

Local council ward boundary review

Preliminary Report

Pyrenees Shire Council

February 2024



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(Victorian Electoral Commission)
February 2024

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Content approval

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1	14 February 2024	Executive chairperson
1	14 February 2024	Program sponsor

Release approval

Version	Date approved	Approved by	Brief description
1.1	27 February	Program sponsor	Dates adjusted for close of submissions, public hearing and final report.

Acknowledgement of Country

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) acknowledges the Dja Dja Wurrung, Eastern Maar, Wadawurrung, Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters for which it is holding this review and pays respects to ancestors and Elders past, present and emerging. The VEC acknowledges their custodianship for many thousands of years and their continuing living culture.

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Executive summary

Under section 17 of the *Local Government Act 2020* (Vic) (the Act), the Minister for Local Government has asked the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) to conduct ward boundary reviews for 10 local council areas prior to the next general local council elections in October 2024.

For these 10 councils, the number of voters per councillor is forecast to be out of balance by October 2024, with the number of voters per councillor in one or more wards forecast to vary from the average number of voters per councillor for all of the wards by more than 10 per cent.

Pyrenees Shire Council is one of the 10 local council areas under review. The purpose of this review is to correct this forecast imbalance for the October 2024 local council election.

In its review, the VEC is looking at:

- the number of currently enrolled voters in each ward
- the forecast number of enrolled voters at the next election
- adjustments to the locations of existing ward boundaries.

At the end of the review, the VEC will recommend ward boundary changes to the minister, with the aim of all wards in Pyrenees Shire Council being within the legislated +/-10% tolerance at the time of the 2024 local council election.

This preliminary report presents proposed ward boundary adjustments for Pyrenees Shire Council.

More information about the background to the review is available on [page 6](#).

Ward boundary models

After considering research and the requirements of the Act, the VEC is presenting 2 models for public consultation. These models propose different options for ward boundary changes to Pyrenees Shire Council.

Details on these models, including maps, are available in [Appendix 1](#).

Next steps

The VEC is now seeking feedback on its preliminary ward boundary models. You can make a response submission to the preliminary models until 5 pm on Wednesday 20 March 2024. If any submitters ask to speak at a public hearing, the VEC will hold this online on Wednesday 27 March 2024. Following the hearing, the VEC will present its final recommendation to the minister on Wednesday 24 April 2024.

More information about the review process is available on the VEC website at vec.vic.gov.au

Background

About the 2024 ward boundary reviews

Under section 15(2) of the *Local Government Act 2020* (Vic), for a council that is divided into wards:

- a) each ward should have an approximately equal number of voters per councillor; and
- b) the number of voters per councillor in a ward should not vary from the average number of voters per councillor for all of the wards by more than 10 per cent.

On 22 February 2023, the VEC provided advice to the Minister for Local Government on councils that were projected to have at least one ward with the number of voters per councillor outside this +/-10% range at the time of the October 2024 local council elections.

This advice was based on:

- current enrolment and enrolment trends
- future population projections
- legislated changes to council entitlements for council-enrolled voters.

On 20 April 2023, in response to this advice and under section 17 of the Act, the minister asked the VEC to conduct ward boundary reviews for 10 local council areas before the October 2024 local council elections. These reviews aim to balance the number of voters per councillor for the wards of these 10 councils in time for the 2024 elections.

Pyrenees Shire Council is one of the 10 local council areas under review.

In its review, the VEC is looking at:

- the number of currently enrolled voters in each ward
- the forecast number of enrolled voters at the next election
- adjustments to the locations of existing ward boundaries.

A ward boundary review does not change a council's electoral structure, number of councillors, or ward names. A ward boundary review also cannot change the external boundaries of a local council, divide local councils, or amalgamate local councils.

At the end of the review, the VEC will recommend ward boundary adjustments to the minister, with the aim of all wards in Pyrenees Shire Council being within the legislated +/-10% tolerance at the time of the 2024 local council election.

The ward boundary review panel

Leading the VEC's review is a ward boundary review panel, which has 2 members:

- the executive chairperson
- the program sponsor.

Administrative and technical support for the panel is provided by the VEC's team of electoral structure and boundary review experts as well as specialists from across the VEC.

Public engagement

Public information program

The VEC is conducting a public information and awareness program about the Pyrenees Shire Council ward boundary review. This includes:

- printed public notices in state-wide newspapers
- public information sessions to outline the review process and respond to questions from the community
- a media release to announce the start of the review
- information on social media channels
- website content on vec.vic.gov.au, including:
 - current information on the review process
 - fact sheets for each council under review and a submission guide.

Pyrenees Shire Council was also offered but did not take up 2 optional methods to promote the reviews:

- printed public notices in local newspapers
- targeted social media advertisements for the council area.

Public consultation

The VEC now invites input to the ward boundary review of Pyrenees Shire Council via:

- response submissions to this preliminary report
- an online public hearing for anyone who makes a response submission and wishes to speak to the ward boundary review panel and expand on their submission.

Public submissions are an important part of the review process and the VEC will consider them alongside other factors during the review. These factors are outlined below.

Considerations in developing models

The models in this preliminary report comply with the Act and were developed through careful consideration of:

- research and analysis conducted by the VEC, including geospatial, electoral and demographic data
- rates or patterns of population and voter change over time, and relevant forecasts of growth or decline based on forecast information provided by .id (informed decisions, a company specialising in demographics and forecasting).

When developing the preliminary models for Pyrenees Shire Council, the VEC considered:

- whether the adjusted wards would comply with section 15(2) of the Act (see below), and how long they are likely to comply
- whether meaningful and effective ward boundaries could be established and whether these would be easily identifiable to local communities
- the representation of communities of interest
- the voter distribution and physical features of the area, and the impact these may have on the shape and size of wards
- the scale of ward boundary changes, aiming for minimal change (where possible).

In addition to the above, the VEC's final recommendation will also consider matters raised in public response submissions.

