

# **ATTACHMENTS**

**Under Separate Cover  
Ordinary Council Meeting**

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**6.00pm Tuesday 23 April 2019**



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6.9 Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) - Preliminary Report Electoral Representation Review

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# Local Council Representation Review

Preliminary  
Report

GOLDEN PLAINS  
SHIRE COUNCIL  
March 2019

Victorian Electoral Commission 

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27 March 2019

Version 1



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## Executive summary

The *Local Government Act 1989* (the Act) requires the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) to conduct an electoral representation review of each local council in Victoria at least before every third council general election.

The purpose of a representation review is to recommend an electoral structure that provides fair and equitable representation for the persons who are entitled to vote at a general election of the council. The matters considered by a review are:

- the number of councillors
- the electoral structure of the council (whether the council should be unsubdivided or divided into wards and, if subdivided, the details of the wards).

The VEC conducts all reviews based on three main principles:

1. taking a consistent, State-wide approach to the total number of councillors
2. if subdivided, ensuring the number of voters represented by each councillor is within plus-or-minus 10 per cent of the average number of voters per councillor for that local council
3. ensuring communities of interest are as fairly represented as possible.

## 2019 electoral representation review

The current representation review for Golden Plains Shire Council commenced on Wednesday 30 January 2019.

### Current electoral structure

Golden Plains Shire Council currently comprises seven councillors elected from an unsubdivided electoral structure. Prior to the last representation review in 2007, Golden Plains Shire Council was comprised of nine councillors elected from nine single-councillor wards.

Visit the VEC website at [vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au) to access a copy of the 2007 review final report.

### Preliminary submissions

At the close of preliminary submissions at 5.00 pm on Wednesday 27 February 2019, the VEC had received 25 submissions for the representation review of Golden Plains Shire Council. These submissions can be viewed on the VEC website at [vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au) and a list of those people or organisations that made a submission is available at Appendix 2.



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### VEC options

The following options are being considered by the VEC:

- Option A (preferred option)  
**Golden Plains Shire Council consist of seven councillors elected from an unsubdivided electoral structure.**
- Option B (alternative option)  
**Golden Plains Shire Council consist of seven councillors elected from one three-councillor ward and two two-councillor wards.**
- Option C (alternative option)  
**Golden Plains Shire Council consist of eight councillors elected from two three-councillor wards and one two-councillor ward.**

## Background

### Legislative basis

The Act requires the VEC to conduct a representation review of each local council in Victoria before every third general council election, or earlier if gazetted by the Minister for Local Government.

The Act specifies that the purpose of a representation review is to recommend the number of councillors and the electoral structure that provides 'fair and equitable representation for the persons who are entitled to vote at a general election of the Council.'<sup>1</sup>

The Act requires the VEC to consider:

- the number of councillors in a local council
- whether a local council should be unsubdivided or subdivided.

If a local council should be subdivided, the VEC must ensure that the number of voters represented by each councillor is within plus-or-minus 10 per cent of the average number of voters per councillor for that local council.<sup>1</sup> On this basis, the review must consider the:

- number of wards
- ward boundaries
- number of councillors that should be elected for each ward.

### Public engagement

#### Public information program

The VEC conducts a public information program to inform the community of the representation review, including:

- public notices printed in local and state-wide papers
- public information sessions to outline the review process and respond to questions from the community
- a media release announcing the commencement of the review
- coverage through the local council's media
- advertising on the VEC's social media
- contact with community groups and networks

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<sup>1</sup> Section 219D of the *Local Government Act 1989*.

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- ongoing information updates and publication of submissions on the VEC website
- a submission guide to explain the review process and provide background information on the scope of the review.

### Public consultation

Public input is accepted by the VEC in:

- preliminary submissions at the start of the review
- response submissions to the preliminary report
- a public hearing that provides an opportunity for people who have made a response submission to expand on this submission.

Public submissions are an important part of the process but are not the only consideration during a review. The VEC ensures its recommendations are in compliance with the Act and are formed through careful consideration of public submissions, independent research, and analysis of all relevant factors.

### The VEC's principles

Three main principles underlie all the VEC's work on representation reviews:

**1. Taking a consistent, State-wide approach to the total number of councillors.**

The VEC is guided by its comparisons of local councils of a similar size and category to the council under review. The VEC also considers any special circumstances that may warrant the local council having more or fewer councillors than similar local councils.

**2. If subdivided, ensuring the number of voters represented by each councillor is within plus-or-minus 10 per cent of the average number of voters per councillor for that local council.**

This is the principle of 'one vote, one value', which is enshrined in the Act. This means that every person's vote counts equally.

**3. Ensuring communities of interest are as fairly represented as possible.**

Each local council contains a number of communities of interest. Where practicable, the electoral structure should be designed to ensure they are fairly represented, and that geographic communities of interest are not split by ward boundaries. This allows elected councillors to be more effective representatives of the people and interests in their particular local council or ward.

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### Developing recommendations

The VEC bases its recommendations for particular electoral structures on the following information:

- internal research specifically relating to the local council under review, including Australian Bureau of Statistics and .id data<sup>2</sup>; voter statistics from the Victorian electoral roll; and other State and local government data sets
- the VEC's experience conducting previous electoral representation reviews of local councils and similar reviews for State elections
- the VEC's expertise in mapping, demography and local government
- careful consideration of all input from the public in written submissions received during the review
- advice from consultants with extensive experience in local government.

### Deciding on the number of councillors

The Act allows for a local council to have between 5 and 12 councillors but does not specify how to decide the appropriate number.<sup>3</sup> In considering the number of councillors for a local council, the VEC is guided by the Victorian Parliament's intention for fairness and equity in the local representation of voters under the Act.

The starting point in deciding the number of councillors appropriate for a local council is comparing the council under review to other local councils of a similar type and size. Generally, those local councils that have a larger number of voters will have a higher number of councillors. Often large populations are more likely to be diverse, both in the nature and number of their communities of interest and the issues of representation.

However, the VEC also considers the particular circumstances of each local council which could be cause for more or less councillors, such as:

- the nature and complexity of services provided by the Council
- geographic size and topography
- population growth or decline
- the social diversity of the local council.

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<sup>2</sup> .id is a company specialising in population and demographic analysis that builds suburb-level demographic information products in most jurisdictions in Australia and New Zealand.

<sup>3</sup> Section 5B(1) of the *Local Government Act 1989*.

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### Deciding the electoral structure

The Act allows for a local council ward structure to be unsubdivided—with all councillors elected ‘at-large’ by all voters or subdivided into a number of wards.

