



# SUBMISSION TO THE ELECTORAL REPRESENTATION REVIEW OF THE CITY OF PORT PHILLIP 2015

## Introduction

The Community Alliance of Port Phillip welcomes this opportunity to contribute to a Review of the City of Port Phillip's electoral arrangements and representation.

All levels of government in Australia (and in many other parts of the world) are experiencing a crisis of trust and faith in a fair, representative democratic process.

Many areas of business, media and social life are experiencing digital disruption and upheaval. Government is not immune from this revolution. This is a huge challenge for the Review, for those in government and others in the 'general public' committed to the democratic process.

Local government should be well placed to overcome cynicism and mistrust. Because of its scale and immediacy, it is the level of government closest to the people – or at least that is its potential.

But to do so requires reform of existing models of representation and innovation about engaging citizens who may be deaf to democracy.

For almost twenty years the Community Alliance of Port Phillip has been an active observer-participant in the evolution of the City of Port Phillip.

Independent of mind, non-partisan in character, committed to the public interest and the common good, we are hundreds of local residents who think and engage deeply with local issues. We love the vibrancy and diversity of the area.

We support like-minded residents who seek to represent their community as councillors – and a number of them have been elected over this period.

The planning, environmental, housing and demographic challenges facing Port Phillip are profound. They include the future of the Fisherman's Bend precinct; housing affordability; accessible and responsive community services to meet a growing population and changing demographic; and steps to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

Port Phillip is a unique municipality with high-level and strategic governance tasks mixed with local amenity and service delivery issues. After the City of Melbourne, it is the most complex and demanding municipality in the State to govern and to administer. It is:

- The pivot for future inner population growth through the South Melbourne Central and Fisherman's Bend development plans;
- A major tourism attractor, with key arts, foreshore and recreation venues of statewide significance within its boundaries;
- An infrastructure hub of statewide significance, including Webb Dock, Station Pier and Albert Park;
- A major statewide contributor of incomes, jobs and wealth. The City's estimated Gross Regional Product is \$11.4bn with an employment base of 87,000 in 2013;
- Facing major infrastructure pressures arising from increasing population density; inadequate school planning; traffic gridlock; lack of investment in public transport and recreational opportunities;
- Home to some of the wealthiest citizens in the country and some of the most disadvantaged citizens in the State – with a deepening housing affordability crisis.

## Key Principles

We submit that the Review's final recommendations should reflect these principles:

- Strong, healthy connections between councillors and those who elect them.
  - Two crucial electoral reforms flow from this:
    - The number of councillors should be increased, to ensure they have enhanced capability to consult with and respond to citizens and, in turn, citizens have greater opportunities to access and inform councillors
    - Ward structures need to be of a scale and consistent logic that enables this connection to occur – either through a greater number of single-member Ward electorates or a smaller number of multi-member Ward electorates.
- Mutual sense of place. For local government to be effective, local knowledge of planning, infrastructure, services and amenity issues is crucial – for both electors and councillors. However, electoral arrangements should not encourage parochialism, as tackling the municipal-wide challenges facing Port Phillip is vital.
- Electors must have choice in the way they elect their representatives. This means Port Phillip's electoral arrangements should incorporate all legislated technologies: a right to vote by post or by attending a polling place on the Election Day or attending a designated polling place before Election Day.
- Electoral arrangements must be fair and not advantage political parties, wealthy stakeholders or vested interests. The cost of standing and campaigning should not be a barrier nor privilege those with greater financial resources – the electoral process should be open to all.



## Number of Councillors

Victoria has the second-lowest average number of councillors per head of population in Australia. After exhaustive consideration of councillor–population ratios, the recent Georgiou Report proposes that a municipality with a population the size of Port Phillip should have 12 councillors. [*Recommendation No. 3 of the Local Government Electoral Review Stage 2 Report*]. This was a central recommendation designed to ‘strengthen the fairness and consistency of the electoral system’.

