

# Report to Parliament on the 2021 South Gippsland Shire Council general election

August 2022



## Letter of Transmittal

The Hon. Nazih Elasmr MLC  
President of the Legislative Council  
Parliament of Victoria  
Parliament House  
Melbourne

The Hon. Colin Brooks  
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly  
Parliament of Victoria  
Parliament House  
Melbourne

Dear Presiding Officers

Pursuant to section 8(2)(b) of the *Electoral Act 2002*, I submit this report on the administration and conduct of the South Gippsland Shire Council general election held in October 2021.

Yours sincerely



Warwick Gately AM  
Electoral Commissioner



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(Victorian Electoral Commission)  
August 2022.

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# **Report to Parliament on the 2021 South Gippsland Shire Council general election**

Victorian Electoral Commission

## **Acknowledgement of country**

The VEC pays respect to Victoria's traditional owners and their elders past and present who have been custodians of this country for many thousands of years. Their living culture and their role in the life of Victoria is acknowledged by the VEC.



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## Commissioner's foreword



The South Gippsland Shire Council general election was held on 23 October 2021 by postal voting with 27,376 voters on the roll at the close of roll.

In accordance with section 263(1) of the *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act), the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) is the statutory election service provider for the conduct of local government elections in Victoria.

Having recently finalised the 2020 local government general elections, the VEC was in a good position to conduct the South Gippsland Shire Council general election in 2021 using the 2020 Election Service Plan as a base, and making minor adjustments and improvements whilst taking into consideration the current coronavirus (COVID-19) environment. Importantly, the same performance targets identified for the 2020 local government general elections were applied to the South Gippsland Shire Council general election and the service level agreement with the council.

Twenty-four candidates nominated to contest 9 vacancies in 3 separate wards. The turnout rate of 81.51% was 1.62% higher than in 2016 (79.89%) as well as .04% higher than other postal elections in the 2020 local government general elections (excluding Melbourne City Council Leadership Team) (81.47%). These figures and the fact that all compliance, integrity, accuracy and service delivery targets were met provides assurance as to the program's success.

Informality rates were lower in this general election at 3.53% across all 3 wards, compared to 4.27% across all wards recorded at the South Gippsland Shire Council general election held in October 2016. This decrease is most likely due to the average number of candidates in each ward.

The results of the South Gippsland Shire Council general election were declared at 1:30 pm on Tuesday 9 November 2021.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge South Gippsland Shire Council for their assistance in developing the voters' rolls and their general support and understanding of restricted vote counting processes, results declarations and swearing in of elected councillors.

As with any election, our staff were critical to our success. Notwithstanding coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions, our people's commitment to service delivery was noteworthy. I also acknowledge the many service providers the VEC contracted, who were critical in the delivery of the South Gippsland Shire Council election program.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Warwick Gately". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Warwick Gately AM  
Electoral Commissioner



# Introduction

## About this report

This publication has been prepared by the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) to report on the conduct of the South Gippsland Shire Council general election held in October 2021.

The report provides information on the planning and functions of the VEC throughout the election timeline and its performance in the execution of the election.

Also provided in this report is information on the implications of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, its impact on the elections and the VEC's strategies to adapt election planning in the everchanging environment.

Details relating to voting statistics, results of elections and stakeholder feedback post-election are summarised throughout this publication.

## About the Victorian Electoral Commission

The VEC is an independent and impartial statutory authority established under Victoria's *Electoral Act 2002*. The VEC conducts:

- > State elections
- > local government elections
- > certain statutory elections and polls
- > fee-for-service elections
- > electoral representation processes for councils and the Electoral Boundaries Commission for State electoral boundaries.

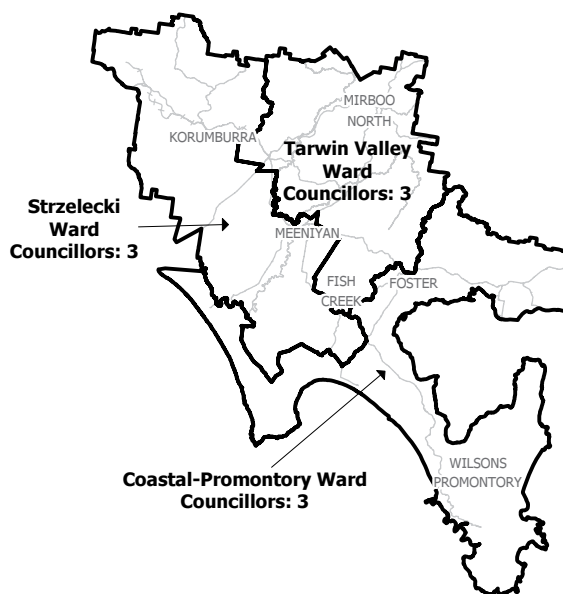
The VEC is also responsible for maintaining the Victorian register of electors, administering political funding and donation disclosure laws, conducting electoral research, providing communication and education services, and informing and engaging Victorians in the democratic process.

## About South Gippsland Shire Council

South Gippsland Shire Council is comprised of nine councillors elected from three multi-councillor wards.

The structure was last reviewed in accordance with the *Local Government Act 1989* through an electoral representation review in 2015.

Figure 1: The electoral structure of South Gippsland Shire Council at the general election held on 23 October 2021.





# 1. Frameworks and electoral landscape

Local government elections in Victoria are governed by the following legislative frameworks:

- › *Constitution Act 1975*
- › *Local Government Act 2020*
- › *City of Melbourne Act 2001*
- › *Electoral Act 2002*
- › *Infringements Act 2006*
- › *Fines Reform Act 2014.*

## Legislation

The 2020 local government elections were the first to be governed by Victoria's new *Local Government Act 2020* (the LG Act). The legislation was passed by Parliament in March 2020, and the electoral provisions of the LG Act came into effect in April 2020 in readiness for the elections.

At a high level the LG Act carried over the previous requirement to hold a general election on the fourth Saturday of October every four years. In October 2020, general elections were conducted for 76 of Victoria's 79 councils, with the general election for South Gippsland Shire Council postponed until October 2021. It also retained and strengthened the principles which ensure accountable and transparent local democracy in Victoria.

At a more detailed level, the LG Act introduced greater consistency across councils (excluding the City of Melbourne) and elections, including uniform electoral structures and a common voting system. It also phases out the automatic entitlement for non-resident property owners to be enrolled. By the next local government general elections in 2024, all non-resident property owners with a voting entitlement will need to apply to be enrolled.

Legislation excluded Casey City Council and Whittlesea City Council from having a general election in 2020 as they remained under administration.

## Regulations

Following the passage of the LG Act, the Governor in Council made the Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2020 (the LG Regulations) on 7 July 2020.

The Regulations were amended twice during September 2020 to provide necessary procedural and technical changes due to the evolving COVID-19 pandemic.

## Voting system

A key reform of the LG Act stipulates that a single voting system (either attendance voting or postal voting) must be used for general elections and by-elections and must be determined by the Minister.

In accordance with the Minister's determination<sup>1</sup>, all 2020 elections were held by postal voting. The voting system also applied to the 2021 South Gippsland Shire Council general election.

# Responsibilities

## Electoral Commissioner

The functions and responsibilities of the Commission under the *Electoral Act 2002* are to produce voters' rolls under the LG Act, assist Melbourne City Council with the preparation of voters' rolls under the *City of Melbourne Act 2001* (the CoM Act) and to conduct all elections and polls under the LG Act and the CoM Act.

To facilitate the conduct of local government elections, the Electoral Commissioner is responsible for:

- › the administration of the State's register of electors
- › the appointment of an Election Manager to each council election, pursuant to Regulation 21 of the Regulations
- › the appointment of a prosecution officer to enforce compulsory voting, pursuant to section 267 of the LG Act.

## Victorian Electoral Commission

The VEC is responsible for conducting fair, efficient and impartial elections in accordance with the relevant legislation. The VEC is the statutory provider for local government elections in Victoria.

The VEC's responsibilities include:

- › conducting local government elections, by-elections and countbacks
- › preparation of the voters' roll

<sup>1</sup> The Minister published this decision in the Government Gazette on 18 May 2020

- › acting as the enforcement agency for compulsory voting enforcement
- › promoting public understanding and awareness of elections and electoral matters through information and education programs
- › reporting to Parliament on the VEC's activities.

## Councils

Councils play an essential role in assisting with the delivery of their elections. The VEC worked in close partnership with the South Gippsland Shire Council throughout the election timeline, from initial consultation and planning through to post-election activities such as feedback and evaluation.

In accordance with section 248 of the LG Act, the council is responsible for maintaining the Chief Executive Officer's list (CEO list) which is provided to the VEC and combined with the Electoral Commissioner's List (EC List) to create the voters' roll. Councils are also responsible for handling complaints regarding alleged breaches of local laws which are received through the VEC's complaints team throughout the election timeline and referred to councils for action.

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The most significant change to the LG Act affecting council was that non-resident owners who were automatically enrolled on the council's last voters' roll under section 13 of the LG Act 1989, were again enrolled without application, provided they retained their entitlement for the relevant property.

People who had become non-resident (or resident) property owners since then, and who were not otherwise on the State roll, needed to apply to enrol under section 242 of the LG Act. For subsequent elections, all non-resident owners that are not otherwise enrolled on the State roll will need to apply to council to be enrolled on the voters' roll.

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## Local Government Inspectorate

The Local Government Inspectorate (LGI) is responsible for the investigation and prosecution of alleged breaches of the LG Act. The VEC and the LGI are committed to maintaining a productive working relationship which was evident throughout the election period.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was established to ensure robust and high-quality electoral practices at local government elections in Victoria and the LGI's responsibilities under the LG Act to enforce and prosecute non-compliance. The MOU was established on 1 July 2020 and expires on 30 June 2024 in advance of the 2024 local government elections.

## Local Government Victoria

Local Government Victoria (LGV) is the division of the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions which provides advice and support to Victoria's local government sector and the Minister for Local Government. Given its role in administering the legal and policy framework governing local councils in Victoria, including local council elections, the VEC works closely with LGV in the lead up to any local council election.

For the South Gippsland Shire Council general election, LGV hosted the online candidate training which was mandatory for all prospective candidates to complete before lodging a nomination form. The online mandatory training was a new requirement for local government elections introduced under the LG Act.

## 2. Election Service Plan

For the South Gippsland Shire Council general election, the VEC prepared an election service plan that was based on the plan from the 2020 local government elections. The VEC sought feedback from the South Gippsland Shire Council on the draft service plan in April 2021, with the final service plan being released in May 2021.

The election service plan followed two principles:

### Local focus for election services

The VEC committed to appoint an Election Manager for South Gippsland Shire Council general election and for the election to be managed locally. Accordingly, the management of candidates, enquiries from the public, and vote counting took place locally within the South Gippsland Shire council area. Contingency plans were put in place to cover any overflow voter enquiries.

### Cost effective

The VEC's South Gippsland Shire Council general election service plan aimed to provide high quality cost-effective election services.

All activities and initiatives that were implemented in the South Gippsland Shire Council election program were comprehensively analysed for their cost and benefits.

Although cost increases in some areas of the program were unavoidable, the VEC was committed to seeking opportunities to minimise cost increases where possible.

### Performance targets

The VEC set out specific performance targets for the preparation, conduct and outcomes of the South Gippsland Shire Council general election. Details of these targets and comments against each can be found in Figure 2, Figure 3 and Figure 4 on the following pages.