Under section 15(2) of the Act, subdivided structures must aim for an approximately equal number of voters per councillor across all wards. This means the number of voters represented by each councillor in a ward should be within +/-10% of the average number of voters per councillor for all wards of that council.

During this review, the VEC aims to recommend ward boundary adjustments that help ensure a council's wards comply with section 15(2) at the time of the 2024 local council elections and, if possible, also comply based on voter numbers at the time the review is conducted. The VEC uses forecasts of population and voter change to assess compliance at the 2024 elections with as much accuracy as possible.

In some cases, population change and other factors impacting voter numbers mean it is not possible to adjust the ward boundaries of a council so that both 'current' (at the time of the review) and 'forecast' (at October 2024) voter numbers are within the legislated +/-10% tolerance. Where this happens, the VEC prioritises compliance at the October 2024 elections to ensure each vote will have approximately equal value at the 2024 elections. In some cases, the VEC's recommended model may set the current ward deviations outside the +/-10% tolerance. This is because the ward deviations are forecast to change over a short period of time and move within the +/-10% tolerance by the time of the 2024 local council elections.

One of the factors that may impact compliance with section 15(2) is the number of current and forecast voters with ratepayer-based voting entitlements, also known as council-enrolled electors. Voters' rolls include both state-enrolled electors (the majority of the roll) and a smaller number of council-enrolled electors. The Act introduced changes to ratepayer-based entitlement categories, which come into full effect at the 2024 local council elections. The VEC will take this change to the makeup of voters' rolls, and therefore compliance with section 15(2) of the Act, into consideration during this review.

About Pyrenees Shire

Profile

Pyrenees Shire Council is in the Central Highlands region of Victoria around 145 kms from central Melbourne. The council covers an area of 3,433 km² and has a population of 7,671 making it one of Victoria's least populated councils (ABS 2022a). The shire is bordered by Northern Grampians and Central Goldfields shire councils to the north, Hepburn Shire Council and Ballarat City Council to the east, Golden Plains and Corangamite shire councils to the south, and Ararat Rural City Council to the west.

The shire is predominantly rural, with over 60 localities and many small centres serving the surrounding rural areas. There are 2 main population centres – Avoca in the north and Beaufort in the south – with farming activities supported by smaller townships including Amphitheatre, Landsborough, Lexton, Moonambel, and Snake Valley. These small settlements provide services and facilities to rural areas and are important focal points for community activities. Many residents rely on nearby regional centres outside of the council area for employment, retail, entertainment, and other services (DTP 2023).

The Dja Dja Wurrung, Eastern Maar, Wadawurrung, Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk peoples are the Traditional Custodians of most of the land in Pyrenees Shire Council (VAHC 2024).

Landscape

The shire includes the Pyrenees Ranges, at the southern end of the Great Dividing Range. The ranges create 2 distinct climates – a warmer, drier climate in the north and a cooler, wetter climate south of the ranges. Much of the ranges are wooded with most areas designated state forests or reserves, with small pockets of plantation forestry.

Agriculture makes up 71.5% of land use, dominated by livestock (mostly sheep) grazing and pasturing, followed by dryland cropping. The Pyrenees Wine Region is in the shire's north-west corner (ABARES 2022, DAFF 2021).

Four major roads service the council:

- The Western Highway runs east-west through Beaufort towards Ararat.
- The Sunraysia Highway runs north-west through Lexton, Avoca, and Wedderburn.
- The Glenelg Highway heads south-west from Ballarat to Hamilton.
- The Pyrenees Highway runs south-west from Maryborough to Ararat, via Avoca.

Two railway lines run towards Ararat. One in an east-west direction, largely following the Western Highway. The other rail line follows the Pyrenees Highway from Maryborough to Ararat carrying freight and agricultural products.

Community

The shire has had consistently low population growth. Since 2001 the population has grown by about 1,300 people (ABS 2001, ABS 2022a) and is forecast to continue at a relatively modest rate. Much of the growth is in Beaufort, Avoca, and Snake Valley, offsetting a decline in the smaller, more rural localities.

The median age in the shire is 50 – much higher than the median of 43 for regional Victorians overall. Australia was the country of birth for 81% of shire residents, matching the average for regional Victoria overall, but much higher than the 65% for Victoria overall (ABS 2022a, ABS 2022b).

About 48% of adults are in the work force, which is low compared to 57% for regional Victoria overall and about 62% for all of Victoria (ABS 2022a, ABS 2022b). The top 5 employment industries are sheep farming, health care, local government, social assistance, and wine and alcoholic beverage making. Sheep farming employs nearly 8% of the shire's workforce. Personal and household median weekly incomes are \$579 and \$1,101 respectively – well below the \$722 and \$1,422 for regional Victoria overall (ABS 2022a, ABS 2022b).

Nearly 98% of private dwellings are separate houses, which is higher than regional Victoria (91%) (ABS 2022a). Home ownership at 82.9% is significantly above the Victorian average of 68.3% (ABS 2022a). There are only 33 social housing dwellings – amongst the lowest in Victoria (AIHW 2022). Over 52% of families are couples without children, over 8% higher than regional Victoria. The number of families with children is low at 32% compared to regional Victoria overall at 39% (ABS 2022a, ABS 2022b).

Thirteen of the shire's localities, including Beaufort and Avoca, are considered the most disadvantaged in the state (ABS 2023).

Current electoral structure

Pyrenees Shire Council has a total of 5 councillors and is divided into 5 single-councillor wards (Avoca, Beaufort, De Cameron, Ercildoune, and Mount Emu wards).