This Review was asked by the Georgiou panel to consistently apply the following considerations to the question of councillor numbers:

- Communities of interest;
- Municipal population, growth and geographic dispersal; and
- Accessibility of councillors to the community.

In the case of Port Phillip, there are particular reasons to increase the number of councillors:

- The complexity and state-wide significance of the issues facing the municipality as outlined above;
- The workload on the current Port Phillip councillors is considerable – since the creation of the City of Port Phillip it has not been possible for councillors to hold full-time employment and do an effective job as a councillor;
- The community has reasonable expectations about access to their elected representatives and these are difficult to meet given the workload of councillors;
- The anticipated increase in population of a further 80,000 with the development of Fishermans Bend requires strong oversight and governance. This level of growth will require a further electoral review within the next five years or earlier depending on how quickly developments are realized.

For all these reasons we support an increase in the number of councillors in Port Phillip.

## Attendance Voting or Postal Voting

The current arrangement for attendance voting should be retained. As well as voting by attendance on Election Day, electors have an option to apply for a postal vote and can also opt to vote early at a number of pre poll stations. It is important to give electors choices that meet the wide range of work and domestic situations facing voters today.

Low turnout affects the strength of the mandate held by councillors. Turnout in the 2012 CoPP election for voters on the State Roll ranged between 50-65 percent while only 6-12 percent of voters on the Council roll (principally absentee landlords) using postal votes turned out. The Council list constituted 25 percent of all voters entitled to vote.

It is highly doubtful that moving to postal voting only will lift turnout. There is no evidence to demonstrate whether individual Councils showed a marked improvement in voter turnout when they moved to postal voting from attendance voting.

The Table below presents turnout data for most urban municipalities for the past two Elections. It is part of a longer-run data series that can be provided to the Review.



There are some key points to note from this Table:

- Turnout in Victorian municipal elections appears to be falling regardless of the preferred voting method – this needs to be addressed collectively by local governments;
- Some of the highest turnouts are in municipalities using attendance voting;
- There is a noticeable gap in voter turnout between inner urban councils such as Stonnington, Yarra City and Port Phillip – all areas with significantly higher rental populations and Council voter enrolments – and other municipalities. Tenancy rates, enrolment issues and the addition of Council rolls with large numbers of voters entitled to vote but not compelled to do so, means that changing voting methods is not likely to significantly lift turnout in these municipalities.
- Data not included in the Table show that in Hobsons Bay and Glen Eira, which moved between attendance and postal voting over the last five elections, there was little change in voter turnout regardless of the voting method over this period.

### Selected Election Turnout 2008-12 for Urban Local Governments, with Voting Method

Municipality	Turnout 2012	Turnout 2008	Voting Method in 2012
Knox	73.88	75.11	Attendance
Moonee Valley	72.38	76.62	Postal
Hobsons Bay	71.80	73.11	Postal
Boorondara	71.39	74.53	Postal
Kingston	71.27	74.62	Postal
Banyule	70.72	75.11	Attendance
Bayside	70.33	74.18	Postal
Greater Dandenong	68.94	69.22	Attendance
Glen Eira	68.03	69.22	Attendance
Darebin	67.53	72.78	Postal
Wyndham	67.34	73.89	Postal
Maribyrnong	63.92	66.89	Attendance
Moreland	63.71	68.41	Attendance
Stonnington	56.29	65.10	Attendance
Yarra City	51.74	54.88	Attendance
Port Phillip	49.47	51.29	Attendance

Source: VEC and CAPP

Voter turnouts in the Port Phillip area for state and federal elections are also consistently lower than the statewide average.<sup>1</sup>

Compulsory postal voting risks depersonalizing the election process – and reducing the act of voting, the lynchpin of the democratic process, to little more than selecting products from a mail order catalogue.

