

Local council electoral structure reviews

Summary for Round 1 councils

Prior to the passing of the *Local Government Act 2020* (LG Act 2020), the VEC was responsible for conducting periodic reviews of local government electoral structures to maintain fair and equitable representation (representation reviews).

The LG Act 2020 introduced a number of changes relating to local government representation and reviews. Representation reviews conducted by the VEC ceased and electoral structure reviews conducted by an Electoral Representation Advisory Panel were introduced.

Changes to the electoral structures that councils can have and how these structures are reviewed were also introduced.

Electoral structure options

Options under the LG Act 2020 are reduced compared to those available under the previous *Local Government Act 1989*. Single-councillor wards are now the default structure for all councils.

However, the LG Act 2020 allows for 2 alternative electoral structures: unsubdivided or multi-councillor wards with an equal number of councillors per ward. The Minister for Local Government has made the additional 2 structures available to large and small rural shire councils only. All metropolitan, interface and regional city councils must have the single-councillor ward structure.

Electoral structure reviews

In October 2022, the Minister for Local Government established two Electoral Representation Advisory Panels (ERAPs) to conduct electoral structure reviews of 39 local councils. These councils have electoral structures that are not compliant with structures permitted by the LG Act 2020.

Electoral structure reviews will commence in early 2023 and be completed by early 2024. The LG Act 2020 requires the VEC to provide administrative and technical support to the ERAPs.

Round 1 of the electoral structure reviews undertaken by ERAPs will focus on large and small rural shire councils. Round 1 reviews will consider the appropriate number of councillors for a council, whether the council should be subdivided into wards or unsubdivided, and if subdivided, the number of wards, ward boundaries, number of councillors per ward and ward names.

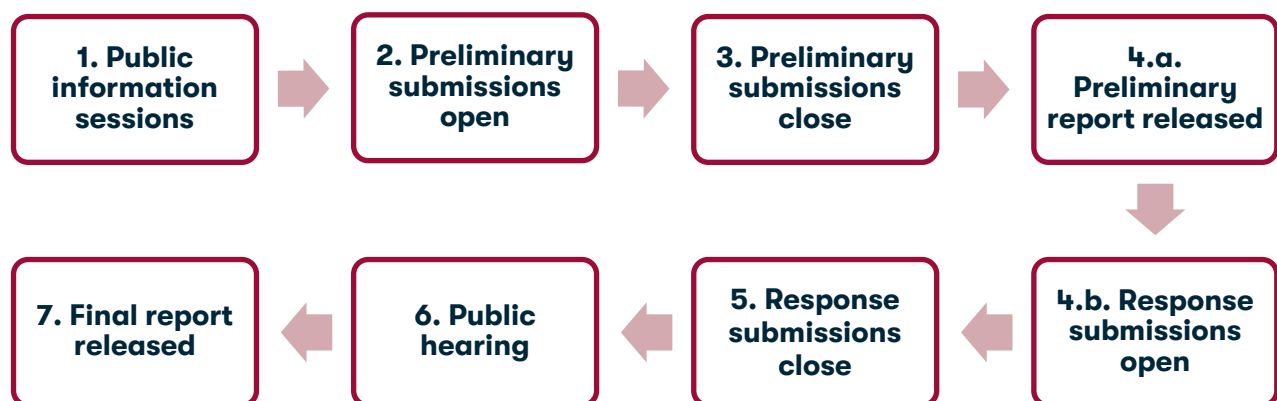
Participation in the review process

Public input is a vital part of the review process. There are three opportunities for involvement during Round 1 of the reviews:

1. a preliminary public submission
2. a response submission to the preliminary report
3. at an online public hearing, if a person makes a request to speak in their response submission.

Anyone can make a submission to the review, including councils, individual councillors and community members.

Electoral structure review process (Round 1 councils)



Prior to the review opening

The VEC will:

- make the council electoral structure review webpage live on the VEC website. This includes a submission guide
- issue media releases advising of the reviews and public information sessions:
 - a state-wide media release for all councils in Round 1
 - a tailored media release to local media for each council (prior to information sessions)
- place an advertisement in *The Age* and *Herald Sun* for all councils in Round 1. These advertisements notify the public of the review
- post about the review on the VEC's social media channels
- provide the council with a communications pack to use via its communication channels. This includes copy for publications like newsletters, copy for the council website, and copy for social media platforms.