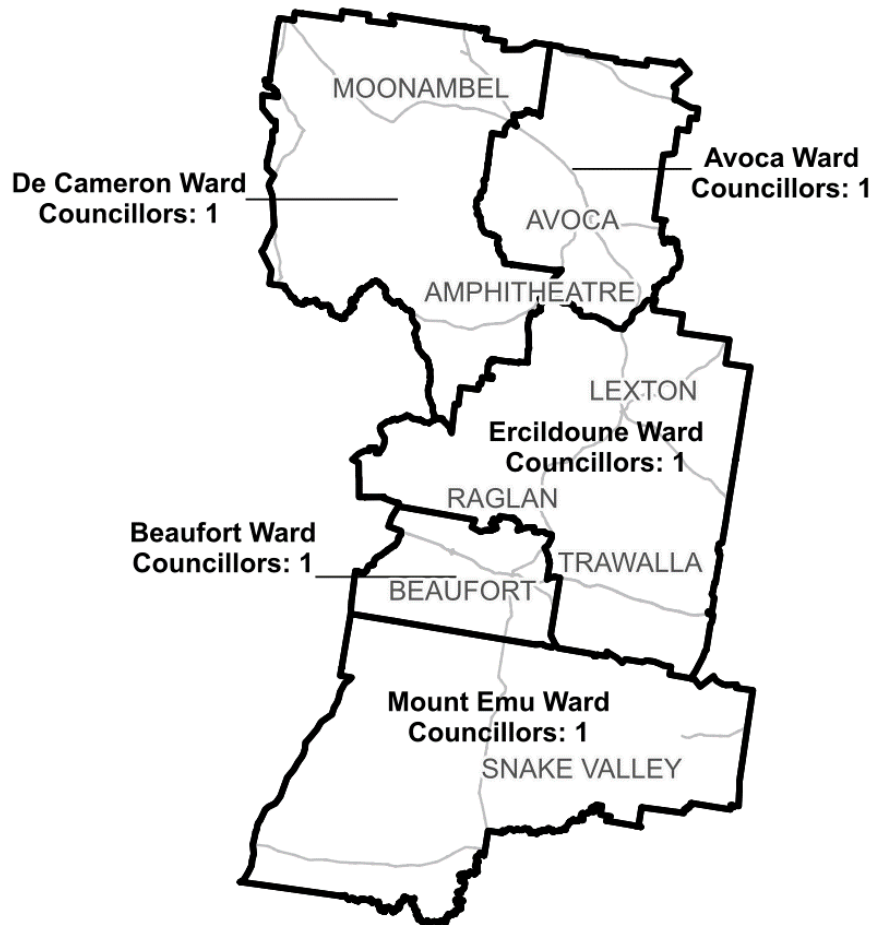


Figure 1: Diagram of current electoral structure of Pyrenees Shire Council.

There are an estimated 7,270 voters in Pyrenees Shire Council, with an estimated ratio of 1,454 voters per councillor.

By October 2024, the voter-to-councillor ratio of Beaufort Ward is forecast to be outside of +10%, and the voter-to-councillor ratio of De Cameron Ward is forecast to be outside of -10%.

Visit the VEC website at vec.vic.gov.au for more information on Pyrenees Shire Council.

Last electoral structure review

The VEC conducted an electoral representation review of Pyrenees Shire Council in 2011. That review was carried out under the *Local Government Act 1989 (Vic)*, which was replaced by the *Local Government Act 2020 (Vic)*.

After conducting the review, the VEC recommended that Pyrenees Shire Council continue to consist of 5 councillors elected from 5 wards.

Visit the VEC website at vec.vic.gov.au to access a copy of the 2011 representation review final report.

Preliminary findings and models

The panel noted 2 wards in Pyrenees Shire Council are projected to be outside of the accepted deviation for different reasons:

- Beaufort Ward is projected to be over the +10% tolerance because of population growth
- De Cameron Ward is projected to be under the -10% deviation due to population decline.

Changes to ratepayer-based entitlement categories, which come into full effect at the 2024 local council elections, are also impacting voter projections in these wards.

Under the existing structure, Beaufort and De Cameron wards do not border each other, so adjusting ward boundaries to transfer voters between the 2 is not possible. For both wards to comply with legislation, the boundaries of all 5 of the council's wards must be adjusted.

Ward boundary models for public feedback

The VEC considered a range of ward boundary adjustments for Pyrenees Shire Council and presents the following 2 models for community consideration:

- Model 1 which proposes changes to the boundaries of all wards
- Model 2, which proposes changes to the boundaries of all wards, with different boundaries to Model 1.

Maps of the preliminary models are included in [Appendix 1](#).

Model 1

The boundaries of Model 1 mostly follow locality boundaries, as well as property boundaries in townships. The wards proposed under Model 1 are expected to be within +/- 10% deviation at both 2024 and 2028 elections.

Model 1 retains existing ward boundaries where possible, with the biggest change being between De Cameron and Ercildoune wards. The proposed boundary between these wards follows the Lexton locality boundary in the east and the Glenlogie and Mount Lonarch localities in the south. In between, it follows the Beaufort-Lexton Road to create a stronger north-south divide than the existing boundaries. The proposed ward boundary follows the southern edge of Lexton, transferring the township from Ercildoune Ward into De Cameron Ward.

Ercildoune Ward retains all of Raglan, Main Lead, and Waterloo, with the southern ward boundary extending southward to the northern outskirts of Beaufort.

In the north, Avoca Ward retains its existing boundary to Mountain Creek, then follows the eastern locality boundaries of Tanwood and Percydale, transferring both localities into De Cameron Ward. Along the southern boundary of Avoca Ward, the existing ward boundary is retained in the west, then an adjustment is made in the east to follow the northern edge of the Lexton locality.

Beaufort Ward's boundaries are largely the same in both Model 1 and Model 2. However, in Model 1 the western boundary extends to Eurambeen-Streatham Road. Minimal changes to Mount Emu Ward result in the full length of the boundary following locality boundaries.

The panel identified the following benefits of Model 1:

- Fewer voters are impacted by the proposed ward boundary changes than in Model 2.
- Townships are not divided by the proposed boundary adjustments.
- More existing boundaries are retained more than in Model 2.
- Proposed new boundaries mostly use locality boundaries and main roads.