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Image: 2021 South Gippsland elections – Service plan

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- Achieved
- Partially achieved
- Continuous

**Figure 2: Election preparation targets**

No.	Service Plan Performance Target	Outcome
1	Establish the election service agreement with South Gippsland Shire Council by 21 May 2021.	■ Agreement was in place with South Gippsland Shire Council by 19 May 2021.
2	Establish an election office that is accessible and suitably located within the local council area and publish accurate information on its accessibility ratings.	■ Election office was established in consultation with the council. The election office was audited for accessibility utilising the VEC's accessibility audit tool. Accessibility information was published on the VEC website.
3	Conduct a public awareness campaign to inform all voters of their opportunity to enrol and vote with a focus on culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, people experiencing homelessness, people living with a disability, and the Indigenous community as applicable to council.	<p>■ The VEC advertised the elections in local newspapers, online, via social media and through direct mail. The VEC also offered free electoral education sessions to CALD communities and people living with a disability although none were requested. The VEC also undertook a campaign for people experiencing homelessness regarding enrolling and voting.</p> <p>Email messaging among community and school groups regarding the election was also undertaken.</p>
4	Appropriately evaluate and respond to complaints and enquiries, including timely referral of compliance matters to the relevant investigating authority.	■ A total of 49 complaints were processed and responded to throughout the election period. Complaints for investigating authorities external to the VEC were referred appropriately.

**Figure 3: Election conduct targets**

No.	Service Plan Performance Target	Outcome
5	Achieve at least 99.95% accuracy in the municipal voters' roll, excluding processing errors outside of the VEC's control.	■ The VEC successfully produced the voters' rolls with no amendments.
6	Ensure all communication products are produced in an accurate and timely manner, are compliant with the legislation, and are focused on enhancing electoral understanding and participation.	■ There were no legislative errors in statutory advertisements produced by the VEC. The VEC successfully published all of the statutory advertising notices online within the required timeframes.
7	Provide information to assist prospective candidates and ensure systems provide efficient processing of nominations and candidate information.	<p>■ The VEC's candidate information session was pre-recorded and available for online streaming from the VEC website. Additionally, an interactive candidate information session was held.</p> <p>The VEC's candidate and scrutineer handbooks were reviewed and updated and made available on the VEC website along with an online candidate kit. Candidate statements and questionnaires were processed and published within prescribed timelines.</p>

8	Lodge all postal ballot material with Australia Post within the required timeframes.	<p>■ Ballot material was lodged in accordance with the timeline, however the VEC identified an issue involving the first day of the general mail-out. On Friday 15 October, the VEC became aware that some voters across all 3 South Gippsland Shire Council wards had not received their ballot packs. On investigation it was identified that the issue was isolated to ballot packs lodged on Tuesday 5 October, day one of the general mail-out.</p> <p>The VEC reprinted ballot packs for the approximately 9,300 impacted voters and these were re-issued within 3 days of the VEC becoming aware of the issue.</p>
9	Declare all elections before 5 pm on Friday 5 November 2021.	<p>■ Due to the re-issue of the ballot material the Electoral Commissioner altered the last day of voting for the South Gippsland Shire Council general election to be held on 23 October 2021, to 6 pm on Friday 29 October 2021, in accordance with Regulation 60(1)(b) of the Regulations.</p> <p>This altered the date of the declarations. All elections were declared by Wednesday 11 November 2021.</p>
10	Continue to maximise opportunities to increase voter participation in the election.	<p>■ The VEC conducted engagement activities for groups that are traditionally under-represented in the electoral process. Further information on these initiatives can be found in the public education and outreach chapter of this report.</p>

**Figure 4: Election outcomes targets**

No.	Service Plan Performance Target	Outcome
11	Establish robust election procedures so that no election can be overturned as a result of the VEC's processes.	<p>■ No election results were overturned for the South Gippsland Shire Council general election.</p>
12	Evaluate its performance at each level of the local council election program and ensure its reporting obligations are met.	<p>■ A statutory report on the South Gippsland Shire Council general election was transmitted within six months of the election.</p>
13	Implement reconciliation and integrity checks to ensure correct recording of results during counting activities and during the packaging, movement and storage of election material.	<p>■ Satisfactory reconciliation achieved for the election office. Results integrity checks were completed prior to the declaration.</p>
14	Maintain accountability for the cost of the election and continue to identify opportunities to minimise the cost imposed on council.	<p>■ The VEC continued to apply a marginal cost recovery model for the South Gippsland Shire Council general election.</p> <p>Independent auditors reviewed the VEC's costing model prior to the 2020 elections and confirmed that it applied marginal cost recovery principles and that the costing program was being effectively managed. The Local Government Costing Framework has significantly improved the governance of the program.</p>

## 3. Initiatives

### Candidate information

The VEC developed a suite of resources that were accessible to prospective candidates prior to the nomination period. From early September, candidates were able to access the VEC's information about the process of nominating and becoming a candidate for the election.

The VEC encouraged prospective candidates to attend a candidate information session prior to the conduct of the election. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, for the South Gippsland Shire Council general election, the VEC's candidate information session was recorded and available for online streaming from the VEC website.

The recorded video was complemented by an interactive candidate information webinar which consisted of a panel from the VEC's leadership team who were able to answer questions regarding the election process or clarify information presented.

This arrangement also allowed prospective candidates to review the session in their own time and was more accessible to those who would normally be unable to attend an in-person session.

### VoterAlert advisories

For the South Gippsland Shire Council general election, the VEC's notification service, VoterAlert, was successfully used to send key election reminders to State-enrolled voters by SMS, email or both. VoterAlert reminders were sent to over 11,000 voters during the election period where the voters were reminded to check their enrolment details prior to the close of rolls, and to vote via 2 reminders sent during the voting period. In addition, VoterAlert was successfully used to advise voters that the voting deadline had been extended.

### Office based computer counting

Computerised counts for local government elections have previously been conducted at venues such as colleges and universities, which have the established infrastructure and hardware required for such counts, as well as security measures and controlled access to the venue. For the 2020 local government elections the VEC utilised election office venues to conduct computer counts. Following the completion of the 2020 general elections the VEC identified several benefits to utilising the election office as a count centre. Overall, this practice proved to be more time efficient and less costly than at previous elections. Additionally, there was a reduction in the movement of ballot papers as counting within the election office reduced the need for couriers to deliver

ballot papers to count venues and return them to the election office at the conclusion of the count.

Accordingly, the VEC deployed this model for computerised counts and the computer count for the South Gippsland Shire Council general election was conducted locally within the election office.

### Updates to the VEC's Ballot Paper Envelope Reconciliation Process (BPER)

Embedded in the VEC's election management system is a module that captures all returned votes. The ballot paper envelope reconciliation (BPER) module is used by each election office to reconcile the number of general mail-out and replacement votes and whether they were accepted or rejected. Data processed via the BPER provides each Election Manager with the number of votes to progress to extraction.

For the 2020 local government elections, several enhancements were made to the BPER process in the election management system. Primarily the changes allowed for the processing of returned postal votes in numbered batch groups to provide more alignment with the manual sorting process undertaken each day mail is received at the office. Additional reporting was also added to allow for ease of reconciliation with the physical items. During the 2020 local government elections, the new process was found to be more simplified than at previous elections and provided better system driven reconciliation than at previous events.

Further enhancements were made prior to the beginning of the South Gippsland Shire Council general election to strengthen reporting and reconciliation requirements.

## 4. Coronavirus (COVID-19) Planning and implementation

In response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) global pandemic, a State of Emergency was declared in Victoria on 16 March 2020. The VEC's operating model was adjusted to deliver a compliant election while meeting health, safety, social distancing and hygiene obligations to voters, election staff, councils, candidates and all other stakeholders.

In addition to these measures, on Wednesday 1 September 2020, the Governor in Council made amendments to the regulations to allow certain provisions to be varied in response to the pandemic. Specifically, the amendments allowed the VEC to determine an appropriate method for eligible candidates to lodge their nomination form and pay their nomination fee electronically; and to allow the Election Manager to determine the maximum number of scrutineers that may be present for any activity at any one time. The amended regulations commenced the day after they were made and remained in place until 26 April 2022.

On 29 September 2020, the Governor in Council made further changes to the Regulations to provide greater clarity of mitigation options for any disruptions to the voting timeline, including delays across the postal network that could threaten the integrity of the elections.

The changes allowed the Electoral Commissioner to alter the last day of voting and/or the extended postal vote receipt deadline if necessary, to maintain and protect election integrity.

For 2020 the VEC developed a COVIDSafe Election Plan in consultation with the Department of Health and Human Services which complemented the VEC's Service Plan. The COVIDSafe Election Plan outlined the VEC's actions and strategies to deliver safe and compliant local government elections.

For the South Gippsland Shire Council general election, the VEC implemented changes such as (but not limited to):

- > acquiring larger election office spaces to accommodate social distancing practices
- > moving operations from face-to-face to online (when legislation permitted), for example:
  - the VEC's briefing meetings with individual councils
  - the candidate information sessions
- > modifying the timeline for ballot paper extraction and counting activities
- > modifying scrutineer practices.

The VEC acknowledges the collaboration and contributions of council officers in navigating the changes required to the program due to coronavirus (COVID-19).

### Additional COVIDSafe measures

In addition to the VEC's COVIDSafe Election Plan, for the 2020 elections the VEC produced a COVIDSafe handbook, covering election office operations.

The handbook outlined measures to ensure that the VEC met government health and safety guidelines, while at the same time mitigating the risk of any coronavirus (COVID-19) event that could have affected election staff, voters, candidates and other members of the public.

For the 2020 elections the handbook was regularly reviewed and updated to align with health advice and directions, to ensure compliance with all requirements. The Department of Health and Human Services indicated their satisfaction that appropriate public health risk mitigation strategies had been considered and integrated into election arrangements.

For the South Gippsland Shire Council general election, the handbook was regularly reviewed to ensure that it continued to align with health advice and directions, to ensure compliance with all requirements.



Image: COVIDSafe posters in the election office



## 5. Voters' roll

Voters' rolls are comprised of two sources of data;

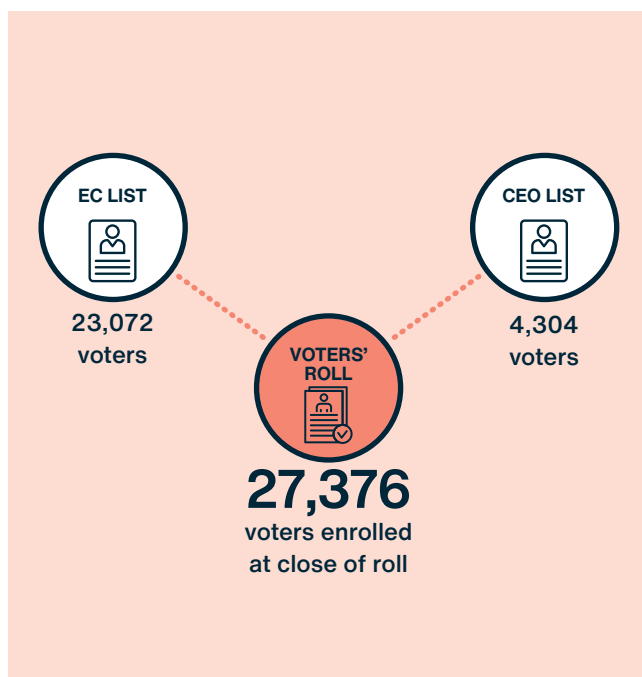
### The Victorian Electoral Commissioner's List

Individuals enrolled on the Victorian State roll for their principal place of residence in a municipality; and

### The Chief Executive Officer's List

This includes owners and occupiers of rateable property within a municipality, including non-resident ratepayers.

Once these data sources were merged, the VEC carefully scrutinises the roll and removes any duplications or data errors.



## Council enrolment entitlements

Enrolment entitlements for council elections differ from those that apply at State elections. Enrolment entitlements for the South Gippsland Shire Council general election were specified under the LG Act.

