber of Commerce is one of Australia's leading regional business bodies, boasting a membership of over 860 and a long, rich and successful history of advocating on behalf of Geelong businesses.

As Geelong's premier business representative body, the Chamber advocates on behalf of all forms of business - micro, small, medium and large - ensuring industries have a say on the issues that impact upon the economic viability of business and the region as a whole.

## **Comments on Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) Preliminary Report: 2015-16 Preferred Model – Option A**

### **Ward Structure**

In our December 2015 submission to the Review of the Local Government Act 1989, the Chamber expressed a strong view that, while the current standing of 12 single ward councillors may offer individual representation for ratepayers, this system does not serve the city as a whole as ward councillors tend to develop a narrow focus, pushing resources to their own wards rather than looking at the overriding regional priorities and encouraging a strategic focus to benefit all areas of the municipality.

The Chamber expressed a belief that the ward structure of the City of Greater Geelong should be amended to one of the following models:

1. Remove wards completely – fully unsubdivided with all councillors “at large”. This model removes competition for resources, focusses priorities across the region and provides an opportunity to re-think ratepayer services and issues; or
2. Reduce the number of wards to allow for a mix of local ward representation and councillors at large (for example, incorporate a mix of four dual member wards with an additional unsubdivided structure (or councillors at large) to facilitate a mix of local representation and strategic direction for the future; or
3. Consolidate wards into large regions with multiple councillor representation. This model provides a whole of region focus, reduces the number of councillors and retains area-based representation for ratepayers.

The VEC preferred option, i.e. **Option A : four-ward model consisting of three three-councillor wards and one two-councillor ward**, accords with the Chamber's view under point 2 above, that the number of wards need to be reduced.

Accordingly, the Chamber has considered the VEC's preferred Option A and provides the following comments on this option.

1. The boundaries proposed seem logical and provide for wards representing communities of interest.
2. The Chamber considers that a better system would be to reduce the number of councillors even further.
3. Modern governance principles suggest that an optimum number of people on a board or other decision-making bodies is around seven to eight people. Accordingly, the Chamber is of the opinion that two councillors per ward plus the Mayor, making a total of nine councillors, would result in more optimal decision-making and governance oversight than the suggested 11 councillors plus the Mayor.
4. In corporate governance, smaller boards are considered to be more optimal and result in better decision-making. These principles also apply to Local Government where the councillors' role is to provide effective governance and oversight of the Council. The Chamber is of the view that councillors should be focused more on the strategic issues for the municipality as a whole rather than simply "roads, rates and rubbish." Council officers are employed to assist ratepayers with day-to-day operational issues. Fewer councillors will result in less contention, enhance decision-making processes and improve effectiveness of Council for ratepayers.
5. The Chamber understands that councillor numbers per ward, as suggested under Option A, are based on maintaining a uniform ratio of councillors per ratepayer. Some wards, however, are more densely populated but cover a much smaller geographic area than others and would not necessitate three councillors. For example, Brownbill Ward, which includes a large part of the central business district in Geelong, only requires two councillors to oversee ward issues. If systems are put in place internally to respond to ratepayer queries by Council officers, then the need to have more councillors per ward could be negated. Similarly, Kardinia Ward includes the growth area of Armstrong Creek. In the short to medium term, this ward would be over-represented with three councillors. A future review of ward representation could be undertaken as that ward's population grows.
6. The Chamber does not support the notion that the number of councillors should be based on a comparison with the number of councillors per population in other council areas. If you compare council representation with that at state (43,000 registered voters per electorate) and federal (100,000 voters per electorate) levels, and considering the significant resources of council available to support the work of councillors, there is significant room to move on councillor numbers. The numbers should instead be determined on a qualitative basis that allows for representation that is practical and has the best chance of delivering good governance. On this, and as we have outlined in this submission, we are calling for a total of nine Councillors including the Mayor.

7. If there are fewer councillors in total, then the City could effectively increase the remuneration to councillors which, in turn, might attract more candidates to run for Council. Current remuneration levels may be a barrier that inhibits diversity of candidates.
8. The Chamber's support for the recommendations made by the VEC is conditional upon there being a review of the ticket system for councillors and Mayor. It is the Chamber's view that a ticket system would result in greater harmony and efficiency of Council leading to better governance outcomes for ratepayers.
9. The Chamber also believes that the allocation of portfolios and how they are determined needs to be reviewed if good governance practices are to be upheld.

The Chamber is happy to present these views and participate in any further consultative processes considered by the VEC.



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