A potential drawback of Model 1 is the division of the Lexton locality, however the township itself remains undivided with the De Cameron-Ercildoune ward boundary skirting around the township's south. Given how close the ward boundary is to the town of Lexton, this would likely result in voters residing in the south-eastern outskirts being included in a different ward to the town itself.

Another potential drawback of Model 1 is the use of property boundaries as ward boundaries, which was necessary in some locations to avoid the division of townships across wards.

Although Model 1 significantly alters some existing ward boundaries, only 646 voters would be impacted by these changes:

- De Cameron Ward includes 383 voters moved from Ercildoune (318 voters) and Avoca (65) wards.
- Ercildoune Ward includes 257 voters shifted from Beaufort (236) and Mount Emu (21) wards.
- There would be 3 voters moved from Ercildoune to Avoca Ward and another 3 from Beaufort to Mount Emu Ward.

Model 2

Model 2 also proposes changes to the boundaries of all 5 wards to ensure they stay within the +/-10% tolerance to October 2024 and 2028. Fewer existing boundaries are retained compared with Model 1.

In Avoca Ward the western boundary is the same as Model 1, while in the south the boundary is adjusted to follow the Amphitheatre and Lexton locality boundaries. This results in the entire locality of Amphitheatre being united within De Cameron Ward.

De Cameron Ward is larger than in Model 1 as it extends south and east to include more voters. North of Lexton, the Sunraysia Highway becomes the new boundary between De Cameron and Ercildoune wards and, unlike Model 1, skirts around the town's north-eastern edge to contain the town in Ercildoune Ward. South of Lexton, the boundary follows main roads until it reaches the Western Highway, which forms the southern boundary. This means most of Raglan is in De Cameron Ward (rather than in Ercildoune Ward as in Model 1).

Ercildoune Ward boundaries move south to balance the voters lost to De Cameron Ward, bringing the outskirts of Beaufort (including the localities of Main Lead and Nerring) into Ercildoune Ward. Parts of Mena Park, Carngham, and Burrumbeet are also transferred from Mount Emu Ward to Ercildoune Ward, with the boundary adjusted to follow Beaufort-Carngham Road and locality boundaries. These changes ensure Ercildoune Ward retains its rural characteristics and avoids cutting into the Beaufort township.

Because the wards north of Beaufort Ward need additional voters, Model 2 changes the ward's northern boundary bringing it to the outskirts of the town. The boundary follows the Western Highway, then planning zone divisions defining areas for residential dwellings and rural or farming activities, then re-joins the Western Highway east of the township. The current southern boundary is shortened but retained. A new western boundary is created, comprising Stockyard Hill Road and a combination of property boundaries northward to the Western Highway.

Mount Emu Ward is the least affected by the boundary changes, gaining the parts of the existing Beaufort Ward south of the Western Highway and west of Stockyard Hill Road. This offsets the loss of parts of Mena Park, Carngham, and Burrumbeet to Ercildoune Ward.

The panel identified the benefits of Model 2 as follows:

- It retains characteristics of the existing structure, including the east–west split through the centre of the council.
- Proposed new boundaries mostly use locality boundaries and main roads.
- It predominantly keeps townships undivided between wards.

A potential drawback of Model 2 is the division of Raglan township across De Cameron and Ercildoune wards, with the ward boundary following Chute-Raglan and Eurambeen-Raglan roads. The south-east part of Raglan remains in Ercildoune Ward with most of the township transferred to De Cameron Ward, dividing this community of interest.

Model 2 impacts more voters than Model 1, with 732 voters changing wards:

- De Cameron Ward includes 426 voters transferred from Ercildoune (306), Avoca (100) and Beaufort (20) wards.
- Ercildoune Ward includes 232 voters moved from Beaufort (199) and Mount Emu (33) wards.
- Mount Emu Ward includes 71 voters transferred from Beaufort Ward.
- The same 3 voters are transferred from Ercildoune Ward to Avoca Ward as in Model 1.




Overall, the VEC is interested to hear from the community if there are other factors that could be considered and which of the models presented is considered the most appropriate modification for wards in Pyrenees Shire.

Next steps

Response submissions

Any person or group, including the local council under review, can make a response submission to the VEC. Your submission should address the model or models proposed in this preliminary report.

You can make a submission:

	<p>Online</p> <p>Visit vec.vic.gov.au and make an account to use the online Public Submission Tool. You may save a draft submission to finish later.</p>
	<p>By email</p> <p>Pyrenees.WardReview@vec.vic.gov.au</p>
	<p>By post</p> <p>Ward boundary review panel Victorian Electoral Commission Level 11, 530 Collins St Melbourne VIC 3000</p>

The panel must receive all response submissions before 5 pm on Wednesday 20 March 2024. If you post your submission, it must reach the VEC before the deadline. Late submissions will not be accepted.

Required information

To be considered, your submission must include your:

- full name
- contact phone number or email address
- postal or residential address.

To protect the integrity and transparency of the review process, the VEC will not consider submissions without this information. If you are submitting as a group or organisation, you must include a nominated contact person authorised to submit on behalf of your group.

The VEC will handle information provided by submitters in accordance with its privacy policy at vec.vic.gov.au/privacy

Public access to submissions

To ensure transparency in the ward boundary review process, your submission will be published on the VEC website at vec.vic.gov.au. The VEC will remove your signature and

contact details, including residential and postal addresses, from all public copies but must publish your full name (or group name) and locality (suburb or town).

Please note that any submission content that is potentially defamatory, offensive, obscene or that includes the personal information of people or organisations who are not a party to the submission may also be redacted before publication.

Public hearing

If you make a response submission, you can also ask to speak at an online public hearing to support your submission and expand on your views.