### General provisions

Under section 240 of the LG Act, a person can only be enrolled on the voters' roll of a council if the person is a resident in the municipal district of the council or a ratepayer to the council. A person can only be enrolled once in a council.

### State-enrolled voters (the EC list) – (s 241 of the LG Act)

Residents in a council area who are on the State electoral roll as at the close of roll are automatically enrolled for local government elections. To enrol, an enrolment form must be received prior to the close of roll. Entitlement is based on the residential address on the enrolment form.

State-enrolled voters comprised 84.27% of the voters across South Gippsland Shire Council in 2021.

The EC List database has been designed and maintained for the purpose of producing electoral rolls for State and local government elections.

### CEO List entitlements

Several of the CEO List entitlements applied at the South Gippsland Shire Council general election, these entitlements are managed by council and each is described below.

#### Owner ratepayers – by application

Under section 242 of the LG Act, a person who at the close of roll was at least 18 years old (or would be 18 on or before election day) and owned rateable property solely or jointly in the municipality, was entitled to apply to be enrolled on the voters' roll for the ward in which the rateable property was located. Section 242 includes applications made by non-citizen residents who pay rates in a municipality.

A person enrolled under section 242 of the LG Act could resign the enrolment by an application delivered to council before the close of the roll. Section 242 enrolments remain in effect until this resignation or disposal of the property which is the basis of the entitlement.

#### Owner/occupier of rateable property - automatically enrolled

A transitional arrangement applied for the South Gippsland Shire Council general election for owners/occupiers of rateable property.

Non-resident ratepayers who were enrolled on the last voters' roll for South Gippsland Shire Council were automatically entitled without application on the 2021 voters' roll. These automatic entitlements are in effect until the 2024 local government elections and apply for any by-election conducted before the second general by-election, pursuant to section 257(1)(b) of the LG Act.

### **Occupier ratepayers – by application**

Under section 244 of the LG Act, a person who at the close of roll was at least 18 years old (or would be 18 on or before election day) and occupied rateable property, either solely or jointly, in the municipality and paid rates on that property was entitled to apply to be enrolled on the voters' roll for the ward where the rateable property is located.

### **Corporation entitlement – by application**

Under section 245 of the LG Act, a corporation that owned rateable property in a municipality prior to the close of roll was entitled to appoint one person to represent it at the council elections, provided that person did not have another entitlement in the same council and made an appropriate application to council.

Corporations may only appoint one person to represent them pursuant to section 245 of the LG Act, regardless of how many properties they own or occupy in a municipality.

### **Roll production**

Considerable time and effort is devoted to roll production with the systematic checking of names and addresses using VEC software in an effort to prepare voters' rolls that are as accurate as possible.

### **Voters' roll production**

The VEC was responsible for the preparation of the voters' roll for the South Gippsland Shire Council general election. Roll production starts many months prior to election day and involves close collaboration between the VEC and council to ensure the voters' roll is accurate, timely and compliant with the LG Act.

The Electoral Commissioner appointed the VEC's Director, Electoral Enrolment Branch as the Registrar for the election.

During each phase of roll preparation, and to ensure the secure transfer of enrolment data between the VEC and council, all data transfers used the VEC's secure data exchange service, DEx.

Voters' roll production proceeded through three phases: preliminary roll production, primary roll production and update processing.

### **Data matching**

Once the EC list and the CEO list data were merged, the VEC carefully scrutinised the roll and removed any duplications.

### **Preliminary roll production**

Preliminary roll production commenced in late March 2021. This is the first phase of full roll production designed to allow the VEC and South Gippsland Shire Council to resolve any issues early in the production process ahead of legislative timeframes.

During preliminary roll production, the VEC provided detailed feedback to South Gippsland Shire Council on matters that could potentially delay final roll processing or affect the overall quality of the voters' roll. South Gippsland Shire Council received reports which included possible duplicates between the EC List and the CEO List, as well as the names of deceased electors. The VEC provided preliminary roll feedback to South Gippsland Shire Council in April 2021.

### **Primary roll production**

Primary roll production commenced in May 2021, with South Gippsland Shire Council required to provide the primary CEO List data extract to the VEC by 30 June 2021. Primary processing was similar to preliminary roll production, with South Gippsland Shire Council receiving feedback reports to action and make final decisions about potential duplicate records. The VEC's matching software was used to identify and remove duplicates and the names of deceased voters. South Gippsland Shire Council were then given a draft voters' roll for quality assurance purposes.

The VEC worked closely with South Gippsland Shire Council to assist council roll production contacts to understand their obligations under the transitional entitlement scheme set out in section 240 of the LG Act. In February 2021 council was provided with a copy of VEC policy guidance – first issued in July 2020 as part of the 2020 local government elections – about the transitional entitlement scheme. Council was advised to ensure that their primary CEO List data extracts did not include the details of non-resident ratepayers who were not automatically entitled pursuant to section 240 of the LG Act, and to provide primary CEO List data extracts that otherwise met legislative requirements.

### **Production of the certified voters' rolls**

Following the close of roll at 4 pm on Friday 27 August 2021, South Gippsland Shire Council was required to provide a certified CEO List data extract to the VEC. The extract contained the details of ratepayers who were entitled to be enrolled as at the close of roll. The VEC cross-checked changes to the CEO List between primary processing and the close of roll with the EC List. As part of this process, the VEC conducted quality assurance checks to ensure that the final voters' roll was accurate and compliant with legislation. The VEC worked with South Gippsland Shire Council to identify data extracts that may have inadvertently included individuals who were not automatically entitled to be on the voters' roll.

All entitlement decisions were made by South Gippsland Shire Council at this stage of roll processing.

The voters' roll for the South Gippsland Shire Council general election was certified by the VEC's Registrar on Thursday 16 September 2021.

### Enrolment

A total of 27,376 voters were enrolled at the close of rolls for the South Gippsland Shire Council general election. A total of 23,072 voters were on the EC List and 4,304 on the CEO List.

There was a 42 percent decrease in the CEO list since the 2016 South Gippsland Shire Council general election. The Transitional entitlement scheme in the LG Act introduced significant changes to non-resident owner entitlements.

Section 243 of the Act provides for the automatic enrolment of non-resident owners who had a non-resident owner entitlement on the last voters' roll for their council (or Ward) provided their circumstances had not changed. Non-resident owners who were not listed on the last voters' roll for a council election needed to apply to be enrolled for this election.

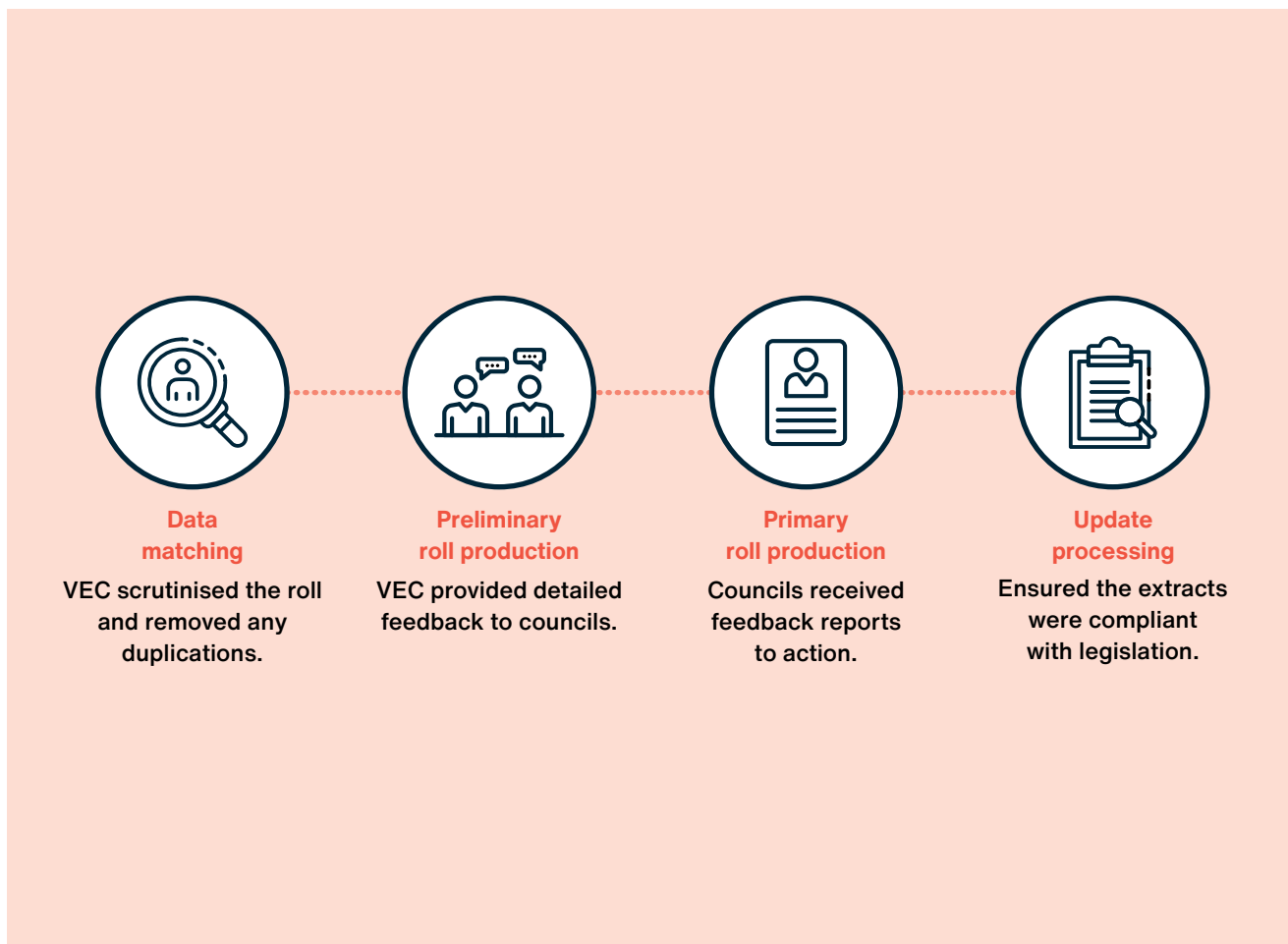
The table in Appendix 2 shows voter numbers by ward and voting entitlement for the South Gippsland Shire Council.

### Amendments to the voters' rolls

In accordance with section 250 of the LG Act, any error or admission in the preparation, printing or copying of the voters' roll may be amended, and any misnomer or inaccurate description of any person, place or thing on the voters' roll may be corrected.

All of the voters added to the roll were issued a ballot pack. Where a voter was deleted from the roll after the mail-out of ballot material, the VEC had systems in place to ensure that returned votes from the deleted voters could be identified and excluded from the extraction and count.

For South Gippsland Shire Council, there were no amendments made to the voters' roll after the certification date. This was a decrease from 2016 where there were 2 additions and 3 deletions following the close of roll.



## 6. South Gippsland Shire Council general election 2021 in review

### Planning and preparation

Planning for the South Gippsland Shire Council general election commenced in early 2021 when the VEC began consultation with the South Gippsland Shire Council. Key elements of the election service plan and the requirements for the South Gippsland Shire Council general election were discussed and decided.

The planning provided the VEC with the opportunity to:

- > recruit and train staff
- > consult with councils
- > ensure adequate preparation for compilation of the voters' roll
- > provide councils with service agreements, estimates and quotes for their election
- > coordinate the sourcing and set up of each individual election office.

The preparation phase included the implementation of an electoral service agreement with South Gippsland Shire Council. The service agreement established the costing arrangements for the preparation, conduct, and closure of the election and summarised contingency election services that may be required during the 2021–2024 council term.