If the local council is to be subdivided into wards, there are three options available:

1. single-councillor wards
2. multi-councillor wards or
3. a combination of single-councillor and multi-councillor wards.

A subdivided electoral structure must involve internal ward boundaries that provide for a fair and equitable division of the local council.

The Act allows for wards with different numbers of councillors, as long as the number of voters represented by each councillor is within plus-or-minus 10 per cent of the average number of voters per councillor for that local council (Principle 2). For example, a local council may have one three-councillor ward with 15,000 voters and two single-councillor wards each with 5,000 voters. In this case, the average number of voters per councillor would be 5,000.

Over time, population changes can lead to some wards in subdivided local councils having larger or smaller numbers of voters. As part of the review, the VEC corrects any imbalances and takes into account likely population changes to ensure ward boundaries provide equitable representation for as long as possible.

In considering which electoral structure is most appropriate, the VEC considers the following matters:

- the VEC’s recommendation at the previous representation review and the reasons for that recommendation
- the longevity of the structure, with the aim of keeping voter numbers per councillor within the 10 per cent tolerance for as long as possible (Principle 2)
- communities of interest, consisting of people who share a range of common concerns, such as geographic, economic or cultural associations (Principle 3)
- the number of candidates in previous elections, as large numbers of candidates can lead to an increase in the number of informal (invalid) votes
- geographic factors, such as size and topography
- clear ward boundaries.

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## Public submissions (preliminary)

The VEC received 25 preliminary submissions by the deadline for submissions at 5.00 pm on Wednesday 27 February 2019. These submissions can be viewed from the VEC website at [vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au) and a list of those people or organisations who made a submission is available at Appendix 2.

The matrix below provides an overview of preferences in the preliminary submissions. Detailed analysis of the submissions follows.

	Submitter wanted fewer wards	Submitter wanted ward number to remain unchanged	Submitter wanted more wards	Submitter did not comment on number of wards
Submitter wanted fewer councillors				
Submitter wanted councillor number to remain unchanged		4	4	
Submitter wanted more councillors		1	7*	
Submitter did not comment on number of councillors		1	7	1

\*One preliminary submission supported nine councillors but would also accept seven councillors

### Number of councillors

Preliminary submissions expressed a variety of opinions on the appropriate number of councillors for Golden Plains Shire Council.

Eight submissions supported keeping the number of councillors at seven. Of these submissions, one also supported reducing the number of councillors to five if there was strong justification and community support.

Seven preliminary submissions indicated support for an increased number of councillors.

Of these submissions:

- two supported an approximate number of seven or eight councillors
- one supported increasing the number of councillors to eight
- four supported increasing the number of councillors to nine (of these, one submission also accepted seven councillors as an alternative)



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- one supported an increase to 12 councillors, which is the maximum number of councillors that can be considered for any local council.

Preliminary submissions in favour of increasing the number of councillors on Golden Plains Shire Council supported their views with the following arguments:

- the population is growing rapidly and would therefore require additional councillors to represent this larger population
- more councillors may lead to a broader range of skills and knowledge on the Council
- the belief that, with a larger group of councillors, there would be less chance of internal or external groups dominating the Council
- increasing the number of councillors to nine would enable the Council to return to a committee system of governance, which the submitter stated was in place during the previous electoral structure. The submitter believed that this committee system was a more robust and effective governance system for the Shire
- the belief that more councillors would enable the creation of a multi-ward electoral structure where a greater number of councillors would represent rural areas of the Shire than under the current arrangements.

Nine preliminary submissions did not indicate a preference for a specific number of councillors.

### **Electoral structure**

Of the 25 preliminary submissions received, six submissions supported keeping the current unsubdivided electoral structure, while 18 submissions supported a move to a subdivided electoral structure. One submission did not clearly indicate a preferred electoral structure.

Submissions supporting the current unsubdivided electoral structure came from residents of Bannockburn, Teesdale and from outside of the local council area.

Submissions supporting a change to a subdivided electoral structure came from residents of Bannockburn, Cape Clear, Gheringhap, Inverleigh, Mannibadar, Ross Creek and Smythesdale.

Two preliminary submissions included maps of their preferred electoral structure created using the VEC's online Boundary Builder tool.

### **Unsubdivided electoral structure**

The six submissions in favour of retaining the current unsubdivided electoral structure provided several arguments in support of this structure.

Submissions argued that an unsubdivided structure is preferable for Golden Plains Shire Council because voters have a greater choice of candidates from across the local council area and that this has enabled voters to choose their preferred candidate regardless of where they reside.

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Whereas with a subdivided electoral structure, these submitters argued there would be fewer candidates to choose from in each ward and a risk of uncontested elections where voters do not have an opportunity to vote for a preferred candidate at all. On this point, one submission referred to uncontested elections at the 2002 and 2004 Golden Plains Shire Council general elections as proof of this risk.

Additional arguments put forward by submitters who were in favour of an unsubdivided electoral structure included:

- the current system works well, provides good balance for local representation, and enables councillors to govern for the community as a whole
- the current structure is fairer than the former nine single-councillor ward structure
- voters have access to all councillors to discuss issues and present their points of view (rather than being restricted to the councillor/s that represent their ward)
- being able to choose from a pool of candidates from across the local council enables the election of councillors with a diverse range of backgrounds, skills, knowledge and viewpoints, and is the best way to get high quality councillors
- candidates for election in an unsubdivided electoral structure must work harder to be elected, must clearly communicate their values and viewpoints to voters, and this election process makes it more likely that high quality councillors will be elected
- elections are fairer because all candidates have the same number of competing candidates and an equal chance of being elected
- under an unsubdivided electoral structure the proportional representation system is used, and this system best supports effective voting and fair representation
- the unsubdivided electoral structure allows for future population growth within parts of the Shire.

Submissions also made specific arguments against moving to a subdivided electoral structure. One submission argued that subdivided electoral structures can lead to some councillors becoming complacent in their duties because the reduced competition (or lack of competition during uncontested elections) essentially guarantees they will be re-elected. Another submission argued that subdivided electoral structures can foster resentment and division between groups within the community and can work against the best interests of the Shire as a whole. Another submission argued that moving to a subdivided electoral structure could result in townships with concentrated populations having greater influence in the Shire because wards containing larger populations require more councillors than wards containing smaller populations.



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### **Subdivided electoral structures**

A variety of subdivided electoral structures were advocated by 18 preliminary submissions.