The online public hearing is scheduled for:

Time: 2 pm

Date: Wednesday 27 March 2024

The VEC encourages participation in the public hearing. If you wish to speak at the public hearing, you **must** indicate this in your response submission. The public hearing will not be held if there are no requests to speak.

Anyone can attend a public hearing, but you will only be able to speak if you expressly asked to speak in your response submission. If you ask to speak, the VEC will contact you to arrange a time for you to speak at the hearing. You will have 10 minutes to address the public hearing panel. The members of the public hearing panel may ask you questions.

Visit the VEC website at vec.vic.gov.au for more information on public hearings.

Final report

Following the public hearing, the VEC will consider all evidence and prepare a final report for the Minister for Local Government containing recommended ward boundary adjustments for the local council.

The final report is scheduled to be provided to the minister on Wednesday 24 April 2024. The minister will consider the final reports, including any determination to make the reports publicly available. Any change to the ward boundaries of Pyrenees Shire Council following this review is expected to apply at the October 2024 local council elections. Under the Act, the final council electoral structure will be set by an Order in Council published in the Victoria Government Gazette.

References

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Appendix 1: Model maps

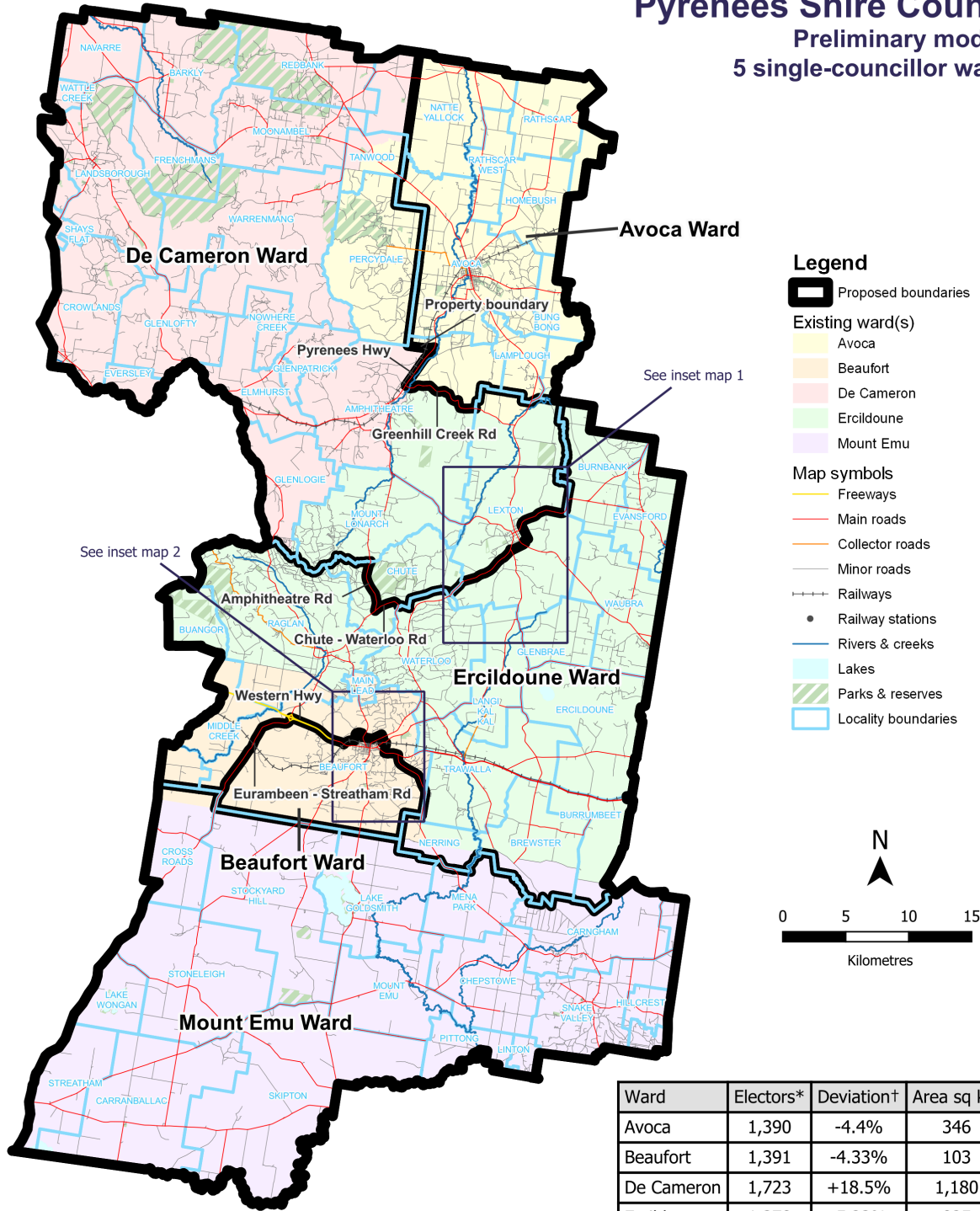
The following maps are included in this report:

Map	Page
Model 1 – with proposed changes to the boundaries of all wards.	19
Model 2 – with proposed changes to the boundaries of all wards, with different boundaries to Model 1.	22