#### Council consultation

The VEC's Client Liaison Officer met with the South Gippsland Shire Council representatives online in June 2021 to finalise their arrangements for the election. At the meeting, the Client Liaison Officer reinforced the key elements of the election service plan and discussed requirements for the election.

#### Election office

The VEC established an election office within the council area: 37 Bair Street, Leongatha which underwent a comprehensive audit to ensure the office met the required standards.

When determining the suitability of accommodation, the following factors are assessed and considered:

- > security – the venue is secure and has a separate lockable storage space for ballot material
- > location – within council boundaries and is conveniently positioned for the public

- > budget – within reasonable budget
- > accessibility – the venue has wheelchair access and suitable accessible parking
- > office area – suitable size to meet OHS and COVIDSafe requirements.

In the first instance the VEC worked with South Gippsland Shire Council to identify if they had a suitable space available for a prospective election office within their own premises, or other premises owned or operated by council. As this was not available, the VEC leased suitable office space elsewhere.

The prospective election office was assessed by the VEC to ensure that not only was the VEC the sole occupant of the premises during the election period, but more importantly it met the strict standards for occupational health and safety including social distancing, accessibility, security and storage.

In response to the social distancing requirements associated with COVID-19, the need for additional space was constantly under review. The VEC provided detailed instructions for full-time VEC staff and election management staff in order to operate safely.

The VEC required access to the election office from the end of August 2021 to deliver necessary furniture and materials and install telephones and computers in time for the opening of the office on Wednesday 15 September 2021. The collection of materials and equipment from the election office took place on Wednesday 17 November 2021 once declarations had been completed.

#### Human resources and support services

The planning of an electoral event requires consideration of staff numbers so that the election can be executed to the highest standard and in a timely manner.

In accordance with section 17A of the *Electoral Act 2002* and section 75 of the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*, the VEC may discriminate against a person in relation to offering employment on the basis of that person's political belief or activity. All staff appointed to roles for the South Gippsland Shire Council general election were required to complete a disclosure of political activities.

The disclosure was then assessed to ensure that there could be no perception of political bias in relation to their work. No applications were rejected on the basis of political disclosure at the South Gippsland Shire Council general election.

### Client Liaison Officer

The relationship between the South Gippsland Shire Council and the VEC was managed by a Client Liaison Officer who reported to the Local Government Program Manager. Due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the Client Liaison Officer predominantly operated offsite in the planning and preparation phase. The Client Liaison Officer acted as a key liaison and source of information for the South Gippsland Shire Council, and represented the VEC during consultation, negotiation and evaluation discussions with council officers which were conducted online. The Client Liaison Officer informed council of any changes to be implemented due to coronavirus (COVID-19).

### Election Support Officer

During the election period, the Election Manager was supported by an Election Support Officer based at the VEC's head office. The appointed Election Support Officer was a highly competent Senior Election Official experienced in managing elections. The Election Support Officer provided the Election Manager with procedural guidance and advice relating to legislation.

### Election Manager and Assistant Election Manager

The VEC maintains a pool of staff who may be appointed as either an Election Manager or Assistant Election Manager, or as an election casual to support election office activities.

Election Managers are impartial and independent election staff who are responsible for the management of their appointed election.

In accordance with section 3 of the LG Act, the Electoral Commissioner appointed Janine Taylor as the Election Manager for the South Gippsland Shire Council general election. The appointed Assistant Election Manager was David Egan.

As in previous elections, the Election Manager and Assistant Election Manager were selected from a pool of available senior election officials.

In this instance, the senior election officials appointed all had extensive electoral experience and did not need in depth training. Instead, the VEC ran a one-day intensive training session prior to the election.

### Casual staff

The VEC is committed to being an equal opportunity employer and employing a diverse range of individuals to fill election roles.

Sixteen casual staff were appointed to fulfil a variety of roles at the South Gippsland Shire Council election office. Staff appointed to election casual roles came from a broad range of backgrounds.

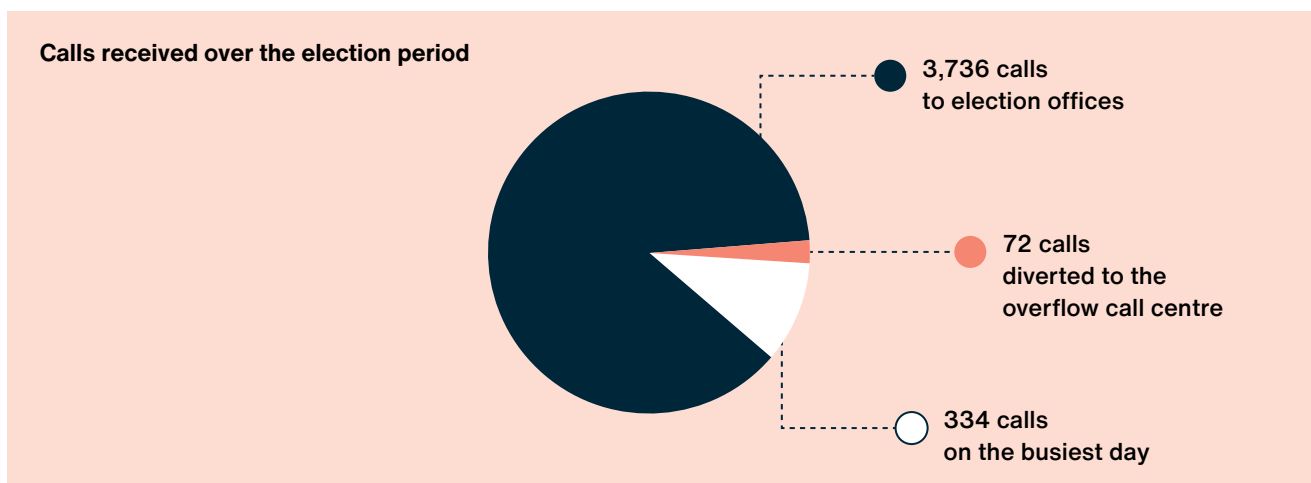
### Public enquiries

The South Gippsland Shire Council election office established a telephone enquiry service which operated from Wednesday 15 September 2021 until the close of voting at 6 pm Friday 29 October 2021 for enquiries regarding the election.

The local telephone enquiry service was supplemented by an overflow call centre at the VEC's head office. The overflow call centre handled calls that were diverted to it when election office lines were at capacity. Additionally, email enquiries were received and processed through [info@vec.vic.gov.au](mailto:info@vec.vic.gov.au).

The types of calls and emails that are typical during an election related to:

- > voting entitlements and compulsory voting obligations
- > enrolment questions
- > ballot pack had not been received
- > ballot material was spoilt or destroyed, so replacement ballot material was required
- > a voter advising that they were overseas or interstate
- > queries regarding the content of the ballot pack.



### Interpreter calls

The VEC engaged the Victorian Interpreting and Language Services' Language Link to provide a telephone interpreting service for telephone enquiries from voters who had a first language other than English. The VEC advertised direct lines for 20 languages other than English and a general line for all other languages.

### Election Management System (EMS)

The VEC's Election Management System (EMS) is a secure, computerised system developed by the VEC to support the end-to-end administration and management of elections. EMS is used by election office staff throughout the election period and by head office staff for oversight of each election.

Prior to the 2020 local government general elections, several new functions and enhancements were made to EMS. Improvements included updates to the overall user experience and navigation, updates required as a result of legislative change, as well as a new dashboard providing a summary of nomination activities across all elections. Further enhancements were made to the processing and reconciliation of returned postal votes to streamline election office activities. The EMS was utilised by election office staff throughout the election period and by head office staff to provide oversight into the management of each election. Head office staff were able to oversee the activities of the election office including reconciliation of ballot papers.

## Candidates

### Candidate information sessions

While candidate information sessions were previously presented by the Election Manager in person, the South Gippsland Shire Council information session was pre-recorded and available for online streaming from the VEC website in early September 2021. The video covered the election timeline, and the procedures and rules relevant to candidates. It also emphasised the new mandatory candidate training, as well as candidate campaigning and advertising rules. The candidate information session was complimented by an interactive candidate information session, which provided the prospective candidates with the opportunity to ask questions about the nomination process and the elections.

The candidate information session was held at 6 pm on Wednesday 8 September 2021.

The video and information session directed viewers to the Election Manager's contact details on the VEC website so they could access more information and organise their nomination appointment.

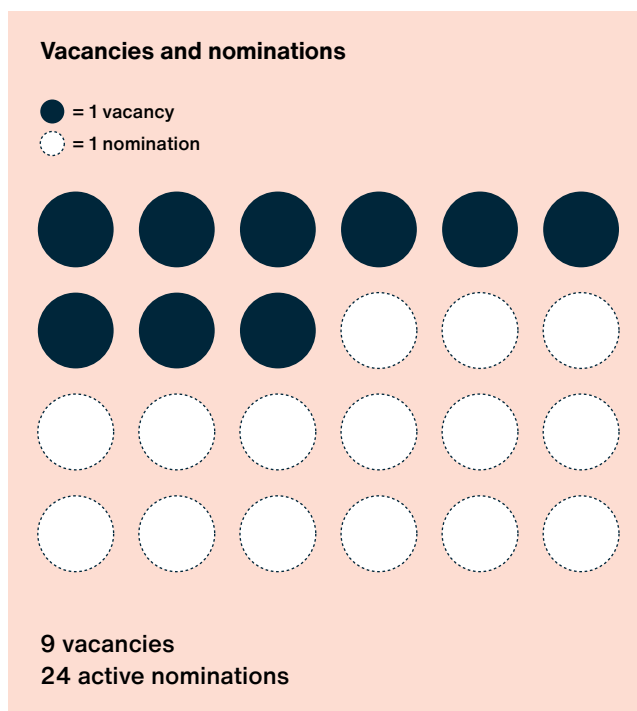
### Candidate Helper and information kits

As in previous council elections, the VEC's Candidate Helper application was available to candidates through the VEC website. Candidate Helper provided candidates with the opportunity to create and edit their candidacy material online. When printed, the material included a barcode that candidates could provide to the Election Manager at their nomination appointment. Barcodes were scanned at the election office and all previously entered information could be retrieved on the VEC's network and uploaded to EMS. This significantly reduced processing times at nomination appointments and streamlined quality assurance practices.

The VEC updated Candidate Helper prior to the 2020 local council elections to ensure it aligned with changes in legislation. The candidate questionnaire was also updated, as required by the LG Act.

The VEC's Candidate Helper went live on Thursday 2 September 2021, enabling candidates to pre-complete their nomination and other forms online before lodging them in person with the Election Manager.

A candidate kit containing handbooks, forms and other resources, was available on the VEC website and at the South Gippsland Shire Council election office for prospective candidates.



### Nominations

Nominations opened at 9 am on Thursday 16 September 2021 and closed at 12 noon on Tuesday 21 September 2021. Due to the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19), the Election Manager only accepted nominations by appointment during this period. The fee to nominate was \$250 per candidate (as set by the LG Act). Late nominations were not accepted.

While amendments to legislation allowed for eligible candidates to lodge their nomination form and pay their nomination fee electronically, no candidate took advantage of this option.

A total of 25 nominations for 9 vacancies in 3 wards were received during the nomination period. One nomination was withdrawn, leaving 24 active nominations at the close of nominations. There were 7 candidates in Coastal-Promontory Ward, 7 candidates in Strzelecki Ward, and 10 candidates in Tarwin Valley Ward. This was a decrease from 2016, where there were 32 active nominations at the close of nominations. See Appendix 3 for a full list of candidates at the close of nominations. Of the candidates nominated, 95.83% (23) completed their nomination form using the online Candidate Helper, an increase from 84.38% in 2016.