These included:

- a two-ward model, comprising a four-councillor ward for the eastern half of the local council, and a three-councillor ward for the western half
- three submitters proposed three-ward models that divide the local council into northern, central and southern areas, with varying numbers of councillors allocated to each ward:
  1. North (3), Central (1), South (3)
  2. North (3), Central (2), South (4)
  3. North (1-4), Central (1-4), South (1-4)
- three submitters proposed four-ward models, with varying numbers of councillors allocated to each ward:
  1. Bannockburn area (3), Smythesdale area (2), Linton area (1), south-west area (1),
  2. Bannockburn area (3), Smythesdale area (3), Linton/Rokewood area (1)  
Meredith/Lethbridge area (2)
  3. Bannockburn area (3), Smythesdale area (2), Linton/Rokewood area (1)  
Meredith/Lethbridge area (1)
- a five-ward model, comprising a two-councillor ward for the north-west of the Shire near Ballarat, a two-councillor ward for the south-east of the Shire near Geelong, and the remaining central parts of the Shire divided into three single-councillor wards
- a six-ward model, comprising a two-councillor ward for the Bannockburn area of the Shire, with the remainder of the Shire split into five single-councillor wards
- a seven- or eight-ward model comprising only single-councillor wards, with Bannockburn possibly being split into two separate single-councillor wards
- a 12 single-councillor ward model.

One submission also indicated a preference for three or four wards but did not describe a specific electoral structure. An additional submission indicated a preference for either five or seven wards but did not describe a specific electoral structure. Six submissions advocated for wards in general, without describing a specific electoral structure.

The majority of submissions in support of a subdivided electoral structure for Golden Plains Shire Council came from residents of Inverleigh (12 submissions).

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The majority of submissions supporting a move to a subdivided electoral structure argued that there is a perception that Bannockburn dominates the local council, and that areas outside of Bannockburn and its immediate surrounds feel disadvantaged and disenfranchised. Submitters also argued that the current councillors tend to have an urban focus, that the needs of rural communities are not well understood or supported by the Council, and that different areas of the local council area have very different focuses and needed individual representation. Multiple submissions from Inverleigh residents indicated that the Inverleigh community does not feel represented and argued that a subdivided electoral structure would enable a local resident, who could best represent their local area, to be elected to the Council. Submitters also voiced concerns that the concentrated and growing population around Bannockburn would continue to increase the town's voting power compared to the rest of the local council area, and further reduce representation of rural areas.

Those in favour of wards also argued that:

- the current structure has led to a high turnover of councillors and little continuity
- there is a lack of connection between councillors and the community, as current councillors are unknown to many people and do not appreciate local issues
- wards give voters better access to councillors and make councillors more visible and accountable to the community
- dividing the local council would reduce travel time for councillors.

Overall, preliminary submissions indicate strong community support for a subdivided electoral structure for Golden Plains Shire Council.

## The VEC's findings and options

### Preliminary report findings

#### Number of councillors

The VEC considers that seven is the most appropriate number of councillors for Golden Plains Shire Council. However, the VEC also recognises that there were a number of preliminary submissions that called for and gave evidence to support an increase in the number of councillors for Golden Plains Shire Council.

Golden Plains Shire Council covers an area of 2,704 square kilometres and currently has 18,567 voters represented by seven councillors. The average number of voters per councillor is 2,652. Country Victorian local councils with a similar size and number of voters generally also have seven councillors, although Golden Plains Shire Council is approaching the top of the list of comparative local councils, which prompts consideration of increasing the number of councillors.

In some cases, special circumstances may exist in a local council area that support a recommendation for fewer or more councillors. Every local council has its own characteristics and challenges. The VEC's analysis and information provided in preliminary submissions has indicated that Golden Plains Shire Council is experiencing rapid population growth, particularly in Bannockburn and the surrounding areas. In this part of the Shire, the number of people aged 18 years or over is expected to increase by over 50% between 2019 and 2031.<sup>4</sup> This rapid population increase may warrant an increase in the number of councillors on Golden Plains Shire Council.

However, the VEC's analysis and information provided in preliminary submissions did not identify any other standout special circumstances that would support a recommendation for additional councillors on Golden Plains Shire Council. The Shire's population is largely socially and linguistically similar. The population also has reasonably low levels of disadvantage compared to other local councils in Victoria, with Inverleigh experiencing the lowest level and areas around Linton and the south-west of the Shire experiencing higher levels of disadvantage within the local council area.

On balance, the VEC considers seven councillors to be appropriate for Golden Plains Shire Council, and also acknowledges some justification for an increase. For these reasons, any model put forward by the VEC during this representation review will consist of either seven or eight councillors.

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<sup>4</sup> .id (Informed Decisions). Golden Plains Shire: Population and age structure map.  
<https://forecast.id.com.au/golden-plains/population-age-structure-map>, accessed 12 March 2019.

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**Comparable Country Victoria councils to Golden Plains Shire Council**

Local council	Area (km2)	Population (2016 Census)	Number of voters at last review	Current estimate of voters	Number of councillors	Number of voters per councillor
Campaspe Shire*	4,519	37,061	28,118	30,984	9	3,442
South Gippsland Shire	3,305	28,703	27,654	29,505	9	3,278
Moorabool Shire	2,110	31,818	21,487	27,856	7	3,979
Moirā Shire*	4,045	29,112	22,307	25,086	9	2,787
Colac Otway Shire*	3,433	20,972	19,198	20,750	7	2,964
<b>Golden Plains Shire*</b>	<b>2,704</b>	<b>21,688</b>	<b>14,228</b>	<b>18,567</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2,652</b>
Glenelg Shire*	6,212	19,557	16,333	17,570	7	2,510
Mount Alexander Shire	1,529	18,761	15,411	16,826	7	2,403
Hepburn Shire*	1,470	15,330	13,649	15,727	7	2,246
Swan Hill Rural City*	6,117	20,584	14,386	14,749	7	2,107
Murrindindi Shire*	3,889	13,732	13,727	14,570	7	2,081

\* The local council is undergoing an electoral representation review by the VEC during 2019–20

### Electoral structure

In 2007, the VEC recommended that Golden Plains Shire Council change to an unsubdivided electoral structure. The reasons for making this recommendation were:

- the size and distribution of the population
- recognition of the broad communities of interest in the Shire
- supporting a whole-of-shire approach to representation and community identity
- forecasted population growth from 2007 to 2016
- difficulties in developing a satisfactory ward-based structure for the Shire due to the characteristics of the local council.

The current unsubdivided electoral structure has been in place for the three most recent general elections at Golden Plains Shire Council (2008, 2012, 2016) and there are some indications, as evidenced below, that the unsubdivided electoral structure is providing more effective representation for various communities of interest within the local council area.