<sup>1</sup> In the 2014 Victorian Election, statewide turnout was 93 percent compared with 88 percent in the seats of Albert Park and Prahran. The national turnout for the Federal 2013 Election was 93 percent, compared to 90 percent in the seat of Melbourne Ports, which includes the City of Port Phillip and parts of the Glen Eira municipalities.



There is also evidence that postal voting encourages 'dummy' candidates whose true identity and relationship to the ballot can be masked by an election catalogue, especially where multi-member Wards are being contested. Rather than encouraging an informed choice it can create the environment for deliberate voter confusion, cf. the 2012 Darebin elections with close to 20 candidates in some seats.

Compulsory postal voting benefits political parties and wealthy stakeholders that have the resources to send voting material directly to voters by mail. Individuals and others without this financial base will be significantly disadvantaged. Finally, it is ironic that when the future of the national mail service is under threat due to technological change and cost pressures, that it may be adopted as the only avenue for casting a vote.

The Election Day ritual of attendance voting when electors and candidates come face to face is a special moment in the democratic process. It is when the community both collectively and individually determines the future. It should not be abandoned lightly.

Clearly, to arrest the overall decline in turnout within our largely compulsory system of voting, additional advertising is needed to inform voters of their voting obligations and responsibilities and to reinforce the importance and rewards of participation in the democratic process.

## Number of Wards

The Georgiou Review made it clear that councillor numbers should allow for a choice between single-member wards, uniform multi-member wards and an unsubdivided ward structure. It did not recommend a 'one size fits all' approach and it noted the diversity of electorate structures used in Victorian local government.

It recommended that Ward boundaries be determined by:

- Area and physical features of terrain;
- Means of travel, traffic arteries, and communications and any special difficulties in connection therewith; and
- Community or diversity of interests.

Taking these factors into account and the principles above, there is no case for an unsubdivided structure. This would privilege political parties above all other candidates and would create a more partisan culture in the local government of Port Phillip.

## CAPP proposes two options:

Either Nine single member wards OR four multi-member wards each electing three councillors.

Both of these options provide for an increase in the number of councillors.

They both enable a sensible scale of representation for councillors and provide for greater councillor-electoral accessibility.

Four multi-member wards electing three members will deliver 12 councillors. This would assist with the workload of councillors and provide more direct contact with voters. It would be consistent with the Georgiou recommendations. While this would still mean relatively large electorates, with 20,000 plus voters per Ward, the boundaries could be designed around strong communities of interest in Port Melbourne, Albert Park-South Melbourne, St Kilda-East St Kilda and Elwood-Ripponlea. An advantage of multi-member Wards with three members elected by proportional representation is that a diversity of viewpoints from a local area can be represented on council – it is not a 'winner takes all' scenario.



Three Wards with three councillors will create even larger electorates with 28,000 plus voters per Ward. This would approximate the size of Legislative Assembly seats in states such as South Australia and Queensland. It would be considerably more difficult to create Ward boundaries reflecting strong communities of interest and that flow logically from natural features or traffic arteries.

Our other option of nine single member electorates could be created with minimal disruption to existing identities of interest. Indeed such an option would resolve the anomaly of the elongated Junction Ward, which incorporates a highly diverse range of residential pockets, with little coherence or logic to its boundaries. Residents of Junction Ward would be better served with new boundaries that would create greater affinity with nearby residential and commercial districts. While this is less than the number recommended by Georgiou, single member electorates provide a strong transparency, accountability and connecting framework between electors and elected members. This option would ease the workload of councillors and improve accessibility.

## **Ward Boundaries and Names**

### **Preferred Options**

1. Nine single member Wards  
Map and ward names – Attachment A
2. Four Wards electing three members each  
Map and ward names – Attachment B

Presented on behalf of the Community Alliance of Port Phillip

**Brenda Forbath**

Convenor

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**Submission Map CAPP-9-9**

- City of Port Phillip
- Proposed Wards
-  Number of Councillors





**Submission Map CAPP-12-4**

- City of Port Phillip
- Proposed Wards
- Number of Councillors

