

# Local Council Representation Review

Final Report



**DAREBIN CITY COUNCIL**

**October 2019**

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Version 1



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## Recommendation

The Victorian Electoral Commission recommends that Darebin City Council consist of nine councillors elected from three three-councillor wards, with adjustments to the current ward boundaries.

This recommendation is submitted to the Minister for Local Government as required by the *Local Government Act 1989*.

Please see Appendix 2 for a detailed map of this recommended structure.

## Executive summary

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

The purpose of an electoral representation review is to recommend an electoral structure that provides fair and equitable representation for people 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 ward boundaries and the number of councillors per ward).

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% of the average number of voters per councillor for that local council
3. ensuring communities of interest are as fairly represented as possible.

### Current electoral structure

Darebin City Council currently comprises nine councillors elected from three three-councillor wards. More information on Darebin City Council and the current electoral structure is available in the council fact sheet on the VEC website at [vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au).

Prior to the last representation review in 2007, Darebin City 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

Preliminary submissions opened at the commencement of the current review on Wednesday 26 June 2019. The VEC received 16 submissions for the representation review of Darebin City Council by the deadline at 5.00 pm on Wednesday 24 July 2019.

## Preliminary report

A preliminary report was released on Wednesday 21 August 2019 with the following options for consideration:

- Option A (preferred option)  
**Darebin City Council consist of nine councillors elected from three three-councillors wards, with adjustments to the current ward boundaries.**
- Option B (alternative option)  
**Darebin City Council consist of nine councillors elected from three three-councillor wards, with adjustments to the current ward boundaries, different to Option A.**

## Response submissions

The VEC received 10 submissions responding to the preliminary report by the deadline at 5.00 pm on Wednesday 18 September 2019.

## Public hearing

The VEC conducted a public hearing for those wishing to speak about their response submission at 6.00 pm on Tuesday 24 September 2019. Five people spoke at the hearing.

## Recommendation

**The Victorian Electoral Commission recommends that Darebin City Council continue to consist of nine councillors elected from three three-councillor wards, with adjustments to the current ward boundaries.**

This electoral structure was designated as Option A in the preliminary report. Please see Appendix 2 for a detailed map of this recommended structure.

## 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 states 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 people 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 is subdivided, the VEC must ensure that the number of voters represented by each councillor is within plus-or-minus 10% of the average number of voters per councillor for that local council.<sup>2</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 conducted a public information program to inform the community of the representation review, including:

- public notices printed in local and State-wide papers
- a public information session to outline the review process and respond to questions from the community
- media releases announcing the commencement of the review and the release of the preliminary report
- a submission guide to explain the review process and provide background information on the scope of the review

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

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

- an information email campaign targeted at known community groups and communities of interest in the local council area
- sponsored social media advertising geo-targeted to users within the local council area
- ongoing information updates and publication of submissions on the VEC website.

More information on the VEC's public information program for the representation review of Darebin City Council can be found at Appendix 3.

### Public consultation

Public input was accepted by the VEC via:

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

Public submissions are an important part of the review process but are not the only consideration. The VEC ensures its recommendations comply 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% 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.

## 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 data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics and .id<sup>3</sup>; voter statistics from the Victorian electoral roll; and other State and local government data sets
- small area forecasts provided by .id for relevant local council areas
- 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 and via oral submissions at the public hearing
- 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 five and 12 councillors but does not specify how to decide the appropriate number.<sup>4</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 appropriate number of councillors for a local council is comparing the local council under review to other local councils of a similar size and type (Principle 1). Generally, 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 justify fewer or more councillors, such as:

- the nature and complexity of services provided by the Council
- geographic size and topography

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<sup>3</sup> .id is a consulting company specialising in population and demographic analysis and prediction information products in most jurisdictions in Australia and New Zealand.

<sup>4</sup> Section 5B(1) of the *Local Government Act 1989*.

- population growth or decline
- the social diversity of the local council.

### **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
3. a combination of single-councillor and multi-councillor wards.

A subdivided electoral structure must have 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% 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 considers 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% 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 outcomes from previous elections indicate that 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.

# Darebin City Council representation review

## Profile of Darebin City Council

Darebin City Council begins about five kilometres north of Melbourne's CBD. The City of Darebin covers approximately 53 square kilometres and includes a mix of residential, industrial and retail areas. Darebin City Council is bounded by Whittlesea City Council in the north, Banyule City Council in the east, Yarra City Council in the south, and Moreland City Council in the west. Darebin Creek and Merri Creek form natural borders to the east and west of the local council area, respectively. The Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation are the traditional custodians of the land.

At the 2016 Census, the City of Darebin's population was 146,719. The City consists of the following suburbs: Reservoir (with a population of about 50,474), Preston (32,851), Northcote (24,561), Thornbury (18,568) and Kingsbury (3,780). Parts of the following suburbs also lie within the local council area: Alphington, Bundoora, Macleod, Fairfield and Coburg.<sup>5</sup>

The major activity centres are in Preston, Northcote and Reservoir.<sup>6</sup> Northland Shopping Centre (in Preston) also constitutes an important activity centre. La Trobe University (Bundoora) in the City's north is a major education precinct providing employment and tertiary education to residents and Greater Melbourne. Melbourne Polytechnic, with its main campus in Preston is a major provider of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) courses in Melbourne's northern suburbs.

The top five employment industries for residents employed in the City of Darebin are health care and social assistance (employing 13.1% of residents); education and training (10.9%); professional, scientific and technical services (9.9%); retail trade (9.4%); and accommodation and food services (7.7%).<sup>7</sup> There is a larger percentage of people employed as professionals in the City of Darebin at 30.7% compared with the average across Greater Melbourne at 25%. Other common occupations include clerical and administrative workers (13%), managers (12.5%), technicians and trades workers (11%) and community and personal service workers (10%).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Populations drawn from Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), '2016 Census Quickstats' for suburbs that lie entirely in the City of Darebin. See for example, ABS, '2016 Census Quickstats: Preston (Vic.)', accessed 20 August 2019, [https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census\\_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/SSC22109?opendocument](https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/SSC22109?opendocument).