At the Council's 2008 general election, although there was a low number of candidates that nominated for election, the candidates were drawn from across the local council area. Of the 11

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candidates at that election, one was from Bannockburn and two from nearby rural localities (Gheringhap and Murgheboluc). The remaining eight candidates were from rural localities and townships across the rest of the local council area (Barunah Park, Haddon, Lethbridge, Linton, Meredith, Napoleons and Rokewood). This election resulted in all seven elected councillors being from rural areas (Barunah Park, Haddon, Lethbridge, Linton, Murgheboluc, Napoleons, Rokewood).

At the Council's 2012 general election, there were 12 candidates. In this election, three candidates were from Bannockburn, eight candidates were from rural localities and townships in the local council (Barunah Park, Haddon, Lethbridge, Napoleons, Rokewood and Springdallah) and one candidate resided outside of the local council area (Sebastopol). This resulted in the election of two councillors from Bannockburn and five councillors from rural areas (Barunah Park, Haddon, Lethbridge, Rokewood, Springdallah).

At the Council's 2016 general election, there were again 12 candidates, with four candidates from Bannockburn and two from nearby townships and localities (Batesford and Sutherlands Creek). The remaining six candidates were from rural localities and townships (Cambrian Hill, Haddon, Inverleigh, Lethbridge, Rokewood and Springdallah). This resulted in the election of two councillors from Bannockburn, two councillors from areas close to Bannockburn (Batesford and Sutherlands Creek), and three councillors from areas in the rural central and northern areas (Cambrian Hill, Rokewood and Springdallah).

The number of rural candidates standing and rural councillors elected can be taken as an indication that, at the time of the 2008 and 2012 local council elections, the unsubdivided electoral structure was delivering results proportional to the distribution of the population.

The most recent 2016 election included a greater proportion of councillors being elected from Bannockburn and surrounds. It is too early to suggest this is any sort of trend of over-representation, although future population growth expected for Bannockburn and surrounds could lead to an increased number of candidates standing from this area. The VEC also observed, however, that the 2016 election included fewer candidates from areas outside of Bannockburn compared to previous elections, which would naturally lead to fewer councillors being elected from the reduced pool of rural candidates. Even within the current Council, there appears to be a fairly broad distribution of councillors from across the Shire.

The general arguments in support of an unsubdivided electoral structure that the VEC outlined in its 2007 review report still apply for Golden Plains Shire Council. However, given the strong push in preliminary submissions for a move to wards as well as an apparent decline in the number of candidates from rural areas, the VEC considers that both unsubdivided and subdivided electoral structures should be examined during the current representation review.

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One of the VEC's key principles when conducting a representation review is to recognise communities of interest that exist within a local council area. A viable subdivided electoral structure must balance the legislated requirement for all wards to be within the acceptable voter-to-councillor ratio alongside the aim to achieve fair representation for communities of interest. When considering subdivided electoral structures, some models must be rejected because the boundaries negatively impact or split identified communities of interest or because a model includes wards that are outside the accepted voter-to-councillor ratio.

One of the greatest challenges for developing a subdivided electoral structure for Golden Plains Shire Council is the distribution of voters and uneven rate of population growth across the Shire. Bannockburn is located in the far south-east of the Shire and is the major town, accommodating just under one-quarter of the Golden Plains Shire population. There are also other population concentrations nearby Bannockburn, including the towns of Teesdale, Inverleigh and Lethbridge. This area of the Shire is more closely linked to the City of Greater Geelong, which borders Golden Plains Shire along the south-eastern boundary of the Shire. The higher rates of growth in the south-east of Golden Plains Shire is associated with significant population growth and new developments in the City of Greater Geelong. At the opposite end of Golden Plains Shire is another population concentration in the Smythesdale area, which is more closely linked with the City of Ballarat, located immediately to the north. In between the Bannockburn and Smythesdale areas, the centre of the Shire is much more sparsely populated and contains largely rural localities and much smaller townships that have a predominantly agricultural focus. The rural areas of Golden Plains Shire are experiencing much lower levels of population growth. This uneven population distribution, coupled with the uneven levels of growth, provide challenges in identifying appropriate and viable ward boundaries.

When considering any subdivided electoral structure for Golden Plains Shire Council, it should be noted that there is also a history of uncontested elections. Prior to the 2008 general election, Golden Plains Shire Council consisted of nine single-councillor wards. During both the 2002 and 2004 elections, six of the nine wards had uncontested elections. The VEC discussed this issue in its 2007 representation review of Golden Plains Shire Council. Given the VEC's observation that even under the unsubdivided electoral structure, the numbers of candidates at the Shire's general elections were a maximum of 12, there is a concern that a subdivided electoral structure will result in uncontested or failed elections for Golden Plains Shire Council.

The VEC received a number of preliminary submissions that suggested various subdivided electoral structures. Extensive modelling was undertaken to test the viability of these suggestions. The following sections outline the various subdivided models explored during the development of the three preliminary options for Golden Plains Shire Council.

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### **Single-councillor wards**

The VEC considered single-councillor ward models, such as the one suggested in the preliminary submission from [REDACTED]. Due to the population concentration in the Bannockburn area and the need to set and maintain voter-to-councillor ratios within the acceptable legislated tolerance, any single-councillor ward model would have needed to split Bannockburn into, at least, two very small wards with arbitrary boundaries that divided the town. The community of Bannockburn clearly shares a strong common interest in representation for the town and any subdivided electoral structure should incorporate the entire Bannockburn area within one ward. It is also difficult to determine meaningful boundaries for single-councillor wards in other areas of the Shire that balance voter-to-councillor ratios and sustain projected population growth. In addition, the history of uncontested elections under the previous single-councillor electoral structure provides an argument against a return to single-councillor wards. Therefore, electoral structures based on single-councillor wards were found to be inappropriate for Golden Plains Shire Council.

### **Mixed- and multi-councillor wards**

The VEC modelled electoral structures with a mix of multi-councillor and single-councillor wards, such as those suggested in preliminary submissions from [REDACTED] and multi-councillor wards as suggested in preliminary submissions by [REDACTED]

Many of these models had viable elements, but also had elements that decreased their viability, such as:

- ward boundaries splitting townships and communities
- current or projected voter-to-councillor ratios close to or exceeding the plus-or-minus 10 per cent tolerance
- large single-councillor wards in central parts of the local council
- multiple single-councillor wards that created a higher risk of uncontested elections
- models that had nine or more councillors, which the VEC does not consider appropriate for Golden Plains Shire Council at this review.