### The ballot draw

Following the close of nominations, a ballot draw is conducted for contested elections by the Election Manager to determine the order of the candidates' names on the ballot paper for each ward. All ballot draws were conducted electronically using the VEC's computerised ballot draw application at the election office. Due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions on non-essential gatherings, the ballot draws for the South Gippsland Shire Council elections were staggered and not open for public viewing beyond the candidates or their representatives.

### Candidate statements and questionnaires

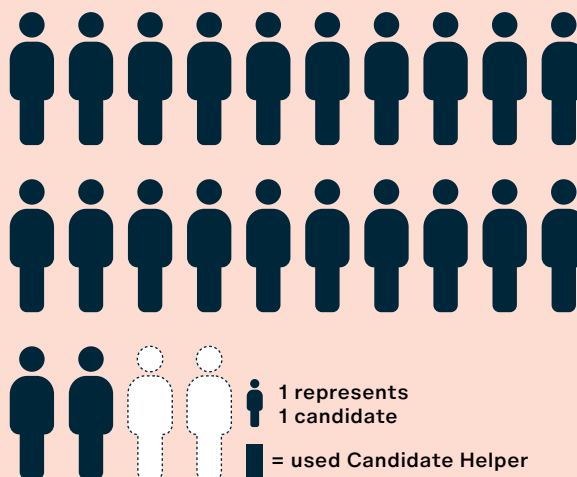
Candidates were able to submit a candidate statement of up to 300 words (an increase from 250 words in 2016). All candidates were able to supply a photograph for the VEC to include in the ballot pack mailed to voters.

Candidate statements were published exactly as they were received by the VEC. The VEC made no corrections to grammar or spelling in statements. All statements were quality assured by VEC staff within publication and printing deadlines. A total of 21 (87.50%) candidates submitted a candidate statement using Candidate Helper – an increase from the candidate (81.25%) who used the online system in 2016.

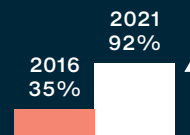
Each candidate was invited to respond to a set of questions prescribed by the Regulations. Voters could access the completed questionnaires on the VEC website and at the election office. The questionnaire asked candidates about their experience and training applicable to the role of councillor and whether they were endorsed by a registered political party.

The candidate questionnaire submission period closed at 12 noon on Wednesday 22 September 2021. A total of 22 questionnaires (91.67%) were completed using the Candidate Helper – a significant increase (53.13%) on the number of candidates who used the online system in 2016.

**92% of candidates submitted their questionnaire using Candidate Helper**



**The % of candidates that completed questionnaires via Candidate Helper was a significant increase from 2016**



### Rolls for candidates

The VEC was required to distribute enrolment data to candidates pursuant to s252 of the *Local Government Act 2020* (Vic). Candidates received enrolment information for their Ward and a label file with elector details set up for printing and mailing purposes. Candidates received access to enrolment data distributed using DEx, the VEC's secure file transfer service, by approximately 4 pm on 22 September 2021.

Candidates were required to declare that they would only use enrolment data for the purposes of conducting their election campaign via the DEx portal. Enrolment data provided to candidates does not contain contact information, such as telephone numbers, for electors.

A total of 18 candidates accessed enrolment data using DEx.

One candidate was unable to access DEx. The VEC distributed roll data to this candidate using a secure Cloud transfer service hosted within the VEC's network. Like all other candidates, this candidate was required to declare that they would use the data for the purposes of conducting their election campaign.

On 24 November 2021 the VEC also wrote to all candidates who had downloaded enrolment data to remind them to destroy the files, pursuant to s252(5) of the *Local Government Act 2020* (Vic). The VEC is not required to do this by legislation but does so as part of its broader commitment to safely maintain and monitor the security of enrolment information it holds about Victorians.

## Candidate bulletins

The Election Manager provided the candidates with regular email bulletins during the election period. The bulletins contained information on the electoral timeline, reminders of processes, and deadlines for certain candidate activities.

The Candidate bulletins provided a streamlined and standardised approach for the Election Manager to communicate with candidates, with tailored information for wards within the South Gippsland Shire Council.

## Election material and products

The VEC produced an extensive suite of products and resources to support the conduct of the South Gippsland Shire Council general election. While ensuring all products complied with the requirements of the LG Act, ballot packs were designed to be user-friendly and informative for the voter. Product generation was fully automated which ensured the VEC was able to meet the high volume, time critical printing and legislative dispatch timeframes for the mail-out of ballot packs.

### Ballot packs

Ballot packs included:

- > a ballot paper envelope with flap
- > a ballot paper attached to a leaflet with candidate statements, instructions on how to vote, and information on how to return the completed ballot paper
- > a pre-paid return envelope.

See Appendix 4 for a sample ballot pack.

Multi-language leaflets were also included for South Gippsland Shire Council general election.

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The paper stock used for printing the ballot leaflets was 100% recycled paper with carbon neutral and forest management certified (FSC) credentials and was made locally in Victoria.

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## Production and mail-out of ballot packs

The printing of ballot material for local government general elections is a large and complex task. The VEC's contracted direct mail and third-party logistics service provider has extensive experience in elections, having been engaged by the VEC for previous major electoral events.

The LG Regulations require that at least 15 days before the close of voting, ballot material is posted or delivered to each person on the voters' roll with no more than 35% of voters, randomly selected being mailed each day. This places significant pressure on print production and mail delivery processes.

As in previous years, the VEC extracted ballot paper and candidate statement data from the EMS using Extensible Mark-up Language (XML). The extracted XML data populated pre-prepared ballot paper and candidate statement templates. Each template was specifically coded to accept the exact number of candidates that had nominated for that corresponding election. This process ensured the quick turnaround of print-ready ballot paper and candidate statement artwork (including the ballot paper, candidate statements and photographs).

Ballot packs were mailed between Tuesday 5 October and Thursday 7 October 2021. Over the three-day period, the VEC mailed out 27,376 ballot packs. The VEC liaised closely with Australia Post during the mail-out period to confirm that ballot packs had been delivered to voters.

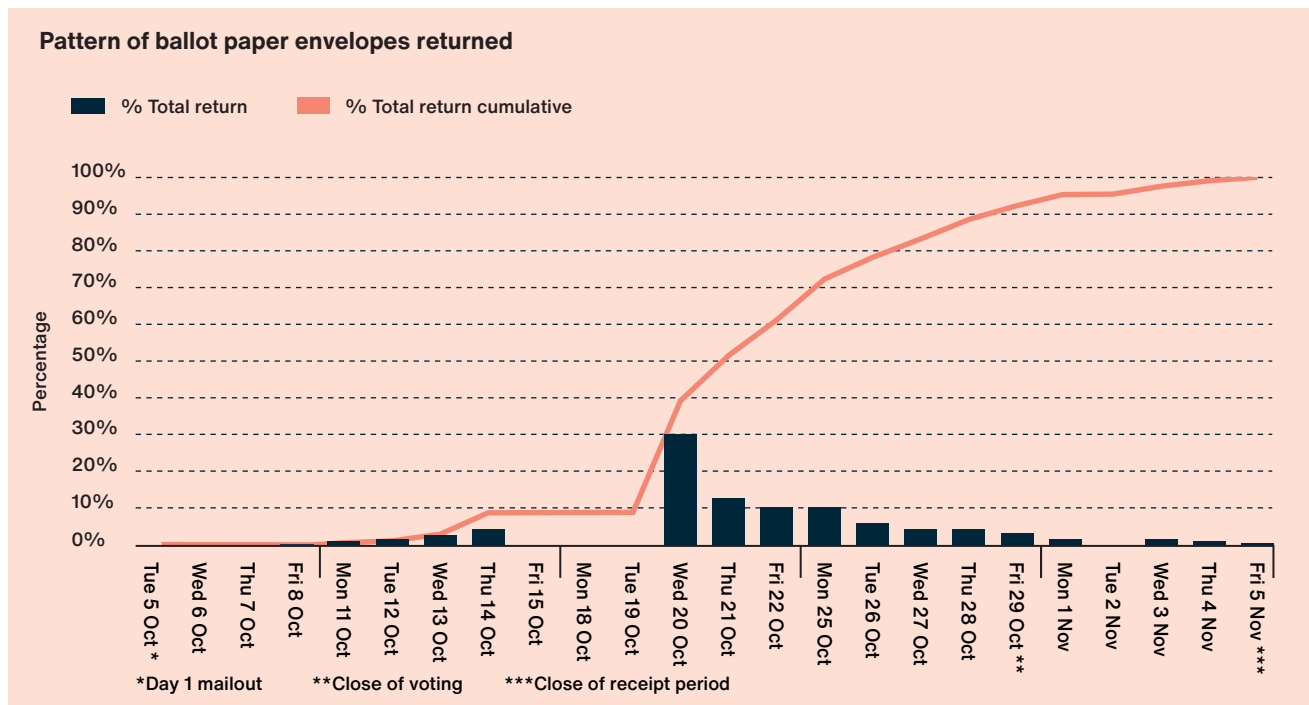
On Friday 15 October, the VEC became aware that a number of voters across all 3 South Gippsland Shire Council wards had not received their ballot packs. On investigation it was identified that the issue was isolated to ballot packs lodged on Tuesday 5 October, day one of the general mail-out. In order to ensure that all voters had adequate time to cast a considered vote and thus ensure the integrity of the election, the Electoral Commissioner, in accordance with regulation 60(1)(b) of the LG Regulations and under regulation 57(3)(a) of the Regulations, made the decision to extend the close of voting by one week from 6 pm on Friday 22 October to 6 pm on Friday 29 October 2021<sup>2</sup>.

A reprint of the ballot material for affected voters took place and ballot packs were re-issued with delivery taking place to voters on Monday 18 and Tuesday 19 October 2021, to just over 9,000 voters across the 3 wards.

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2 15 October 2021 - Extended voting deadline for South Gippsland Shire Council election | Victorian Electoral Commission (vec.vic.gov.au)





### Return of ballot paper envelopes

Voters were provided with a priority reply-paid envelope for the return of their ballot paper envelope containing their completed ballot paper(s). The return mail was delivered to the South Gippsland Shire Council election office from the local postal facility. The VEC's service arrangement with Australia Post allowed returned mail to be pre-sorted into wards where applicable, before being received by the Election Manager.

Voters who chose to hand-deliver their completed vote to the election office were able to do so by placing their ballot paper envelope into a ballot box located at the election office.

Voting closed at 6 pm on Friday 29 October 2021. By the close of voting a total of 21,683 ballot paper envelopes had been returned.

The LG Regulations allowed for the Election Manager to admit returned ballot paper envelopes received by post before 12 noon 5 days after close of voting, if they were satisfied that the vote had been completed by the voter prior to the close of voting. The Election Manager received a total of 1,572 returned ballot paper envelopes during the extended postal vote receipt period.

The Election Manager admitted 22,361 total ballot paper envelopes to extraction processes across the elections. Any ballot paper envelopes not signed by the voter or, unenrolled votes that weren't found to have an entitlement, were not admitted to the extraction and count.

The graph above shows the pattern of the ballot paper envelopes returned for postal elections from the mailout on Tuesday 5 October to the close of the extended postal vote receipt period on Friday 5 November 2021.

### Services for people who are blind or have low vision

The VEC worked with Vision Australia and Blind Citizens Australia (Vic) to provide key election information to their clients about the elections. The information was offered to members in Digital Accessible Information System/CD/audio, braille, large print and e-text formats.

**The VEC received and processed 3 requests for large print ballot material for South Gippsland Shire Council.**

The special format ballot packs included the ballot paper, a ballot paper envelope, voting instructions and candidate statements. A pre-paid Australia Post satchel was also included for the return of the completed ballot material.