Pyrenees Shire Council

Preliminary model 1

5 single-councillor wards



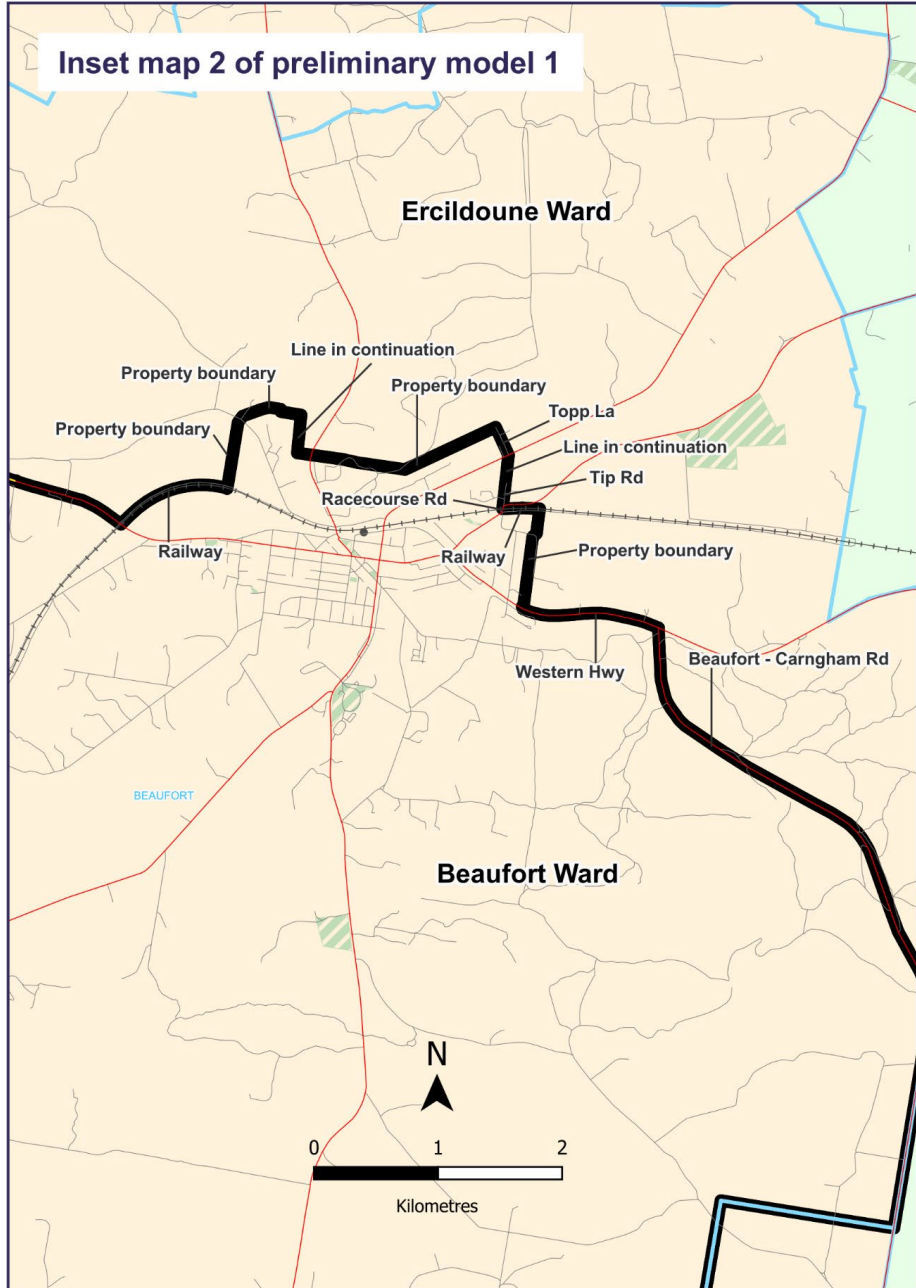
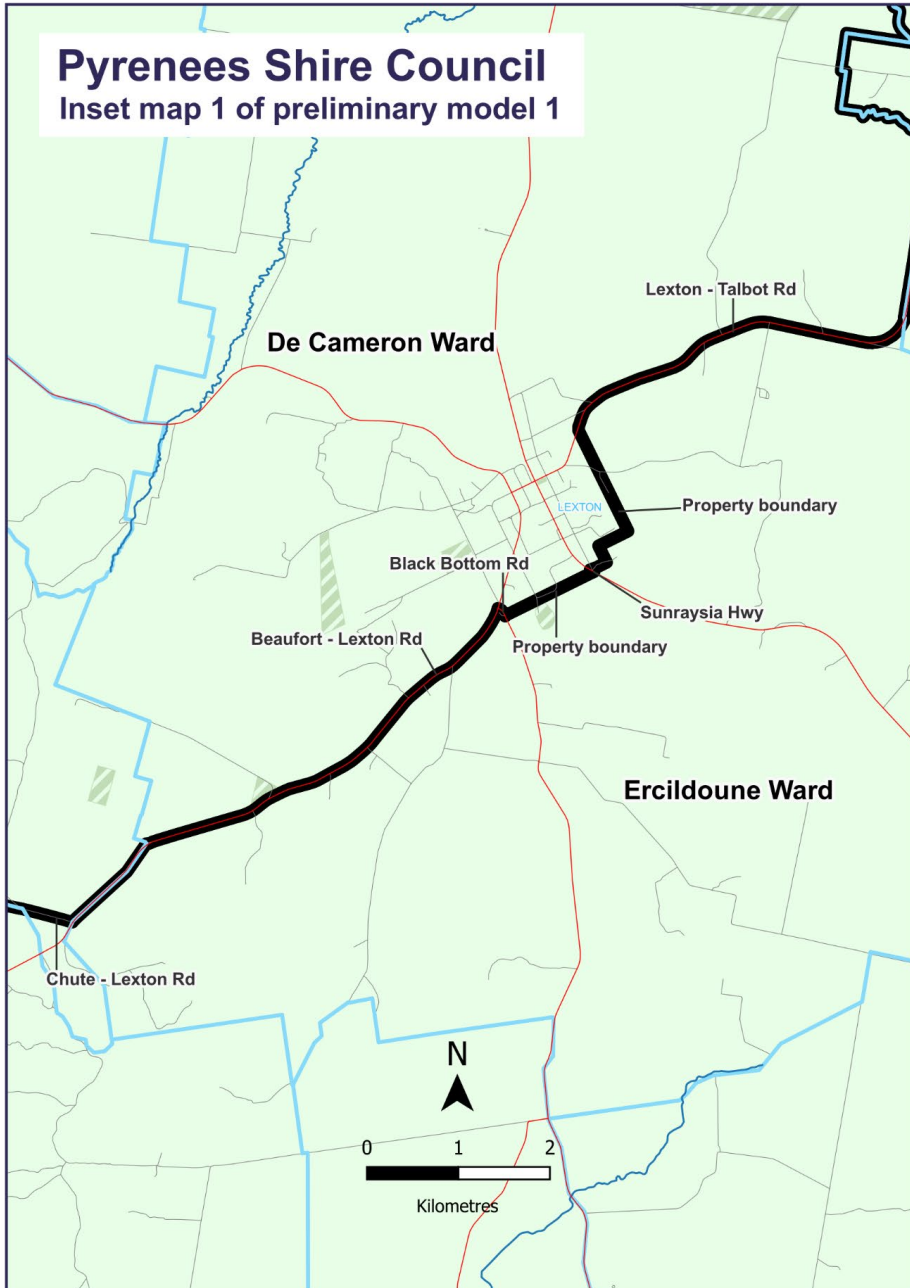
Ward	Electors*	Deviation†	Area sq km
Avoca	1,390	-4.4%	346
Beaufort	1,391	-4.33%	103
De Cameron	1,723	+18.5%	1,180
Ercildoune	1,378	-5.23%	825
Mount Emu	1,388	-4.54%	980
Total	7,270		3,434
Average	1,454		687