For these reasons, the specific models proposed in the preliminary submissions were not considered appropriate for Golden Plains Shire Council. However, the concepts and boundaries presented in these models were able to be incorporated into the development of the options presented in this report.

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When developing potential subdivided electoral structures for Golden Plains Shire Council, the VEC found that three-ward models were the most effective at balancing voter-to-councillor ratios across the local council area as well as providing representation for the major geographic regions of the Shire. Option B and Option C are based around a three-ward electoral structure.

**Option A: Seven councillors elected from an unsubdivided electoral structure (the current electoral structure)**

The VEC recommended the current electoral structure following its last representation review of Golden Plains Shire Council in 2007. The benefits of the current unsubdivided electoral structure include:

- allows communities of interest to exist undivided
- balances the uneven population distribution and forecast population growth across the Shire, without putting pressure on ward enrolments
- supports a Shire-wide approach to representation, community identity and community engagement
- provides an opportunity for multiple councillors to be elected from any area of the Shire
- enables voters to select from a wider pool of candidates
- provides an overall balance between the needs of various groups in the local council and legislative requirements
- avoids issues associated with uncontested elections, which was an issue with the previous single-councillor ward electoral structure
- provides an opportunity for councillors to share responsibilities and workloads equitably
- provides an opportunity for candidates to be elected from geographic and non-geographic communities based on their proportion of support across the Shire
- in previous elections under the current unsubdivided structure, councillors have been elected from across the Shire without any area dominating or being unrepresented.

On the other hand, there was strong support for a change to a subdivided electoral structure expressed through preliminary submissions to this review. The VEC heard from submitters about the downsides of the current electoral structure, including:

- a concern that communities outside of Bannockburn are not fairly represented
- it may be harder for local candidates to be elected from the rural areas due to the increasing population of Bannockburn and surrounds, and the sparsity of the rural population.



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**Option B: Seven councillors elected from one three-councillor ward and two two-councillor wards**

Option B is a subdivided electoral structure consisting of:

- a two-councillor ward (Goldfields Ward) in the north-west of the local council, that includes the townships of Haddon, Napoleons, Scarsdale and Smythesdale
- a two-councillor ward (Central Plains Ward) in the central area of the local council, that includes the townships of Cape Clear/Illabarook/Rokewood Junction, Dereel, Inverleigh, Linton, Rokewood/Corindhap, Shelford and Teesdale
- a three-councillor ward (Eastern Plains Ward) in the south-east of the local council, that includes the townships of Bannockburn, Batesford, Lethbridge, Maude/Steiglitz/She Oaks and Meredith.

This option is based on the preliminary submission from [REDACTED], with modifications made to enhance its viability. These modifications include combining the central area into one multi-councillor ward to balance voter-to-councillor ratios across the central part of the local council area, and changes to ward boundaries to make them more identifiable and avoid splitting communities.

The benefits of Option B are:

- provides representation for the three major geographic regions of the shire (north-west region, south-east region, central region) recognising the differing needs and focuses of these areas
- voter-to-councillor ratios are reasonably balanced across the local council area
- the Eastern Plains Ward groups towns located along the Midland Highway (the major transport corridor between Geelong and Ballarat) and the Geelong-Ballarat railway line
- the Goldfields Ward groups townships and communities that are located on the outskirts of Ballarat, including most areas north of the Enfield State Park
- takes into account the expected growth around Bannockburn and surrounding townships
- township of Inverleigh is located in a ward separate to Bannockburn. This placement acknowledges the strong push seen in preliminary submissions for separate representation from members of the Inverleigh community
- all wards are multi-councillor and will have the same counting method used at an election
- ward boundaries are well positioned according to clear and logical features
- due to the size of the Central Plains Ward there is less risk of uncontested elections

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- guarantees representation for rural parts of the local council.

Potential downsides of Option B are:

- any subdivided electoral structure for Golden Plains Shire Council will limit the number of councillors that can be elected for any area in the Shire
- the voter-to-councillor ratio for the Eastern Plains Ward is currently close to 10 per cent below the average, although population projections indicate that growth in this ward will correct this ratio in time for the Shire's 2020 general elections
- the sparsely populated centre of the local council area and the need to balance voter-to-councillor ratios means that the Central Plains Ward must cover a large proportion of the local council area.
- ward boundaries cut near to the outskirts of Newtown and Teesdale
- considering the history of uncontested elections for the previous electoral structure that was in place, as well as low numbers of candidates for recent elections (2008, 2012, 2016), there is a risk of uncontested wards.

**Option C: Eight councillors elected from two three-councillor wards and one two-councillor ward**

Option C is a subdivided electoral structure consisting of:

- a three-councillor ward (Goldfields Ward) in the north-west of the local council, that includes the townships of Haddon, Linton, Napoleons, Scarsdale and Smythesdale
- a two-councillor ward (Central Plains Ward) in the central area of the local council, that includes the townships of Cape Clear/Illabarook/Rokewood Junction, Dereel, Inverleigh, Rokewood/Corindhap, Shelford and Teesdale
- a three-councillor ward (Eastern Plains Ward) in the south-east of the local council, that includes the townships of Bannockburn, Batesford, Lethbridge, Maude/Steiglitz/She Oaks and Meredith.

Option C combines elements from the preliminary submission from Mr Wren and also the preferred model from the VEC's 2007 representation review of Golden Plains Shire Council, with modifications made to enhance the sustainability of the model and make ward boundaries more identifiable.

The benefits and potential downsides of this model are very similar to those of Option B.

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However, additional benefits of this model are:

- current and projected voter-to-councillor ratios are generally more balanced across wards
- ward boundaries are located further away from Teesdale and Newtown.

This option also offers the opportunity to consider whether the number of councillors in the local council should be increased to eight.

A potential downside to this option is the increased possibility of tied votes at Council meetings as a result of the even numbers of councillors. The VEC notes that meeting procedures manage this situation and that tied votes can occur from time-to-time with any number of councillors, although the addition of an additional vote as a casting vote in any circumstance does not align with fair and equitable representation.

### **Ward names**

While the VEC has provided ward names for the preliminary ward-based models (Option B and Option C), these are illustrative only. Feedback on ward names through submissions responding to the preliminary report is welcome.

The VEC notes that two preliminary submitters included potential ward names with their submission. These suggested wards names were:

- East, West
- North, Central, South, East, North-East
- Central Plains, Murnong, Golden Reef, Burn

Additionally, one submission indicated that, if a subdivided electoral structure was to be recommended for Golden Plains Shire Council, ward names that reflect the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage of the local area would be preferred.