### Communications campaign

The VEC delivered a comprehensive communication campaign aimed at increasing voter awareness and participation in the South Gippsland Shire Council general election. The campaign included print advertising, social media, media releases and election information published on the VEC website. A targeted awareness campaign of the election also ran on radio, social media and digital channels.

The advertising and communication campaign comprised the following components:

- > statutory press advertisements
- > paid radio, social media and digital advertisements
- > regular media releases distributed to local media outlets at key election milestones
- > election information on the VEC website

- > communication toolkits provided for use by the council
- > downloadable Easy English guides
- > an organic social media campaign via the VEC’s social media channels
- > a mailout to Vision Australia/Blind Citizens Australia (Vic) clients
- > VoterAlert SMS and email reminders.

### Statutory advertising

Four statutory notices are required to be published during the conduct of a local government election:

- > close of roll
- > notice of election
- > voting details\*
- > declaration of results.

\* Due to delivery issues affecting some voters an additional advertisement was published – *Voting deadline extended* – advising voters of the extension of the voting close date.

Notices were published on the VEC website and in nominated newspapers (as requested by South Gippsland Shire Council) to meet obligations detailed in the LG Act and Regulations. Notices included a ‘voting reminder’ advertisement, which was published in the week prior to election day. See Appendix 5 for examples of the advertisements used.

With the changes to the definition of ‘publish’ in the LG Act, all notices were published on the VEC website in addition to the selected newspapers. As many metropolitan and regional newspaper outlets suspended their print editions due to the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19), some advertisements were not able to be published in newspapers for several councils. With the changes to the definition of ‘publish’ in the LG Act, all notices were published on the VEC website to ensure councils with no available local newspapers had a platform for their notices to be viewed.

### Media relations

The VEC’s media relations campaign focused on increasing news coverage of the electoral process; driving awareness and participation.

The campaign comprised of four phases: enrolment, nominations, voting, and results, aimed at increasing news coverage through the dissemination of media releases containing key electoral information.

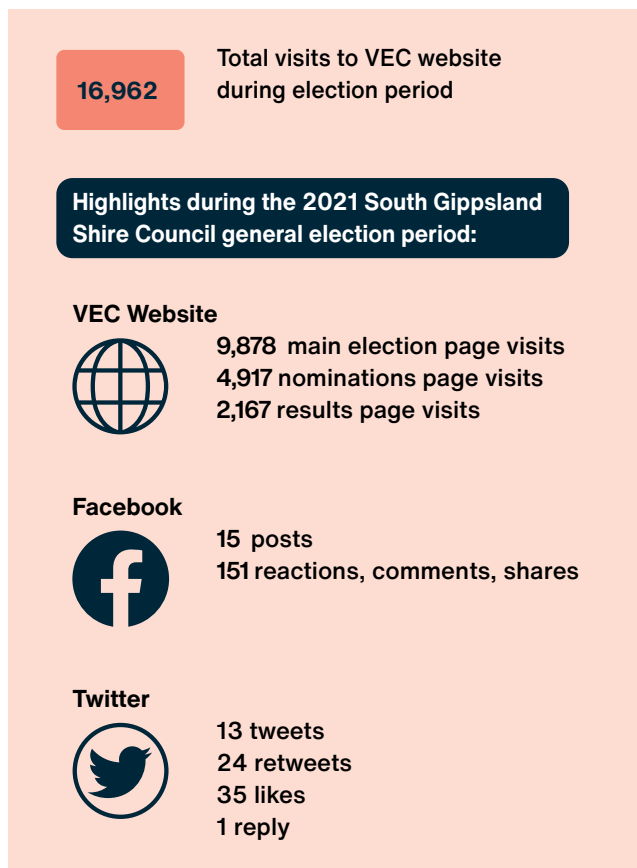
The VEC fielded media enquiries with the most frequent queries related to enrolment, postal voting, elections, campaigning, authorisation of political material, results and counting activities.

### Social media campaign

The VEC rolled out a comprehensive schedule of organic social media posts via its four key channels: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn.

The organic social media campaign was designed to amplify key messaging in relation to the election and fuel conversations about the democratic process in the South Gippsland electorate.

The VEC also ran an Instagram-only ‘Demographics advertising campaign targeted at young people aged 18-29 in the South Gippsland Shire area. The paid social media advertising was designed to educate, raise awareness and motivate young people to enrol and vote in the elections.



### Public education and outreach campaign

The VEC consulted with its community advisory group members and partnered with community-based organisations to deliver a range of electoral education initiatives for the South Gippsland Shire Council general election. These initiatives targeted community groups who were traditionally under-represented in the electoral process. Due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the VEC’s programs, usually delivered in-person, were redesigned to operate online.

## Be Heard Democracy Ambassador program

The Democracy Ambassador program provided online peer-led electoral education to culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, and residents in specialist disability services.

Democracy Ambassador sessions were presented and promoted through the South Coast Service Providers Network – a forum which brings together representatives from organisations providing health, welfare, aged care, emergency relief, youth, employment, disability and community services in Bass Coast and South Gippsland Shires. Further promotion occurred through the Centre for Multicultural Youth (Morwell office), Venus Bay Community Centre, Manna Gum Community House, Milpara Community House, Leongatha Community House, Latrobe Community Health Service, and South Gippsland Shire Council.

## VEC Mythbusting campaign

The VEC targeted areas within the South Gippsland council area with higher populations of people experiencing homelessness by working with homeless services. The Mythbusting campaign aimed to address myths about enrolling and voting for people experiencing homelessness or residing in insecure housing.

The campaign included:

- › distributing ‘no fixed address’ enrolment forms
- › pocket cards containing the Mythbusting messages, packaged with ‘no fixed address’ enrolment forms, along with the offer for material aid with VEC messaging were distributed by services including Salvation Army, Community Housing Bairnsdale, Community Housing Morwell and the Gippsland Homelessness Network
- › the free call number 1800 TO VOTE, or 1800 86 86 83, established to support people experiencing financial hardship to contact the VEC about enrolling and voting, was promoted through homelessness agencies and other local community services.

## DemGraphics – social media co-design pilot with young people

Prior to the 2020 local government general elections, a research project identified barriers to enrolling and voting with a representative group of young people who are typically under-represented in the electoral process. This information was used to develop DemGraphics – a simple, highly engaging, shareable social media campaign for people aged 18–29. The campaign covered key concepts and information about the democratic process in language and communication styles most relevant to young people. The project was updated and adapted for the South Gippsland Shire Council general election.

## Easy English guides

An Easy English tutor guide with related worksheets was produced for people with low English proficiency and/or cognitive disabilities. These products were designed as a co-read product where a person supports the learner through the worksheets. The tutor guide and worksheets were based on the VEC’s Easy English guides for the South Gippsland Shire Council election and were available for download from the VEC’s website in PDF and Word formats.

**Figure 5: Number of downloads for guides**

Guide	Downloads
South Gippsland Easy English guide	86

## VEC website

The website featured comprehensive information on the South Gippsland Shire Council general election. Content was updated at each milestone in the election timeline.

Visitors to the website were able to:

- › search for their address and be directed to specific information relating to the South Gippsland Shire Council general election
- › download Easy English booklets
- › download statutory election notices
- › find information on how to nominate as a candidate
- › find information about how to check and update their enrolment
- › find information on candidates who had nominated
- › find information about how to vote
- › find information about what steps to take if they needed a replacement ballot pack
- › find election results
- › find information about what steps to take if they had received an apparent failure to vote notice.

The election landing page was the 9th most visited webpage on the VEC website for the duration of the election timeline. Election-specific web content attracted a steady flow of traffic.

Most visited election-specific pages:

- > Election landing page: 9,773 visits (2% driven from VoterAlert messages)
- > Nominations page: 4,906 visits (18% driven from VoterAlert messages)
- > Results page: 1,934 visits
- > Candidate announcement media release: 1,519 visits  
South Gippsland Shire Council profile: 1,162 visits (increase of 900 visits when compared to a non-election time).

### **VoterAlert**

VoterAlert is the VEC's free SMS and email notification service which is sent to all State-enrolled Victorians who have previously provided their mobile or email contact details to the VEC. It has an integral role in raising the awareness of electoral events and encouraging community participation. More than two million voters are registered to receive VoterAlert.

During the South Gippsland Shire Council general election, the VEC used its VoterAlert service to send the following direct messages to those State-enrolled voters on the roll for the election:

- > Close of roll: reminder of the close of roll date
  - > Ballot pack mailout: notification regarding the mailout of ballot packs
  - > Voting deadline extended: advising voters of the extension of the voting close date\*
- \* Due to delivery issues affecting some voters.

## **Counting and results**

### **Close of voting**

Close of voting was 6 pm on Friday 29 October 2021.

Legislation allows for a five-day extended postal vote receipt period after election day, where votes can be admitted if the Election Manager is satisfied that the voter completed their postal vote declaration prior to the close of voting. The close of the extended postal vote receipt period for the South Gippsland Shire Council elections was 12 noon on Friday 5 November 2021.

The extraction of ballot papers began after the close of voting and finished at the end of the extended postal vote receipt period.

### **Counting**

The 2021 South Gippsland general elections were conducted by computer count. Computer counts are conducted for elections where a proportional representation count is required. Trained data entry operators, in the presence of scrutineers and election officials, enter preferences from ballot papers into the VEC's computer count application. A calculation step follows the completion of the computer count to determine the successful candidates.

The computer counts for the South Gippsland Shire Council general election were conducted locally in the election office.

The VEC counted votes in two stages. The first stage included votes received up until the close of voting. The second stage included all votes received up until the end of the extended postal vote receipt period.

The computer count results were calculated once all formal ballot papers had been entered into the VEC's computer count application and the total number of informal votes to be included had been updated. The computer count results for all wards were calculated on Tuesday 9 November 2021.

The calculation of the result is a public event where candidates, scrutineers and other interested parties were invited to attend, however the VEC had appropriate measures in place to ensure all events complied with COVIDSafe guidelines.

### **Recounts**

In some cases, an Election Manager may decide to conduct a recount of votes before the election has been declared. A recount may also be conducted at the written request of a candidate, or if results distribution reports indicate that there are critical margins that may warrant a recount. For the South Gippsland Shire Council general election, no formal requests for a recount were received.

## Declaration of results

The results for all elections were declared at 1:30 pm on Tuesday 9 November 2021 at Leongatha Memorial Hall, 6–8 McCartin Street, Leongatha. A table showing the successful candidates and declaration date can be found at Appendix 6.

The Electoral Commissioner advised the Minister for Local Government of the declared results for the South Gippsland Shire Council general election on Thursday 11 November 2021.

### Refund of nomination fees

Candidates are eligible to receive a refund of their \$250 nomination fee if:

- > they are declared elected
- > the total number of first preference votes received is at least 4% of the total number of first preference votes.

Of the 25 candidates nominated for the South Gippsland Shire Council general election, 21 were eligible to receive a refund of their nomination fee. This resulted in the VEC issuing \$5,250 worth of refunds. Three candidates did not meet the above provisions and one candidate withdrew their nomination, therefore \$1,000 was forfeited to council.

## Statistical information

### Voter turnout

Voter turnout is measured as the number of formal and informal votes counted, as a percentage of voters enrolled on the voters' roll.

The overall voter turnout for the 2021 South Gippsland Shire Council general election was 81.51% which was higher than the statewide average at the 2020 Local Government elections of 81.47% (excluding Melbourne City Council), and higher than the turnout of 79.89% at the 2016 general election for South Gippsland Shire Council. Refer to Appendix 7 for a breakdown of the turnout by ward and to Appendix 8 for a detailed comparison between 2021 and 2016 elections.