The VEC are also making additional, optional promotion methods available to Round 1 councils. If requested by the council, the VEC may also (prior to information sessions):

- issue a VoterAlert message to voters in the local council area, advising of the reviews
- place social media advertisements targeted to voters in the local council area, advising of the reviews and public information sessions
- place advertisements in local newspapers, advising of the reviews and public information sessions. If this option is taken up, local councils must nominate to the VEC the local newspaper/s in which to advertise.

1. Public information sessions

The information sessions provide an opportunity for community members to find out more about the review process. Councillors and council officers are welcome to attend.

Public information sessions will be held online using a webinar platform such as Zoom. Information sessions will be joint sessions, with 2 combined sessions held for the 4 councils in each group.

2. Preliminary submissions open

The online submission tool is made available on the council's representation review webpage and submissions from the public are accepted for a period of 3 weeks (21 days).

Preliminary submissions will be published on the VEC website. Any personal information such as signatures, contact telephone numbers or addresses will be removed. Names and localities of submitters will be published alongside their submission.

3. Preliminary submissions close

Preliminary submissions are carefully considered by the ERAP when preparing the preliminary report.

4. a. Preliminary report released

The ERAP will present at least one option for the local council's electoral structure in a preliminary report.

The VEC will:

- publish the preliminary report on the VEC website
- provide the council with a link to the report
- issue a tailored media release to local media for each council, advising of the release of the preliminary report and the beginning of the response submission period
- post about the release of the preliminary report on the VEC's social media channels.

If requested by the council, the VEC may also:

- issue a VoterAlert message to voters in the local council area, advising of the release of the preliminary report and the beginning of the response submission period.

b. Response submissions open

Following the release of the preliminary report, the VEC accepts submissions from the public that respond to the recommendations contained in the report. Submissions from the public are accepted for a period of 3 weeks (21 days).

Response submissions will be published on the VEC website. Any personal information such as signatures, contact telephone numbers or addresses will be removed. Names and localities of submitters will be published alongside their submission.

5. Response submissions close

Response submissions are carefully considered by the ERAP while the final report is prepared.

6. Public hearing

An online public hearing is held to give people or organisations who have provided a response submission the opportunity to address the ERAP to expand on their views. Only people who have requested to speak as part of their response submission may speak at the public hearing. All members of the public may attend, including councillors and council staff.

A public hearing will not be held if no requests are made to speak. The VEC will contact the council following the close of response submissions to advise if the public hearing will proceed.

7. Final report released

The ERAP will provide a final report recommendation to the Minister for Local Government on the appropriate electoral structure for the council.

Any changes resulting from the final report will apply at the October 2024 general election.

The VEC will:

- publish the final report on the VEC website
- provide the council with a link to the report
- issue a tailored media release to local media for each council, advising of the release of the final report
- post about the release of the final report on the VEC's social media channels.

Review schedule – Round 1 council reviews

Below is the review schedule for the 12 large and small rural shire councils.

Round 1	Group	Council reviews ERAP 1	Council reviews ERAP 2	1. Information sessions	2. Preliminary submissions open	3. Preliminary submissions close	4. Preliminary report released & response submissions open	5. Response submissions close	6. Public hearing	7. Final report released
	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Buloke SC Gannawarra SC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northern Grampians SC Yarriambiack SC 	23 to 25 Jan 2023	25-Jan-23	15-Feb-23	15-Mar-23	5-Apr-23	12 to 14 Apr	10-May-23
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Campaspe SC Strathbogie SC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corangamite SC Surf Coast SC 	30 Jan to 1 Feb	1-Feb-23	22-Feb-23	22-Mar-23	12-Apr-23	18 to 20 Apr	17-May-23	
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hepburn SC Moorabool SC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central Goldfields SC Mount Alexander SC 	6 to 8 Feb	8-Feb-23	1-Mar-23	29-Mar-23	19-Apr-23	26 to 28 Apr	24-May-23	