### **Summary**

The VEC has presented three preliminary options in this report.

When developing its preliminary options, the VEC used information relating to communities of interest, demographics, geography and voter distribution. The VEC encourages public comment on all three options, including feedback on ward boundaries modelled in each of the two alternative options.

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## Options

The VEC is required by the Act to include a preferred option and may include one or more alternative options for the electoral structure in the preliminary report. The VEC considers that all the options outlined below offer fair and equitable representation for voters in the local council. Please see Appendix 1 for detailed maps of these options.

### Option A (preferred option)

**Golden Plains Shire Council consist of seven councillors elected from an unsubdivided local council.**

### Option B (alternative option)

**Golden Plains Shire Council consist of seven councillors elected from one three-councillor ward and two two-councillor wards.**

### Option C (alternative option)

**Golden Plains Shire Council consist of eight councillors elected from two three-councillor wards and one two-councillor ward.**

## Next steps

### Response submissions

Any person or group, including the council, can make a submission to the VEC in response to the options contained in this report. Response submissions to the preliminary report should address the models proposed by the VEC within this report. Response submissions must be received by the VEC by 5.00 pm on Wednesday 24 April 2019. Late submissions will not be accepted.

Submissions must include the full name, address and contact telephone number of the submitter. Submissions without this information cannot be accepted.

### Submission methods

Submissions can be made via:



The online submission form at [vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au)



Email at [goldenplains.review@vec.vic.gov.au](mailto:goldenplains.review@vec.vic.gov.au)



Post to  
Victorian Electoral Commission  
Level 11, 530 Collins Street  
Melbourne VIC 3000

### Public access to submissions

To ensure transparency in the electoral representation review process, all submissions will be available for public inspection at:

- the VEC website at [vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au)
- the VEC office at Level 11, 530 Collins Street, Melbourne.

The VEC will remove personal information such as address, phone number, and signature, if applicable, from all public copies. However, the full name and locality of submitters will be displayed.

### Public hearing

There is an opportunity for people or organisations who have made a response submission to speak about their submission at the public hearing. The public hearing is scheduled to be held at 6.30 pm on Wednesday 1 May 2019 at the Rokewood Recreation Reserve, 14 McMillan Street, Rokewood. If you wish to speak at the public hearing, you **must** indicate this on your response submission. If there are no requests to speak at the hearing, it will not be held.

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### **Final report**

Following the public hearing, the VEC considers all the evidence it has gathered and publishes a final report for the Minister for Local Government containing a recommended electoral structure. The report is scheduled to be published on Wednesday 22 May 2019. Any changes resulting from the final report will apply at the October 2020 general election.

The final report will be available from the VEC by visiting [vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au) or calling 131 832 and for inspection at the offices of Golden Plains Shire Council.

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## Appendix 1: Option maps

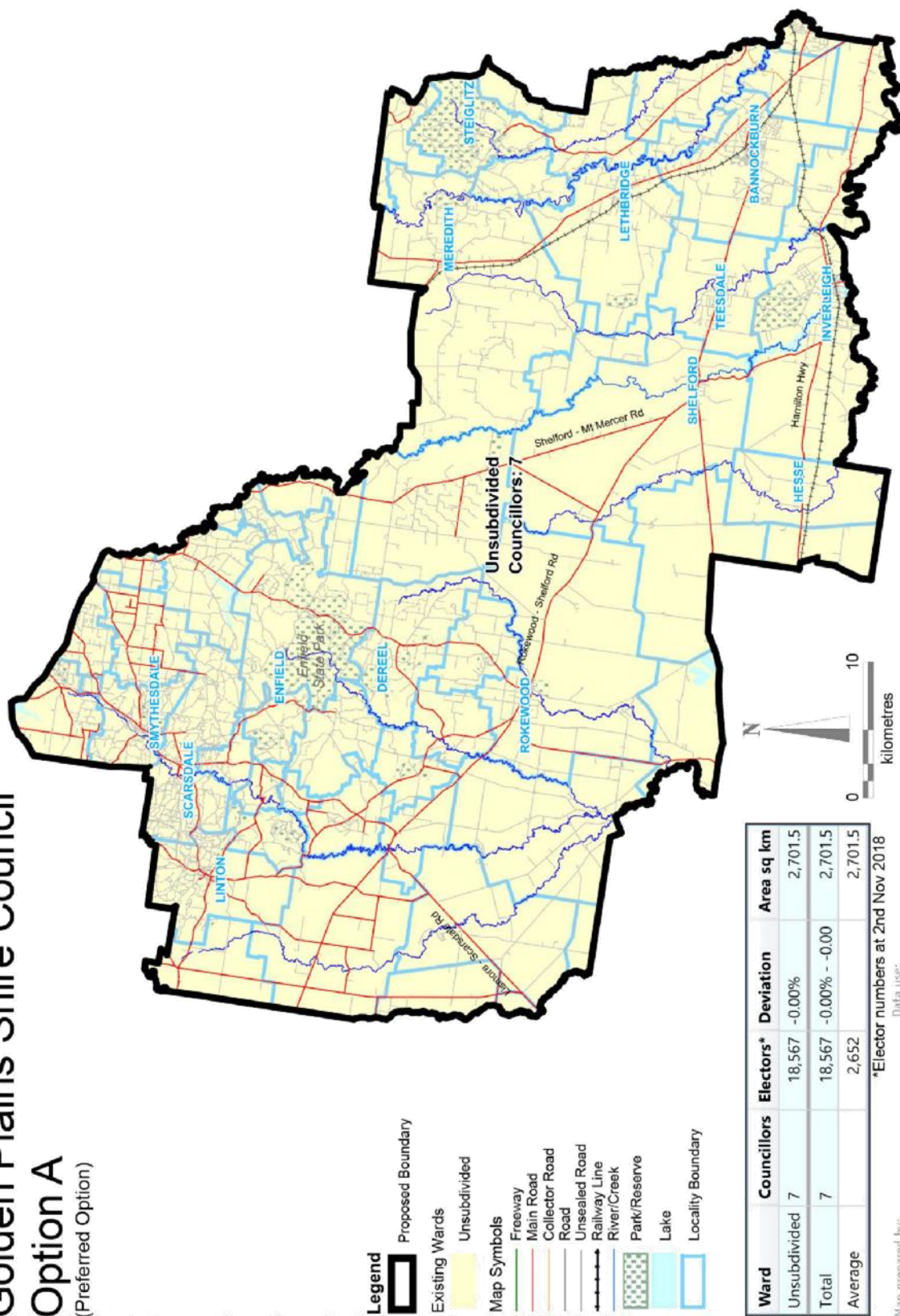
The following maps are included in this report:

<i>Map</i>	<i>Page</i>
Option A (preferred option)	25
Option B (alternative option)	26
Option C (alternative option)	27



# Golden Plains Shire Council

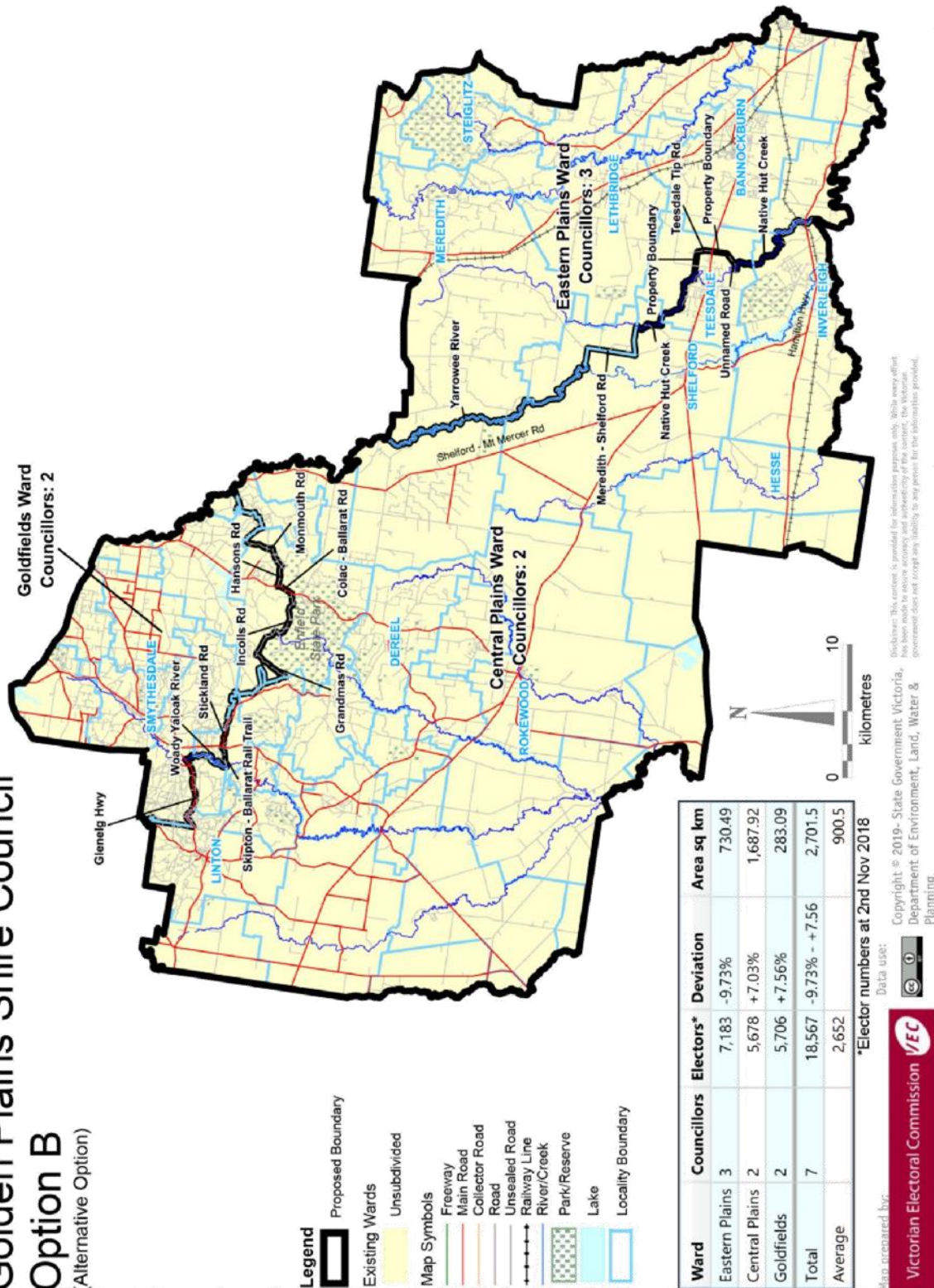
## Option A (Preferred Option)