### Voter participation by enrolment category

Participation is measured by the number of marks on the roll as a percentage of the total enrolment and can vary from turnout.

The overall participation rate in the South Gippsland Shire Council general election was 84.17%, which is higher than the 2020 State average of 84.12% (excluding Melbourne City Council) and higher than the 80.89% rate at the 2016 South Gippsland Shire Council general election.

Increases in the participation rate for both the EC List and the CEO List can be partially attributed to the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19). It is likely that awareness of the elections, and awareness of receiving ballot packs, increased due to more individuals being present in their homes due to the lockdowns.

Age-specific voter participation followed expected trends based on past elections. In general, older voters voted at higher rates than younger voters. In the 18 to 69 age group, 85.04% of EC List voters voted, compared to 91.89% in the 70 and over age group.

Analysis of voter participation for the different enrolment categories shows that participation is higher for voters who are enrolled on the EC's List (86.65%) compared to voters enrolled on the CEO's List (70.86%). Refer to Appendix 9 for further information on participation, including a breakdown by enrolment category.

### Informal voting rates

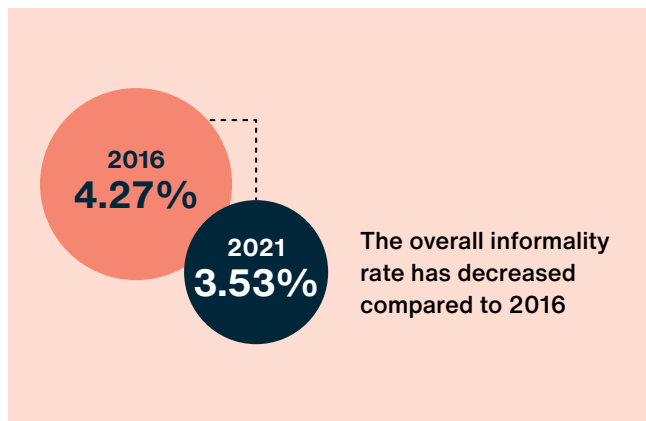
A vote is classified as informal when the voter does not complete the ballot paper in accordance with instructions or if their voting intention cannot be determined.

Votes classified as informal cannot be admitted to a count.

The informal rate for the South Gippsland Shire Council general election was 3.53% of total votes, which was lower than the 4.72% informal rate recorded for the 2020 local government elections. The informal rate was also lower than the 4.27% rate recorded previously for South Gippsland in 2016.

**Figure 6: South Gippsland Shire Council general election turnout and informality percentages comparison**

	2012	2016	2020 LG Postal Elections (Excluding Melbourne Leadership Team)	2021
<b>Turnout %</b>	74.71	79.89	81.47	81.51
<b>Informality %</b>	2	4.27	4.76	3.53



Strzelecki Ward recorded the highest informal rate of all three wards at 3.93%, closely followed by Tarwin Valley at 3.84% and Coastal-Promontory at 2.60%.

### Informal voting analysis

The VEC conducted an informal vote analysis of the South Gippsland Shire Council general election to assess trends in the errors made on ballot papers.

Specifically, the VEC sought to learn whether most of the informal votes were accidental or the consequence of a deliberate decision to spoil the vote. The results of the analysis provide valuable information for future council elections.

The key finding of the analysis for South Gippsland, compared with 2020, was that just under half (47.46%) of the informal votes analysed were cast by voters who expressed a clear preference, but their vote could not be counted because of the formality rules in the LG Act. The corresponding rate for LG2020 was significantly higher at more than two-thirds (68.48%). See Appendix 10 for the detailed results of the analysis.

### Complaints management

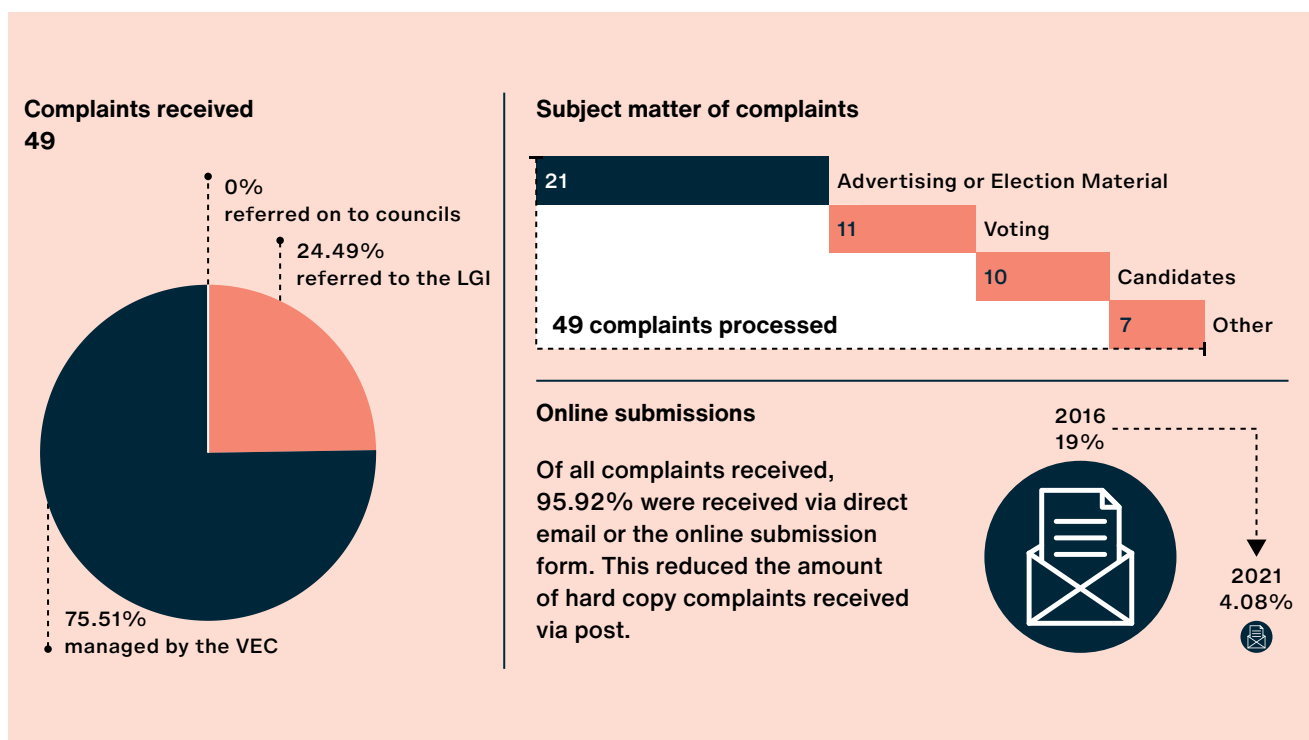
The VEC worked closely with the LGI to develop a new customer feedback framework and policy to streamline how it receives and manages feedback and complaints from the public for the 2020 elections. During the South Gippsland Shire Council general election, customers were able to provide feedback and complaints through an online submission form.

Complaints regarding the South Gippsland Shire Council general election generally fell into two broad categories:

- > complaints regarding the conduct of candidates and other participants in the election, at times alleging a breach of the LG Act or local laws
- > complaints about the administration of the election and services to voters.

The VEC processed and responded to 49 complaints during the election period. Of those complaints, 24% were referred to the LGI as they related to possible breaches of the LG Act.

The VEC committed to responding to simple complaints within five working days or providing an update to complex complaints after 10 working days. The average response time was one working day.



## Post-election activities

### Applications to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal

The Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) hears disputes into the validity of local council elections. Following receipt of an application, VCAT has broad powers to resolve the matter in dispute, and can uphold or dismiss an application, change the declaration of an election, or declare an election void and require a new election. Applications for an inquiry into an election may be made within 14 days after the declaration of the election, either by a candidate in that election, a group of at least 10 people who were entitled to vote in the election, or the VEC.

There were no applications to the VCAT disputing the result of the South Gippsland Shire Council general election.

### Election reports to councils

Under clause 83 of the LG Regulations, the VEC must prepare and submit a report to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of each council on the conduct of the election within six months of election day.

The VEC sent the election report to the South Gippsland CEO by the legislated deadline of Friday 22 April 2022. As set out by the LG Act, each report included a certified record of the printed, issued, used, spoiled, and returned ballot papers, and declarations.

Comprehensive details of planning, milestones and statistical information regarding the elections were included in the report.

### Compulsory voting enforcement

Section 266 of the LG Act and Part 7 of the Regulations set out the provisions for compulsory voting enforcement for local government elections.

Voting in local government elections is compulsory for all State-enrolled voters (the EC list) but is not compulsory for those enrolled on the CEO list. From the 2024 local government elections onwards, it will be compulsory for everyone on the roll to vote.

The enforcement program undertaken by the VEC involves three stages. During each stage, councils are provided with updates regarding the process. Penalties collected during the infringement notice and penalty reminder notice periods are forwarded to council.

### List of non-voters

Following on from the South Gippsland Shire Council general election, the VEC prepared the non-voter list. Before dispatching the first notice in the enforcement program (the Apparent Failure to Vote Notice),

a preliminary process takes place to exclude non-voters who are exempt from voting, such as people who had submitted an overseas notification form to the VEC.

Voters are also excused where their ballot material was received by the VEC within seven days of the close of the extended postal vote receipt period (Friday 5 November 2021) and they had signed and dated their material before the close of voting on Friday 29 October 2021. Postal vote declarations received after the cut-off date and voter excuses received during the elections were processed in November 2021.

From late November 2021, the VEC prepared the list of non-voters for the South Gippsland Shire Council according to the Regulations. Any non-voters who are automatically exempt from voting were excluded at this point.

### Enforcement process

The VEC began its enforcement program in late November 2021 for the South Gippsland Shire Council general election. The first step in the process is required by the LG Act and the remaining steps are required by the *Infringements Act 2006*.

### Apparent Failure to Vote Notice

In late November 2021, the VEC prepared and sent Apparent Failure to Vote Notices to enrolled voters who appeared not to have voted, and who were not excused or automatically exempt. A total of 1,920 Apparent Failure to Vote Notices were mailed, and recipients had 21 days to reply.

### Infringement Notice

In early January 2022, the VEC sent Infringement Notices with an \$91 penalty to non-voters who did not respond to the Apparent Failure to Vote Notice or whose response to the Apparent Failure to Vote Notice was not deemed sufficient.

Recipients had 28 days to respond. A total of 1,476 Infringement Notices were issued, of which 1,327 were because the recipient did not respond to the Apparent Failure to Vote Notice. A further 149 were issued because the response provided to the Apparent Failure to Vote Notice was not deemed sufficient.

During the infringement period, non-voters have the following options under the *Infringements Act 2006*:

- > paying the penalty in full
- > applying for a payment plan
- > requesting an internal review of the infringement (within certain criteria)
- > requesting that the matter be heard in the Magistrates' Court.

The VEC commences proceedings against any non-voters who elect to go to court at the end of the Infringement Notice or Penalty Reminder Notice stages. Prosecution involves significant time and resources, and matters referred to the Magistrates’ Court are usually expected to continue into future financial years.

**Penalty Reminder Notice**

At the close of the Infringement Notice period, the VEC prepares and sends Penalty Reminder Notices to non-voters who have not responded to the Infringement Notice. This notice includes the original penalty amount plus a \$26.20 penalty reminder notice fee. Recipients have 21 days to respond, and have the same payment, review or court referral options as with the Infringement Notice.

In late February 2022, the VEC sent a total of 1,102 Penalty Reminder Notices to non-voters with an outstanding infringement.