<sup>6</sup> .id provides maps of the activity centres. See for example, .id, 'Preston Activity Area', accessed 20 August 2019, <https://profile.id.com.au/darebin/about?WebID=320/>.

<sup>7</sup> ABS, 'Data by Region: Darebin (C) (LGA) (21890)', accessed 20 August 2019, [https://itt.abs.gov.au/itt/r.jsp?RegionSummary&region=21890&dataset=ABS\\_REGIONAL\\_LGA2018&geocconcept=LGA\\_2018&maplayerid=LGA2018&measure=MEASURE&datasetASGS=ABS\\_REGIONAL\\_ASGS\\_2016&datasetLGA=ABS\\_REGIONAL\\_LGA2018&regionLGA=LGA\\_2018&regionASGS=ASGS\\_2016](https://itt.abs.gov.au/itt/r.jsp?RegionSummary&region=21890&dataset=ABS_REGIONAL_LGA2018&geocconcept=LGA_2018&maplayerid=LGA2018&measure=MEASURE&datasetASGS=ABS_REGIONAL_ASGS_2016&datasetLGA=ABS_REGIONAL_LGA2018&regionLGA=LGA_2018&regionASGS=ASGS_2016).

<sup>8</sup> ABS, 'Data by Region: Darebin (C) (LGA) (21890)'.

The median age of residents in the City of Darebin is 36 years old, which is the same for Greater Melbourne generally. There is a slightly larger percentage of residents in Darebin City Council aged between 25 and 44 years (at 35.3%) compared to Greater Melbourne (at 30.9%).<sup>9</sup>

Just over 30% of residents own their home in the City of Darebin. Approximately 27.5% are paying a mortgage on their home. The proportion of the population that is renting is distinctly higher in the City of Darebin at 38.3% compared with the average across Greater Melbourne (at 30%) and in Victoria (at 28.7%).<sup>10</sup>

The City of Darebin has one of the largest proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents compared to Greater Melbourne generally.<sup>11</sup> At the 2016 Census, there were 1,162 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents in the City of Darebin who comprised 0.8% of the population.<sup>12</sup>

The City is culturally and linguistically diverse. Large numbers of post-war migrants from Italy, Greece and Macedonia have settled in the area. At the last Census, just over 33% of Darebin City Council's population was born overseas. The five most common ancestries are English, Australian, Italian, Irish and Greek. The top five countries of birth other than Australia include Italy, China (excluding Special Administrative Regions and Taiwan), India, Greece and England.

Darebin City Council has a slightly higher unemployment rate at 7.2% compared to Victoria (6.6%). The median weekly household income for residents in the City is slightly lower at \$1,423 compared to the average for Greater Melbourne (\$1,542). However, the workforce participation rate of residents in the City of Darebin at 61.4% is similar to the average for Greater Melbourne (61.9%).<sup>13</sup>

The Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA) Index of Relative Disadvantage score for the City of Darebin overall is 1,004 (slightly lower than the average for Greater Melbourne at 1,021). This means that its population is more likely to experience a greater level of socio-economic disadvantage than the average in Greater Melbourne.<sup>14</sup> While areas in the southern parts of the City of Darebin (such as Fairfield and Northcote) score above Greater Melbourne's average,

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<sup>9</sup> ABS, 'Data by Region: Darebin (C) (LGA) (21890)'.

<sup>10</sup> ABS, '2016 Census Quickstats Darebin (C)', accessed 21 August 2019, [https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census\\_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/LGA21890?opendocument](https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/LGA21890?opendocument). ABS, '2016 Census: Quickstats Greater Melbourne', accessed 21 August 2019, [https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census\\_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/2GMEL?opendocument](https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/2GMEL?opendocument).

<sup>11</sup> Darebin City Council, 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Darebin', accessed 21 August 2019, <http://www.darebin.vic.gov.au/Darebin-Living/Community-support/Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-Darebin>.

<sup>12</sup> ABS, '2016 Census Quickstats Darebin (C)'.

<sup>13</sup> ABS, '2016 Census Quickstats Darebin (C)'.

<sup>14</sup> .id provides SEIFA Index of Relative Disadvantage scores for the City of Darebin overall and for smaller areas in the City. See: .id, 'City of Darebin: SEIFA by Profile Area', .id, accessed 21 August 2019, <https://profile.id.com.au/darebin/seifa-disadvantage-small-area?WebID=330>.

areas in the north and centre (such as the Northland Activity Area and Reservoir) score below the average, indicating a higher level of socio-economic disadvantage in these northern and central areas.<sup>15</sup>

Between 2006 and 2016, Darebin City Council's population grew from 128,067 to 146,719. The City's population is forecast to grow steadily at an average annual rate of 1.5% with the population projected to be 210,650 by 2036, adding an estimated 49,040 people.<sup>16</sup>

### **Current electoral structure**

Darebin City Council currently comprises nine councillors elected from three three-councillor wards. Prior to the last representation review in 2007, Darebin City 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 submissions on Wednesday 24 July 2019, the VEC received 16 submissions for the representation review of Darebin City Council. A list of people who made a preliminary submission can be found in Appendix 1.

### **Number of councillors**

Most submitters (14 out of 16) supported retaining nine councillors. Two submitters indicated support for more councillors. Most submitters supported nine councillors in relation to the current electoral structure of three three-councillor wards, which they commented has 'worked well' for the community, without further commentary about the overall number of councillors.

Of the two submitters who supported increasing the number of councillors, one favoured the maximum number of 12 councillors because it would mean more representation of minority groups and encourage greater political diversity in the Council. Another submitter wanted 'no fewer than the current nine councillors' without further discussion on the number of councillors.