*Elector numbers as at 3 November 2023
†The deviations of all wards are projected to be within +/-10% by the time of the 2024 local government elections.

Map prepared by:
VEC Victorian Electoral Commission

Data use:
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Data for Model 1

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Average	1,454	n/a	687

*Elector numbers at 3 November 2023

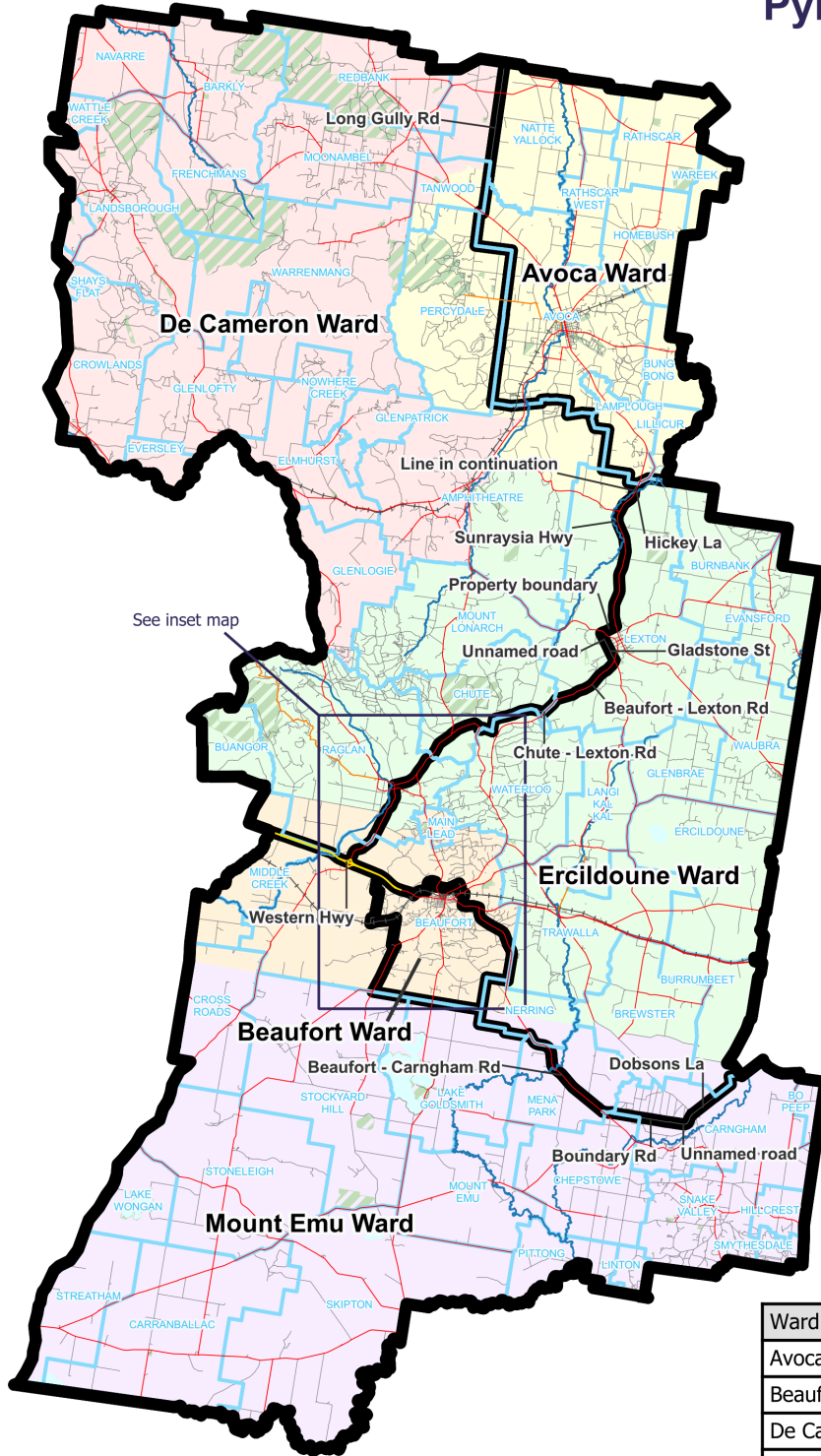
† The deviations of all wards are forecast to be within +/-10% by the time of the 2024 local council elections. The current deviation of some wards may be set outside +/-10% at the time of the review to offset forecast change between the review and the 2024 election.