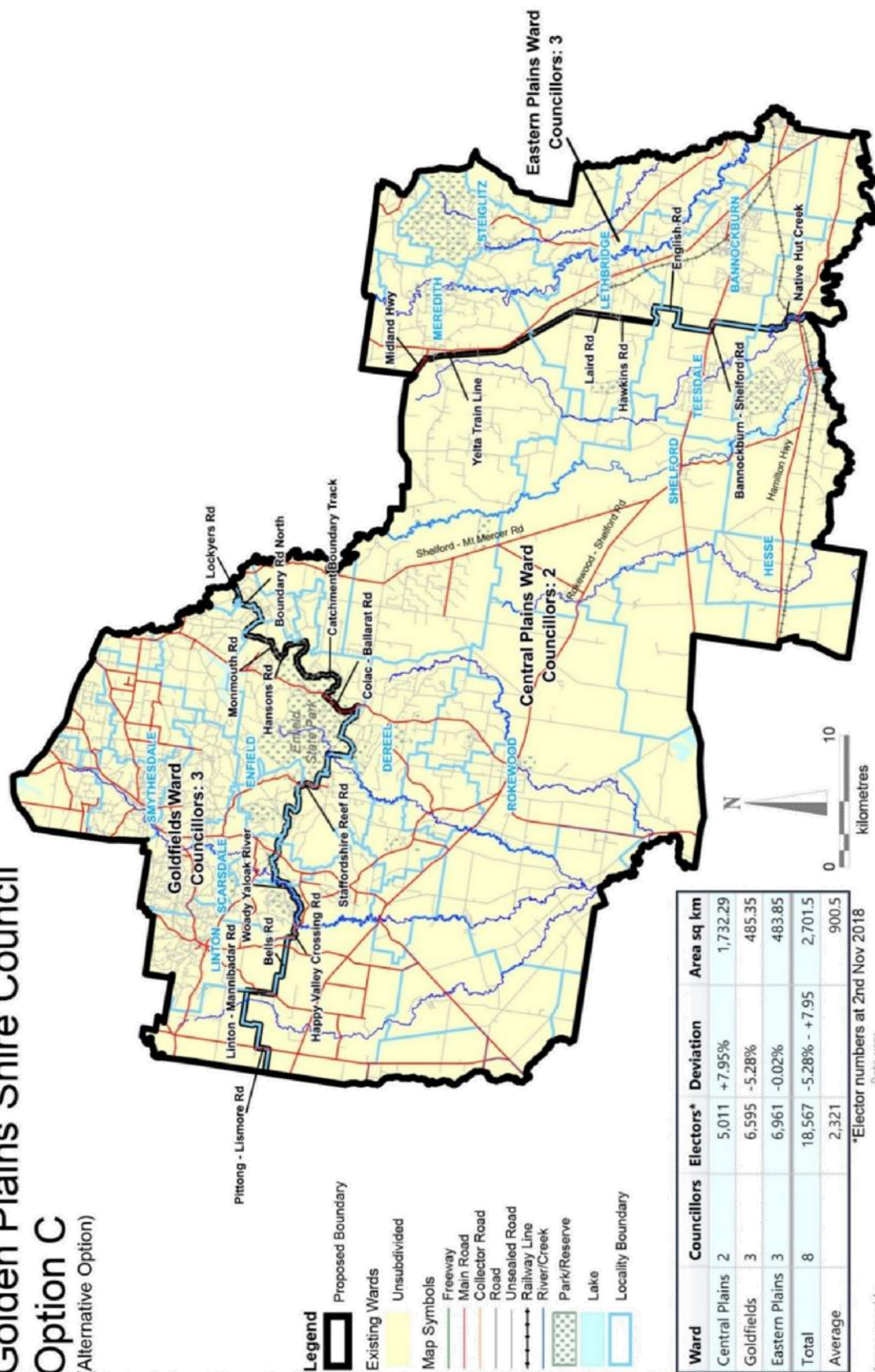


# Golden Plains Shire Council

## Option B (Alternative Option)



# Golden Plains Shire Council Option C (Alternative Option)



Ward	Councillors	Electors*	Deviation	Area sq km
Central Plains	2	5,011	+7.95%	1,732.29
Goldfields	3	6,595	-5.28%	485.35
Eastern Plains	3	6,961	-0.02%	483.85
Total	8	18,567	-5.28% - +7.95	2,701.5
Average		2,321		900.5

\*Electors numbers at 2nd Nov 2018

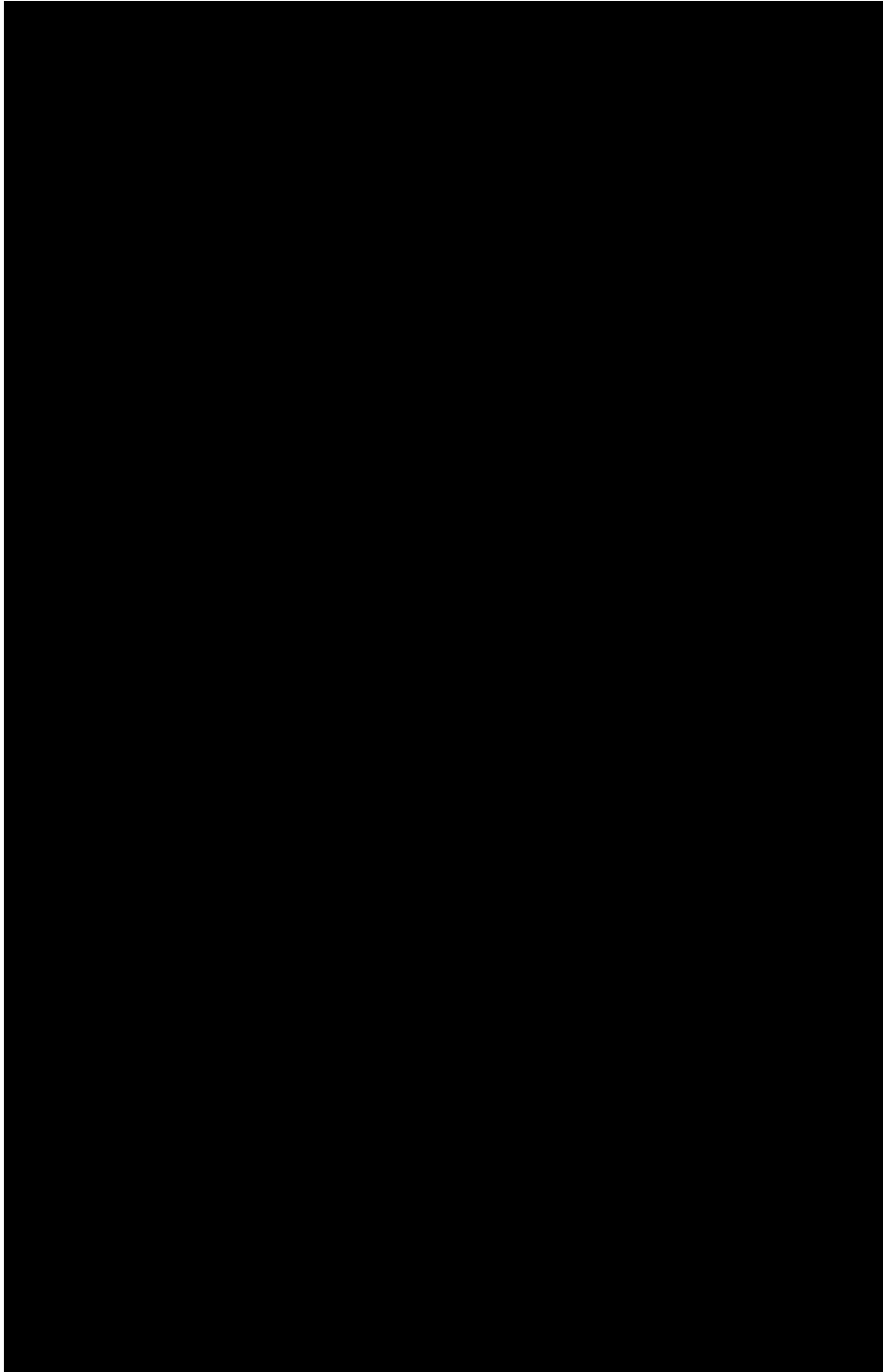
Map created by: Victorian Electoral Commission VEC  
Data used: Copyright © 2019- State Government Victoria, Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning  
Disclaimer: This material is provided for information purposes only. While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy and reliability of the content, the Victorian Government does not accept any liability to any person for the information provided.

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## Appendix 2: List of preliminary submissions

Twenty-five preliminary submissions were received in total. Submissions were made by:



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2019