### **Electoral structure**

Most submitters supported the current structure, stating that it has 'worked well' in representing the socially, economically and politically diverse community groups and views within the local council area. Two submitters favoured an unsubdivided electoral structure but also supported the current structure. There was no support for a single-councillor ward electoral structure.

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<sup>15</sup> .id, 'City of Darebin: SEIFA by Profile Area'.

<sup>16</sup> Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (Victoria), *Victoria in Future 2019: Population projections 2016 to 2056*, Melbourne: State Government of Victoria, 2019, p. 12.

### **Support for the current structure**

Submitters commonly stated that the current structure had facilitated the election of diverse councillors who have been able to represent a wide range of interests in the City of Darebin. Darebin City Council similarly stated in its submission that multi-councillor wards had done more to promote gender equity on the Council compared to single-councillor wards. Submitters were generally of the view that retaining the current structure would continue to promote diversity on the Council and appropriately reflect the diversity in the community.

Submitters also supported the current structure as a good reflection of local geographic communities of interest. Several submitters described the current structure as accurately reflecting the different 'character' of the geographic communities across the City of Darebin. These submitters highlighted the 'east-west', 'horizontal' boundaries, with one submitter stating that it 'is the most logical as affluence and demographics in general in Darebin are predominately shaped by distance from the city'.

Darebin City Council's preliminary submission added that councillors are more likely to work together, support one another and adopt 'a broader municipal-wide perspective' in their work under multi-councillor wards as opposed to single-councillor wards.

The Proportional Representation Society of Australia (Victoria-Tasmania) Inc. (PRSA) supported the current structure, commenting that wards with the same number of councillors are intrinsically more democratic than wards with different numbers of councillors. The PRSA supported the current ward structure because candidates in all wards need to reach the same quota of votes to be elected.

### **Unsubdivided electoral structure**

Two submitters supported an unsubdivided structure, commenting that it would expand the benefits offered in the current structure by further promoting the representation of diverse positions, interests and views in the local council area. The PRSA expressed some support for an unsubdivided structure but acknowledged that the large number of candidates at Darebin City Council's elections would make this option impractical as it would lead to a long ballot paper and higher rate of informal voting.

### **Opposition to single-councillor ward structure**

There was no support among submitters for single-councillor wards. Some submitters stated their opposition to single-councillor wards more explicitly than others, and commented that single-councillor wards would not reflect the diversity within the community and would instead support the election of 'major party and conventional (white male) candidates' over female candidates and those of diverse political, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, ages and abilities, among other under-represented groups.

Submitters argued that single-councillor wards were also more likely to encourage 'parochialism', reduce opportunities for the Council to 'rejuvenate' through the election of new councillors, increase the likelihood of uncontested wards at elections, and limit the choice of councillors for voters.

Submitters further commented that single-councillor wards would necessitate constant alterations to ward boundaries to accommodate population changes, while multi-councillor wards were more sustainable as they better accommodated population change in the long-term.

## **Preliminary report**

A preliminary report was released on Wednesday 21 August 2019. The VEC considered public submissions and research findings when formulating the options presented in the preliminary report.

### **Number of councillors**

The VEC considered that nine was the most appropriate number of councillors for Darebin City Council.

Darebin City Council has a higher voter-to-councillor ratio than most other nine-councillor metropolitan local councils. This, alongside projected population growth, suggested the possibility of increasing the number of councillors. Despite the anticipated growth and more complex demographics in the City of Darebin, the VEC also noted that Darebin City Council fitted within the band of metropolitan local councils with nine councillors and the work appeared to be well managed by the current councillors.

The VEC's research did find some complexity in the population that may have warranted an increase in the number of councillors. There are varying levels of social and economic disadvantage in the City of Darebin, with areas in the north generally more disadvantaged than in the south. There are also discernible demographic shifts in the City of Darebin since the last review in 2007. For example, there is a trend towards greater cultural and linguistic diversity and a growing percentage of renters, particularly in the suburbs closer to Melbourne CBD. However, the VEC noted that there was little support in preliminary submissions to increase the number of councillors. Instead, the dominant view was to retain nine councillors elected from the current structure as an efficient model for representing a diverse, complex and compact local council area.

The VEC noted that Darebin City Council had a range of policies and programs in place to address the needs of its diverse communities, as well as strategies to manage future growth.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Darebin City Council, 'Community Support', accessed 9 August 2019, <http://www.darebin.vic.gov.au/Darebin-Living/Community-support>. For a list of the Council's strategies see,

Based on its research, the VEC supported the view that nine councillors remained appropriate until the next scheduled review prior to the 2032 local council elections.

### **Electoral structure**

The VEC found that the current electoral structure was working well. There had been no uncontested wards over the past three elections and the electoral structure had kept more suburbs and communities together within its larger wards – without these communities being divided by internal ward boundaries, which was the case in the previous single-councillor ward structure.

The VEC did not consider single-councillor ward structures to be more favourable than multi-councillor ward structures for several reasons. First, the VEC noted that there was no support for single-councillor wards among preliminary submitters to the review and, indeed, some submitters explicitly opposed single-councillor wards. Second, the need to balance voter-to-councillor ratios across wards so that all wards were within and remained within plus-or-minus 10% of the average number of voters per councillor for as long as possible meant that ward boundaries would have needed to be somewhat arbitrary and potentially split communities. Third, the uneven population change within the City of Darebin meant that single-councillor wards, which were inherently more sensitive to population changes than multi-councillor wards, would not be sustainable through to the next scheduled representation review.