#Ward area (square km) and total council area is measured at level of accuracy required for electoral boundaries. This may vary slightly from other data sources (for example, the ABS).

Pyrenees Shire Council

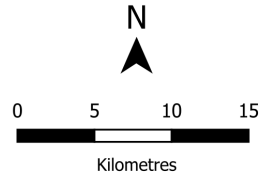
Preliminary model 2

5 single-councillor wards



Legend

- Proposed boundaries
- Existing ward(s)**
- Avoca
- Beaufort
- De Cameron
- Ercildoune
- Mount Emu
- Map symbols**
- Freeways
- Main roads
- Collector roads
- Minor roads
- Railways
- Railway stations
- Rivers & creeks
- Lakes
- Parks & reserves
- Locality boundaries



Ward	Electors*	Deviation†	Area sq km
Avoca	1,355	-6.81%	316
Beaufort	1,340	-7.84%	54
De Cameron	1,766	+21.46%	1,322
Ercildoune	1,365	-6.12%	702
Mount Emu	1,444	-0.69%	1,040
Total	7,270		3,434
Average	1,454		687

*Electors numbers as at 3 November 2023

†The deviations of all wards are projected to be within +/-10% by the time of the 2024 local government elections.

Map prepared by:

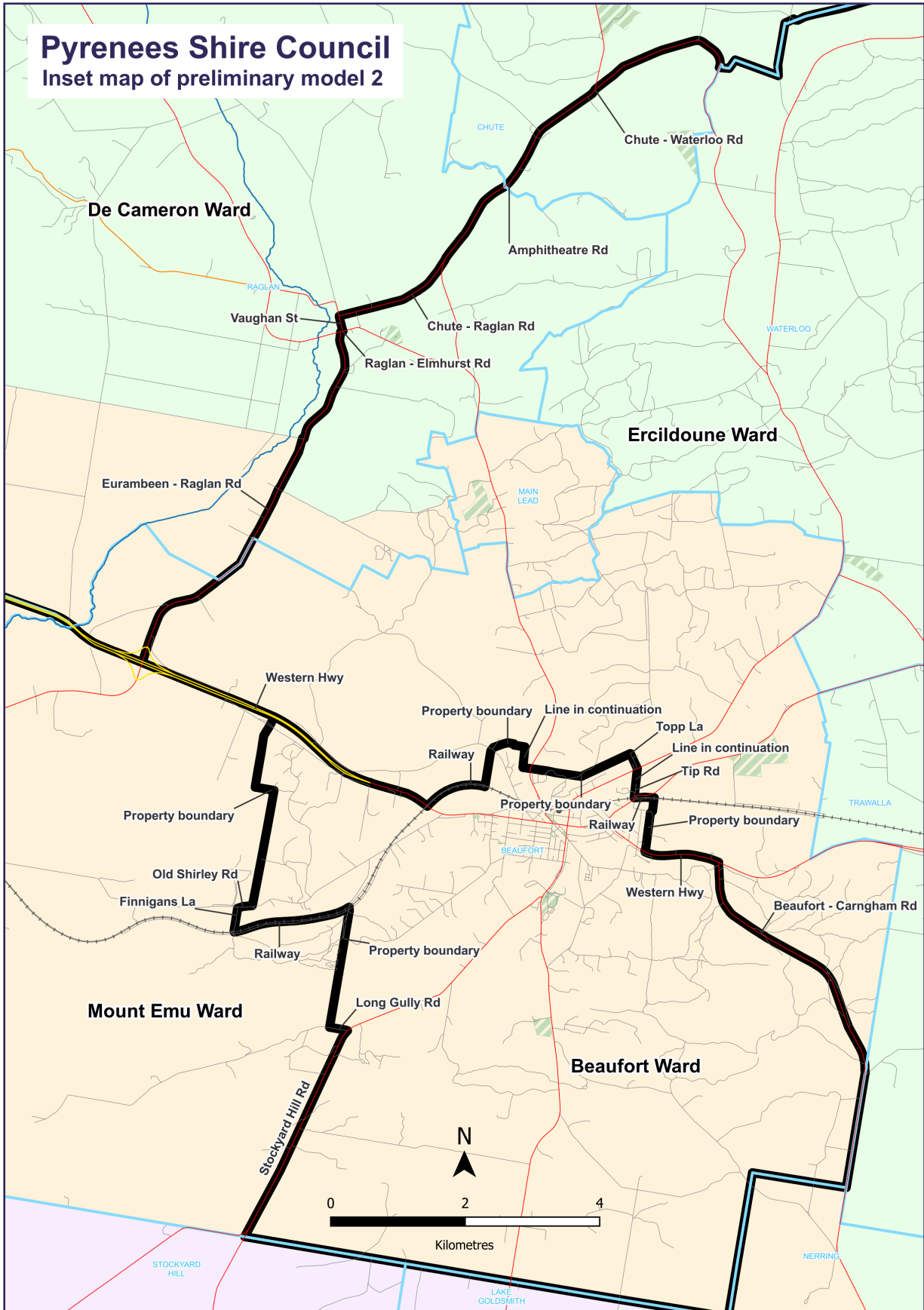


Data use:



Layers for alignment:
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Data for Model 2

Ward	Voters*	Deviation†	Area# (square km)
Avoca	1,355	-6.81%	316
Beaufort	1,340	-7.84%	54
De Cameron	1,766	+21.46%	1,322
Ercildoune	1,365	-6.12%	702
Mount Emu	1,444	-0.69%	1,040
Total	7,270	n/a	3,434
Average	1,454	n/a	687

*Voter numbers at 3 November 2023.

†The deviations of all wards are forecast to be within +/-10% by the time of the 2024 local council elections. The current deviation of some wards may be set outside +/-10% at the time of the review to offset forecast change between the review and the 2024 election.

#Ward area (square km) and total council area is measured at level of accuracy required for electoral boundaries. This may vary slightly from other data sources (for example, the ABS).

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