The VEC also considered an unsubdivided electoral structure in its preliminary report. An unsubdivided structure would promote a whole-of-council approach to representing the community and would remove the need to modify internal ward boundaries as the population changed between now and the next scheduled representation review. However, the VEC concluded that this electoral structure would be impracticable given the large number of candidates at Darebin City Council's elections. There were 60 candidates in the 2016 general election, 52 in 2012, and 48 in 2008. An unsubdivided structure would result in a lengthy and unwieldy ballot paper. In the VEC's experience, longer ballot papers can be confusing for voters and more difficult to fill out correctly, leading to higher levels of informal voting through voter error and effectively disenfranchising these voters.<sup>18</sup>

Based on the strong community support for the current three three-councillor wards and the VEC's findings that the current structure was working well, the VEC focused its modelling towards boundary variations in the current structure. In doing so, the VEC considered submitters'

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Darebin City Council, 'Organisation and Performance', accessed 9 August 2019,

<http://www.darebin.vic.gov.au/Your-Council/How-council-works/Organisation-and-Performance>.

<sup>18</sup> See Figure 9 in Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC), *Local Government Elections Report, 2016*, VEC: Melbourne, (2017), p. 26, accessed 7 August 2019,

<https://www.vec.vic.gov.au/files/Report%20on%20the%20conduct%20of%20the%202016%20Local%20Government%20Elections.pdf>.

suggestions regarding ward boundary changes. The VEC found the following two options to be the strongest models, which were presented in the preliminary report for further consultation.

Option A was a minimal-change option that made a proposed ward boundary modification to return La Trobe Ward to within the legislated plus-or-minus 10% tolerance of the average number of voters per councillor.

Option B would also return La Trobe Ward to within the legislated tolerance, but proposed different and more significant changes than Option A.

Both options took into consideration the lower growth in voter numbers in the City's northern areas, which had caused La Trobe Ward to exceed -10% below the accepted tolerance, as well as the current and projected growth anticipated through the central area in Cazaly Ward.

#### **Option A: Retaining the current model with modified ward boundaries**

In Option A, the VEC sought to model a least-change option that would respond to community support for retaining the current three three-councillor ward structure. Option A modified the northern boundary in the current structure between La Trobe and Cazaly wards. In making these modifications to the northern boundary, the VEC considered the growth anticipated in the Preston area within Cazaly Ward. This option would incorporate more of Reservoir's south into La Trobe Ward, which already included most of the suburb. The VEC also sought to improve on the current boundary by following more major roads and landmarks.

The boundary adjustments proposed in Option A would affect a total of 3,725 voters or 3.18% of Darebin City Council's total enrolment.

The VEC did not consider there to be any significant disadvantages to Option A based on its findings and the support for retaining the current structure in the preliminary submissions.

#### **Option B: Current model with different ward boundaries**

In Option B, changes to both the northern and southern internal ward boundaries in the current structure were proposed. In developing this option, the VEC considered the boundary adjustments proposed in two submissions (including Darebin City Council's submission) which proposed adjustments to both the northern and southern internal boundaries in the current electoral structure.

Option B responded to these two submissions. Like Option A, this option would also use major roads and landmarks to form the new boundaries, where possible. Option B would also include more of Reservoir's south into La Trobe Ward, but the northern boundary was adjusted in a different way to Option A, moving different areas of Reservoir's south from Cazaly Ward to La Trobe Ward.

The VEC considered that there were potential disadvantages to this option:

- The boundary adjustments in Option B would affect a total number of 10,952 voters or 9.34% of the total enrolment in Darebin City Council, significantly greater than the number of voters that would be affected in Option A.
- The ward boundaries in Option B were less clear than those in Option A.
- Option B would further divide Thornbury, which was mainly in Rucker Ward in the current structure. As Option A did not propose any adjustment to the southern boundary between Rucker and Cazaly Wards, more of Thornbury would remain in Rucker Ward in Option A compared to this option.

### **Ward names**

The VEC used the same ward names as the current structure to identify the wards in Options A and B. Four submitters identified a strong preference for names that reflect local Indigenous history and ties to the land. These submitters indicated a preference for the traditional owners, the Wurundjeri People to be consulted on appropriate ward names. The VEC invited comments from the community on appropriate ward names as part of submissions responding to the preliminary report. It also noted that thorough community consultation could be a lengthy process and that the Act provided for ward names to be changed outside of the representation review by an Order in Council.

### **Options**

After careful consideration, the VEC put forward the following options:

- Option A (preferred option)  
**Darebin City Council consist of nine councillors elected from three three-councillor wards, with adjustments to the current ward boundaries.**
- Option B (alternative option)  
**Darebin City Council consist of nine councillors elected from three three-councillor wards, with adjustments to the current ward boundaries, different to Option A.**

## Public response

### Response submissions

The VEC accepted submissions responding to the preliminary report from Wednesday 21 August 2019 until 5.00 pm on Wednesday 18 September 2019. The VEC received ten response submissions. A list of people who made a response submission can be found in Appendix 1. Table 1 indicates the level of support for each option.

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*Preferences expressed in response submissions*

Option A	Option B	Other
9*	2†	2‡

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\*This number includes submitters who supported both Options A and B.

†These submitters supported both Options A and B.

‡This included a submitter who supported Option A.

### Number of councillors

Most submitters did not comment directly on the overall number of councillors but indicated their support for nine councillors through their support for the current arrangement. Darebin City Council reiterated its support for nine councillors, noting that most preliminary submitters had also supported nine councillors. The PRSA supported nine councillors as well as continuing with an odd number of councillors, which would avoid tied votes and minimise occasions for the use of the Mayor's casting vote during the Council's decision-making. Similarly, Lyle Allan of Barwon Heads, who previously lived in the City of Darebin, also supported the current number of councillors and an odd number of councillors to support the delivery of proportional representation at elections.

Two submitters requested a different number of councillors. One submitter (Brenda McKenna of Preston) supported 11 councillors. Another submitter (Oliver Walsh of Northcote) supported three or four councillors in each ward, indicating support for nine councillors or 12 councillors.

### Electoral structure

Most submitters supported Option A over Option B. Submitters in favour of Option A stated that this option best preserved the current structure, which was 'working well'. They noted that Option A would affect the smallest number of voters and represented least disturbance and confusion for the voters of Darebin City Council.

Several submitters commented that both options would cater for the projected population growth in Cazaly Ward and across the local council area over the next decade. Option B was less appealing to these submitters because the option would affect a greater number of voters. These submitters also argued that Option A was preferable to Option B because it did more to reflect

communities of interest. Submitters supported Option A because they preferred the northern boundary adjustment in this option.

Several submitters considered Option B's ward boundary adjustment between Rucker and Cazaly wards to be 'less clear and even arbitrary', leading to Thornbury being divided. Zaccheus Evangelides of Thornbury considered that Option B 'would not unite communities of interest' by 'splitting East Thornbury and Regent into two different wards'.

There were only two submitters who supported Option B. The PRSA supported both options on principle as both would deliver multi-councillor wards and proportional representation in the Council's elections. According to the PRSA, multi-councillor wards with an equal number of councillors would mean all candidates need to reach the same quota of votes to be elected. Mr Allan supported both options because they would continue to deliver proportional representation and provide residents with more than one councillor to approach. Mr Allan stressed that proportional representation was important as the Council had lacked diversity (one party held all wards) under the previous single-councillor ward electoral structure.

### **Other electoral structures**

The VEC received two proposals to change the electoral structure. Ms McKenna's submission indicated a level of dissatisfaction with Darebin City Council, stating that the Council was not doing enough to meet the United Nation's sustainable development agenda. Ms McKenna proposed an alternative structure of three wards with one councillor per ward; the whole local council area to have six councillors elected by proportional representation; and a Mayor and Deputy Mayor directly elected by preferential voting. The VEC considered this submission but noted that the request was mostly out of scope for this review.

Mr Walsh also supported an alternative three-ward structure for Darebin City Council. Mr Walsh proposed a structure with internal ward boundaries running north to south instead of the current east to west boundaries. Mr Walsh commented that in his time as a councillor for Darebin City Council, he had noticed 'significant issues' along the Merri and Darebin creeks. Mr Walsh stated that his preferred structure would mean that the three wards would be 'socio economically more equal than they currently are' and would 'fix' the perception that areas in the south of the City were better taken care of than the north.

### **Public hearing**

The VEC conducted a public hearing for those wishing to speak about their response submission at 6.00 pm on Tuesday 24 September 2019 at Preston Shire Hall, 286 Gower Street, Preston. Five people spoke at the public hearing. These speakers included Adam Newman of Wollert; Mayor of Darebin City Council, Councillor Susan Rennie who spoke on behalf of Darebin City Council's response submission; Sue Wilkinson (Chief Executive Officer of Darebin City Council)

who added clarifying information, while not formally speaking to a submission; Deputy Mayor, Councillor Susanne Newton; and Oliver Walsh. The Deputy Mayor's submission was independent of the Council's submission. All speakers supported Option A, although Mr Walsh supported the electoral structure in his response submission as his first preference.

### **Mr Newman**

At the public hearing, Mr Newman told the VEC's public hearing panel that Option A would preserve an electoral structure that was working well for people in the City of Darebin.

Mr Newman felt that Option A was preferable because population growth was expected in Cazaly Ward and the boundary changes in Option A would do more to ensure that the wards were sustainable in the long-term without the need for constant boundary adjustments. Mr Newman also commented positively on Option A's grouping of the suburbs in each ward.

Mr Newman expressed some concern that Rucker Ward had a higher voter-to-councillor ratio (at +7.18%) which could trigger an earlier than expected boundary change, but he considered Option A to be acceptable and preferable to Option B or the possibility of single-councillor wards.

### **Mayor of Darebin City Council (Councillor Rennie) and Chief Executive Officer (Ms Wilkinson)**

The Mayor informed the VEC that although Option A was different to the Council's preliminary proposal, the Council supported this option as it was an 'appropriate proposal' to achieve the 'evening up' of enrolments across the wards, would retain the fundamental three three-councillor ward structure which was working well, and lead to minimal disruption.

The Mayor emphasised that a positive feature of the VEC's options were their consideration of the expected growth in Cazaly Ward. The Mayor explained that population growth in the City of Darebin occurred along a linear path and along the major transport corridors. The Mayor explained that a lot of growth was expected in Cazaly Ward over the next decade, with slightly less growth in the other two wards. Much of the growth would occur in and around Preston. For this reason, the Mayor considered it appropriate for Cazaly Ward to be set with a lower number of voters (but still within the legislated plus-or-minus 10% deviation from the average voter-to-councillor ratio across the City).

Regarding communities of interest, the Mayor explained that many people in the City of Darebin identified more strongly with their suburb, which made Option A more appropriate than Option B, as it did more to 'line up' with the major suburbs. Considering Option B, the Mayor commented that the northern boundary adjustment (between Cazaly and La Trobe wards) in Option B was acceptable and 'just a different way' of returning La Trobe Ward to the legislated requirement. However, the Mayor preferred Option A's northern boundary adjustment as it would include Regent, which is a 'distinct part of Reservoir', in La Trobe Ward. The Mayor believed that with

the present patterns of growth, all of Reservoir could be included in La Trobe Ward in the future, which would be a positive recognition of the communities of interest belonging to La Trobe Ward.

Considering Option B's southern ward boundary adjustment (between Rucker and Cazaly wards) the Mayor stated that Thornbury was a 'clear community of interest' and that the section of Thornbury east of the railway line would be divided from the rest of Rucker Ward in Option B. If the VEC was to adopt Option B, the Mayor believed that it could create uncertainty and confusion for voters in this part of Thornbury, who for a long time have been in Rucker Ward.

The Mayor explained that there were some strong shared interests across the City but there were differences between the north and south, which had been outlined in the submissions. The Mayor noted that La Trobe Ward encompassed a particularly diverse population; it was geographically larger, which meant more distance for councillors to cover; it also included La Trobe University and a large student population. However, the Mayor did not consider that there was a much greater workload for the three councillors in the north, compared to the south. The Mayor stated that there were different challenges in each ward. While Rucker Ward's population was generally less disadvantaged compared with La Trobe Ward, Rucker Ward tended to have a more vocal and mobilised community with higher expectations regarding councillors and the Council.

The Mayor did not support a division of wards from east to west (proposed by Mr Walsh). The Mayor stated that it would not reflect the growth patterns along the major transport corridors in the City, meaning one ward would grow much more rapidly compared to the others. The Mayor also considered that there were differences in the way Darebin Creek and Merri Creek were being used by residents in the north compared to the south of the City, suggesting that they were not strong communities of interest and there was no support for creating wards around the creeks.

### **Mr Walsh**

Mr Walsh was a previous councillor and Deputy Mayor of Darebin City Council. Mr Walsh reiterated his support for a three-ward structure that would divide the local council area along vertical boundaries, creating long and vertical wards, which would capture communities of interest along Darebin Creek and Merri Creek. Mr Walsh considered that his proposed electoral structure would reduce any real or perceived disadvantage in council representation for the northern areas of the City compared to the more 'affluent and vocal' south. Mr Walsh explained that there was a distinct demographic and socio-economic divide and he believed that there was evidence that the 'vocal south' had generally received more attention from the Council than the north.

Mr Walsh suggested that his three wards have three or four councillors each, and that the ward capturing Merri Creek be renamed 'Merri Ward'. Mr Walsh was also supportive of Indigenous place names for the wards.

The VEC's public hearing panel questioned Mr Walsh about the impact of his proposed electoral structure for the wider City of Darebin as it would require substantial change. Mr Walsh believed that his proposal would not make much of a difference because most people were not aware of the ward boundaries. Mr Walsh also expressed support for an unsubdivided electoral structure if his preferred option was not considered. Regarding the VEC's two options, Mr Walsh considered that both options were similar, but he stated his support for Option A over Option B.

Considering Option A, Mr Walsh commented that he did not generally support the use of railway lines as ward boundaries but acknowledged that the use of the railway line between Rucker and Cazaly wards in Option A was unlikely to change, due to the need to keep all wards within the legislated voter-to-councillor tolerance.

Mr Walsh also supported a reconsideration of the municipal boundaries for all local council areas, which the VEC noted was outside the scope of this review.

#### **Deputy Mayor (Councillor Newton)**

The Deputy Mayor told the VEC that she strongly supported the renaming of wards to recognise the traditional owners of the land. Cr Newton considered that the renaming should occur in consultation with the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation.

Cr Newton emphasised that the current multi-councillor ward structure was working well and that there was no benefit in returning to single-councillor ward structures.

Cr Newton told the VEC that a multi-member system had led to a more 'democratic and diverse' Darebin City Council. The current council, she told the VEC, is made up of six women (and three men), two political parties, four independent representatives, as well as councillors reflecting a range of ages, backgrounds and interests. Cr Newton stated that her ward (La Trobe Ward) included three councillors from Italian, Indian and Anglo-Australian backgrounds who represented the Australian Labor Party, Greens Party and one independent. The three La Trobe Ward councillors also included one councillor in their first term, one in their third term, and one that had served the City of Darebin for a long time.

Cr Newton explained that La Trobe Ward was not too large for its councillors and if one councillor was on leave, others would step in to continue the work.

Cr Newton reiterated her support for Option A, which would cause minimal disruption to the current arrangement. Cr Newton commented that Option A's proposed boundary adjustments 'made sense' because a smaller sized Cazaly Ward would accommodate the anticipated growth in Preston and in the urban renewal precinct at Northland Shopping Centre. In Cr Newton's

opinion, it also made sense for the northern boundary to follow McNamara Street, Regent Street and the railway line as this would incorporate more of Reservoir into La Trobe Ward, which was beneficial as La Trobe Ward currently includes most of Reservoir.

Cr Newton considered Mr Walsh's proposed ward boundaries would be a major change for the City of Darebin, which she did not support.

## Findings and recommendation

### The VEC's findings

The VEC considered the key themes expressed in the submissions and at the public hearing, as well as internal research and analysis to develop its final recommendation. The VEC's recommendation complies with the legislative equality requirement and acknowledges communities of interest. The VEC recommends Darebin City Council consist of nine councillors elected from three three-councillor wards, with adjustments to the current boundaries (designated as Option A in the preliminary report).

### Number of councillors

Determining the number of councillors for Darebin City Council was not a substantially disputed element of this review. Like the preliminary submissions, the dominant view at the final stage of the review was to retain nine councillors. At the public hearing, most speakers, including the Mayor who spoke on behalf of Darebin City Council, supported the current number of councillors, indicating that nine councillors would efficiently and effectively represent people in the City of Darebin. Darebin City Council also currently remains within the band of nine-councillor metropolitan local councils. Therefore, the VEC recommends nine councillors until the next scheduled review prior to the 2032 local council elections.

### Electoral structure

The VEC considered three electoral structures in its final deliberation, which included Options A and B, as well as Mr Walsh's alternative electoral structure, which was described in his response submission and in his presentation at the public hearing. On balance, the VEC considered that Option A had more advantages and fewer drawbacks than the other electoral structures.

The VEC considered Mr Walsh's alternative electoral structure of three wards based on internal boundaries running north to south. This structure did not meet the VEC's main principle to consider communities of interest and ensure, as far as possible, that communities of interest were not unnecessarily divided by ward boundaries. The VEC reasoned that dividing the local council area into vertically running wards would divide the existing communities of interest in the southern, central and northern parts of the City of Darebin. Like most submitters, the VEC found that demographic differences in the City of Darebin were predominantly shaped by the distance that people lived from the Melbourne CBD. The VEC modelled Mr Walsh's submission and found that the wards would not comply with the legislated requirement for all wards to be within plus-or-minus 10% of the average number of voters per councillor across the local council area. For Mr Walsh's proposal to be viable, at least one ward would not include any of the northern sections of the City.

In its preliminary report, the VEC noted that Options A and B both return La Trobe Ward to be within the legislated tolerance. Both options would also accommodate the growth anticipated in the Preston area in Cazaly Ward and ensure that all wards remained within the tolerance until the next scheduled review.

Both options would also continue to provide voters with the opportunity to elect candidates representing geographic and non-geographic communities of interest. One of the common themes in this review was the importance of an electoral structure that would continue to promote diversity on the Council. The VEC received generally positive submissions about the current multi-councillor ward structure, which had delivered more diverse representatives in Darebin City Council compared to the single-councillor ward model in place prior to the Council's 2008 general election.

Most submitters also supported the horizontal division of the local council area in both options, commenting that the wards generally reflected the different character in the southern, central and northern parts of the City.

At the final stage of the review, the VEC heard clear support from submitters for Option A over Option B. Option A was considered to have more advantages and less drawbacks than Option B. Option A would impact a smaller number of voters and minimise disruption to the current arrangement. The VEC notes that Option A affects a total of 3,725 voters, or 3.18% of the total enrolment. In contrast, Option B would affect 10,952 voters (9.34% of enrolment). The VEC supports a least-change option for Darebin City Council, given the evidence supporting the current arrangement. The VEC therefore considered Option A to be preferable to Option B, as it minimises the number of voters affected by the necessary ward boundary adjustments and therefore reduces voter confusion at the next general election.

The VEC also considered that Option A presented a better reflection and recognition of communities of interest than Option B. In Option A, the VEC's proposed adjustment to the northern boundary between Cazaly and La Trobe wards would move an area commonly known as Regent into La Trobe Ward. Several submitters noted that Regent shared commonalities with Reservoir. At the public hearing, the Mayor and Deputy Mayor both commented that people in Regent were more likely to see themselves as belonging to La Trobe Ward.

One of the VEC's main principles in these reviews is to ensure, where possible, that geographic communities of interest are not split by ward boundaries. The VEC considers that Option A, which does not make any adjustments to the southern boundary between Rucker and Cazaly Wards, will better ensure that existing communities of interest are not split by the VEC's proposed boundary adjustments. As several submitters stated, Option B, with its proposed boundary adjustment in the south, would move an area of Thornbury east of the railway line into Cazaly Ward. The VEC considered this to be a drawback of Option B.

The VEC also considered that Option A is more advantageous because of its boundaries, which follow more easily identifiable features (such as distinguishable roads and the railway line) compared to Option B. On balance, the VEC believes that Option A is more appropriate than Option B. For these reasons, the VEC recommends Option A.

### **Ward names**

The VEC has used the same ward names as in the current electoral structure to identify the wards in the recommended option. Throughout the review, there were several submitters who identified a preference for names that would reflect local Indigenous history and ties to the land. At the public hearing, the Deputy Mayor reiterated a strong preference for Darebin City Council to consult the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation on this matter. The VEC notes that the Act provides for ward names to be changed outside of the representation review by an Order in Council.

## **The VEC's recommendation**

**The Victorian Electoral Commission recommends that Darebin City Council consist of nine councillors elected from three three-councillor wards, with adjustments to the current ward boundaries.**

This recommendation is submitted to the Minister for Local Government as required by the *Local Government Act 1989*. The model was designated as Option A in the VEC's preliminary report for this review.

Please see Appendix 2 for a detailed map of this recommended structure.

## Appendix 1: Public involvement

### Preliminary submissions

Preliminary submissions were made by:

Allan, Lyle

Atkinson, Gary

Banks, Christine

Brown, Jen Jewel

Darebin City Council

Darebin Ratepayer Group

Dempsey, Damien

Evangelides, Zaccheus

Lewis, Marcia

Nechwatal, Rose

Newton, Susan (Deputy Mayor and Councillor)

Peisker, Andy

Proportional Representation Society of Australia (Victoria-Tasmania) Inc.

Thorne, Alison

Walker, Leslie

Wauchope, Gindi

### Response submissions

Response submissions were made by:

Allan, Lyle

Banks, Christine

Darebin City Council

Evangelides, Zaccheus

Flattley, Michael

McKenna, Brent

Newman, Adam

Newton, Cr Susanne

Proportional Representation Society of Australia (Victoria-Tasmania) Inc.

## **Public hearing**

The following individuals spoke at the public hearing:

Newman, Adam

Rennie, Susan (Mayor and Councillor)

Wilkinson, Sue (Chief Executive Officer for Darebin City Council)

Walsh, Oliver

Newton, Suzanne (Deputy Mayor and Councillor)

## Appendix 2: Map

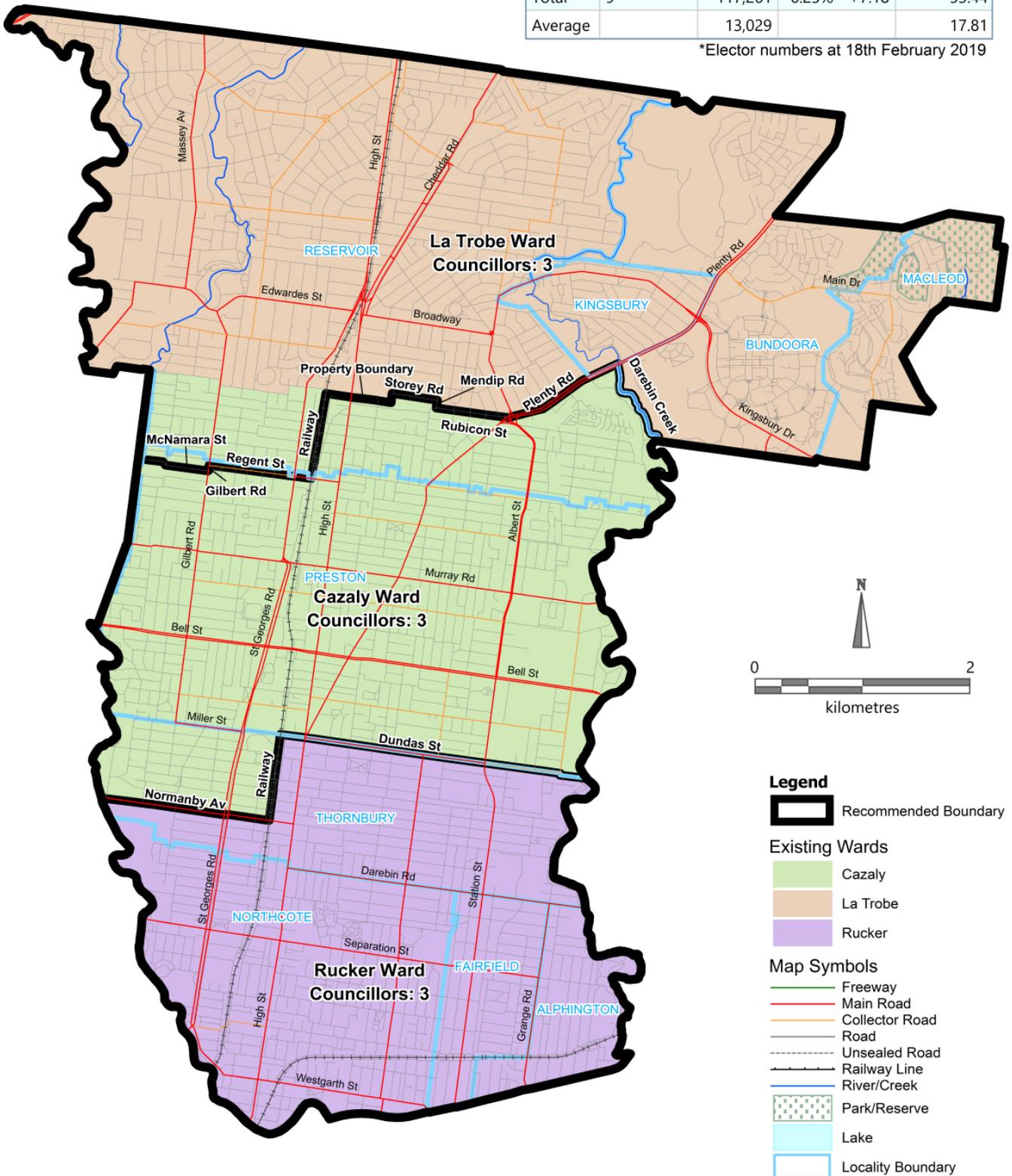
The map is provided on the next page.

# Darebin City Council

Map of Recommended Option  
Nine Councillors, Three Wards

Ward	Councillors	Electors*	Deviation	Area sq km
Cazaly	3	36,644	-6.25%	15.31
La Trobe	3	38,724	-0.93%	25.38
Rucker	3	41,893	+7.18%	12.75
Total	9	117,261	-6.25% - +7.18	53.44
Average		13,029		17.81

\*Elector numbers at 18th February 2019



Map prepared by:

Victorian Electoral Commission **VEC**

Data use:



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Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning

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## Appendix 3: Public information program

### Advertising

In accordance with the Act, public notices of the review and the release of the preliminary report were placed in the following newspapers:

Newspaper	Notice of review	Notice of preliminary report
<i>Herald Sun</i>	Thursday 6 June	Wednesday 7 August
<i>Preston Leader</i>	Tuesday 18 June	Tuesday 20 August
<i>Northcote Leader</i>	Wednesday 19 June	Wednesday 21 August

### Media releases

A media release was prepared and distributed to local media to promote the commencement of the review. A further release was distributed with the publication of the preliminary report. A final media advisory was circulated on the publication date of this final report.

### Public information sessions

A public information session for people interested in the review process was held on Tuesday 25 June 2019 at the Preston Shire Hall, 286 Gower Street, Preston.

### Submissions guide

A submission guide was developed and made available on the VEC website, or in hardcopy on request, throughout the review timeline. The submission guide provided information about the review, the review timeline and how to make submissions to the review.

### Online submission tool

An online submission tool was developed and made available during the submission periods of the review. The tool allowed people to make a submission from the VEC website. During the preliminary submission stage, users also had the opportunity to map out their preferred subdivisions through the online submission tool using Boundary Builder. Boundary Builder included real elector numbers so that users could see if their preferred structures and numbers of councillors met the plus-or-minus 10% rule.

### VEC website

The VEC website delivered up-to-date information to provide transparency and facilitate public participation during the review process. All public submissions were published on the website.

## **Email and social media engagement**

The VEC delivered an information email campaign targeted at known community groups and communities of interest in the local council area. This included a reminder email at each milestone of the representation review process.

The VEC also published sponsored social media advertising that was geo-targeted to users within the local council area. This included advertising at both the preliminary submission and response submission stages. The total reach of these posts was 10,600 during the preliminary submission stage and 9,264 during the response submission stage.

## **Council communication resources**

The VEC provided the Council with a communication pack that included information on the review in various formats. While the council is encouraged to distribute this information and raise awareness about the review, the VEC is an independent reviewer and all communications resources include reference and links to the VEC website and core materials.

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