**Non-voter analysis**

The number of non-voters for the South Gippsland Shire Council general election was much lower than at previous elections (see ‘Voter turnout’ for more information and analysis). Voter turnout for the South Gippsland Shire Council general election 2021 (81.51%) was higher than both the 2020 Local Government elections average (81.47%) and the South Gippsland Shire Council general election 2016 (79.89%). The increase in turnout can, in part, be attributed to the fact that it was well known that the election would be conducted by post in 2021.

Analysis of South Gippsland Shire Council voting data shows that of those voters enrolled on the EC list, where voting is compulsory, 86.65% participated in the elections. This translates to approximately 3,655 enrolled voters who did not exercise their right to vote.

After preliminary processing of exemptions, this number was reduced to 1,920. Apparent Failure to Vote Notices were issued to this group.

The following table below shows response statistics from the dispatch of Apparent Failure to Vote Notices

Response statistics	2016	2021
Apparent Failure to Vote Notices (AFTVN) issued (as a percentage of total enrolment)	10.1% (2,161)	7.1% (1,920)
Response rate to Apparent Failure to Vote Notice	44.3% (958)	30.9% (593)
Invalid responses as percentage of total responses	34.8% (333)	25.1% (149)
No response to AFTVN	55.7% (1,203)	69.1% (1,327)
Percentage of voters excused based on returned AFTVNs	65.2% (625)	74.9% (444)
Infringement Notices issued as percentage of AFTVNs	71% (1,536)	76.9% (1,476)

for the 2016 and 2021 South Gippsland Shire Council general election. It is important to note with respect to 2021 that 1,327 (89.9%) apparent non-voters did not respond to the Apparent Failure to Vote Notice which provided them the opportunity to state a reason for not voting or provide evidence that they did vote, at which point enforcement action would likely have ceased.

Additionally, with respect to Infringement Notices, the opportunity to request a review is available and as of Tuesday 22 March 2022 the VEC had received 39 requests for review resulting in the 39 infringements being withdrawn. Those withdrawn were generally as a result of the provision of further supporting documentation.

**Invoicing**

The VEC aims to provide cost-efficient election services to councils in Victoria. The VEC acknowledges that inflation may have increased some of the costs associated with the South Gippsland Shire Council general election.

Cost increases have been evident with:

- > communication and advertising costs
- > Australia Post postage rates
- > rates of pay for election officials
- > market rent for the election office accommodation
- > paper used to produce ballot materials
- > transport and logistics in relation to the movement and delivery of equipment and ballot materials.

In addition, the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic had further impacted costings for the South Gippsland Shire Council general election.

As in previous local government elections, the VEC applied a marginal cost recovery model to the South Gippsland Shire Council general election, where all direct costs are recovered.



The VEC invoiced in three stages:

**Stage 1:**

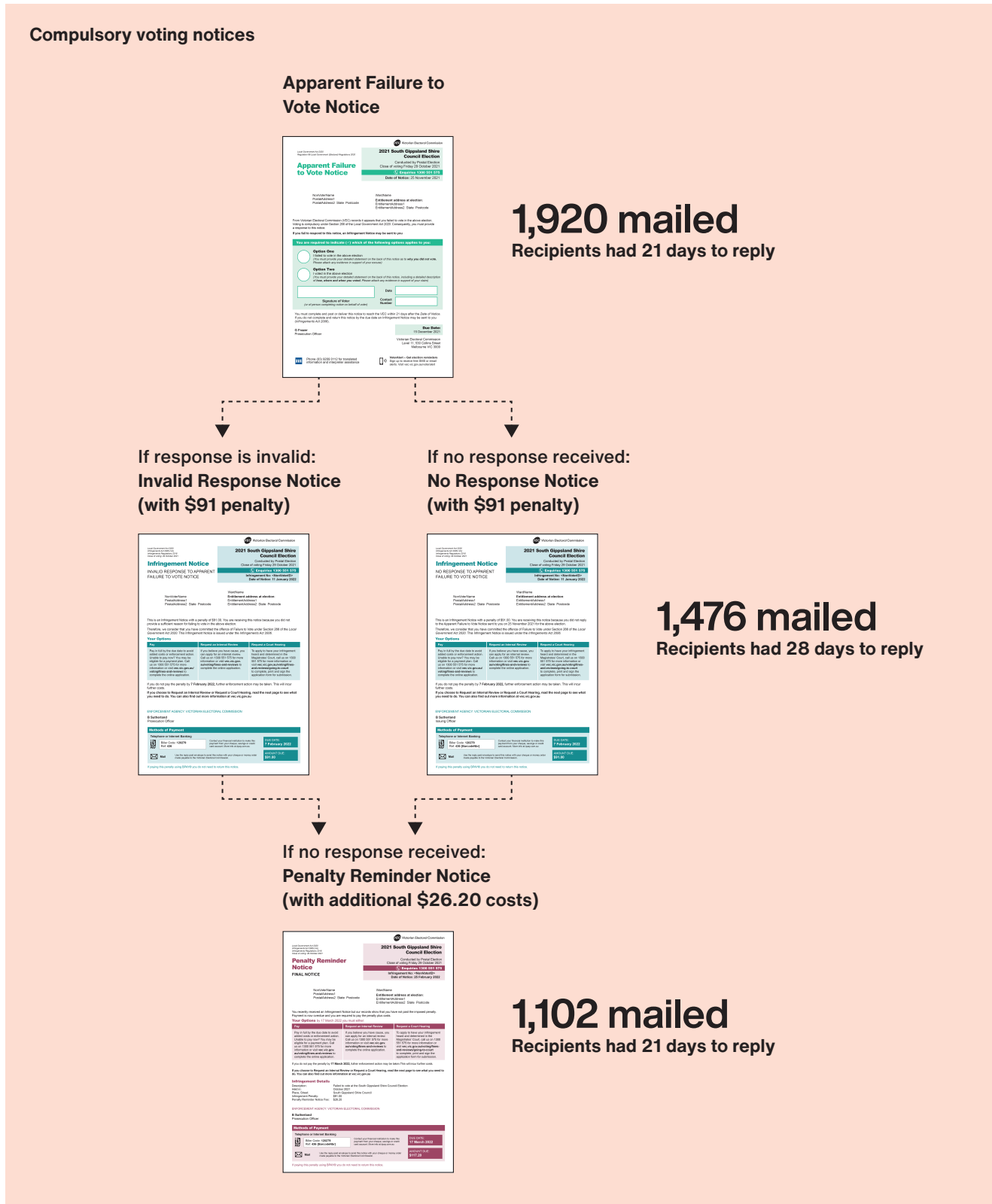
An invoice for election services was sent to South Gippsland Shire Council in April 2022.

**Stage 2:**

An invoice for the dispatch and processing of Apparent Failure to Vote Notices (AFTVNs) and Infringement Notices was sent to South Gippsland Shire Council in April 2022.

**Stage 3:**

An invoice for the dispatch and processing of the Penalty Reminder Notice was sent to South Gippsland Shire Council in June 2022. Further invoices will be issued if prosecution costs are incurred. These will be raised in the following financial years.



## 7. Debrief and evaluation

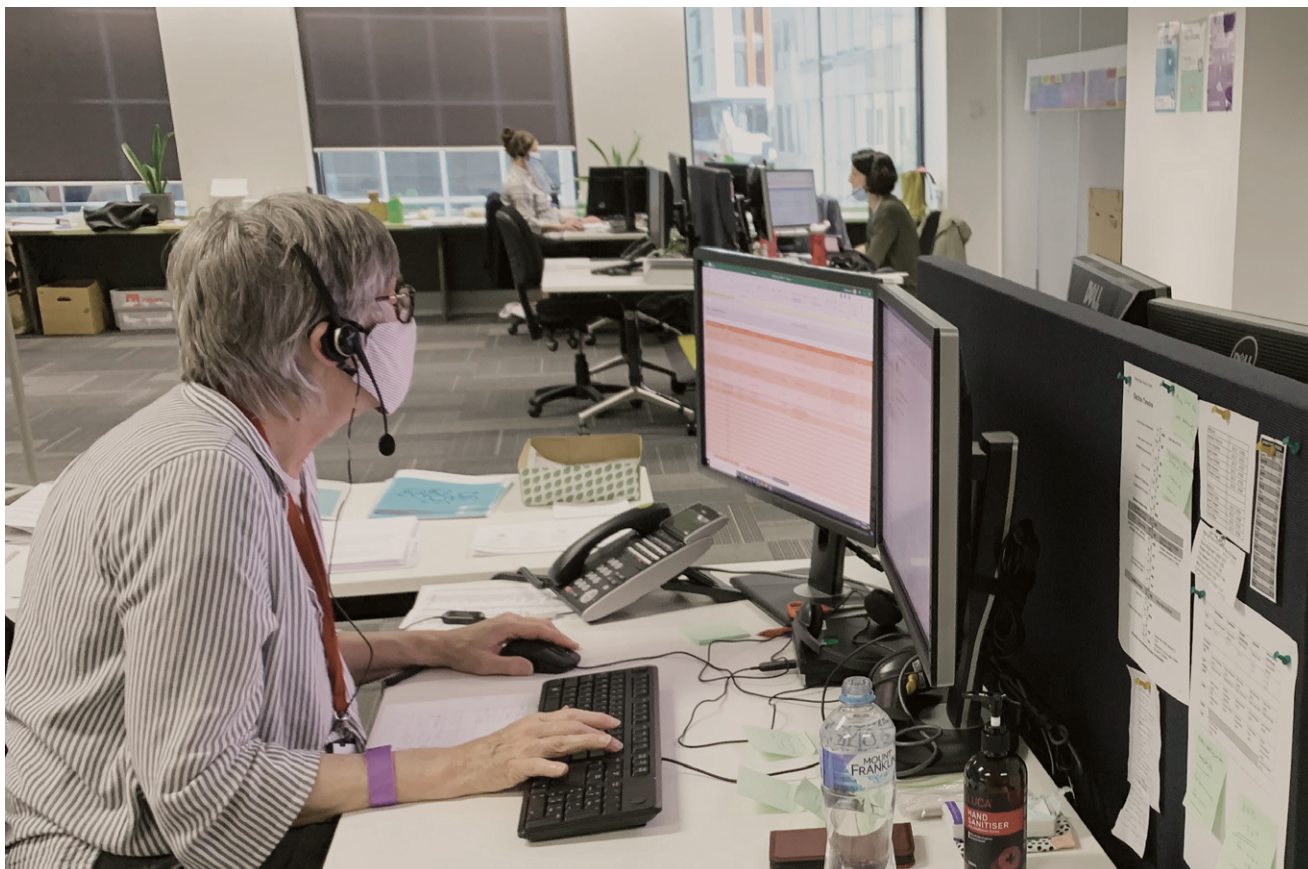


Image: VEC Head Office staff during the election period

After each electoral event, the VEC leads an extensive debriefing and evaluation program, inviting feedback from councils, voters, candidates and staff. All feedback received is considered during the preparation and planning of future local council elections.

### Councils

On Monday 13 December 2021, South Gippsland Shire Council was invited to complete an online evaluation survey following the conclusion of the general election. The aim of the survey was to assess the VEC's performance in the execution of the election and obtain feedback for future council elections. Additional feedback was able to be provided to the Program Manager for Local Government elections.

### Voters

In late 2020 the VEC launched its online research panel. The first research exercise that used the panel was a survey designed to measure voter satisfaction with the services provided by the VEC for the 2020 Local government elections. The survey was conducted in December 2020 and 919 voters completed the survey.

The same survey, with minor adjustments, was distributed to voters in South Gippsland Shire Council to similarly measure voter satisfaction and collect feedback on VEC election services.

In November 2021 a total of 600 randomly selected South Gippsland voters were invited to participate in the survey. By the close of the survey the VEC had received 128 responses.

Of the total, 123 respondents indicated that they had voted in the South Gippsland Shire Council general election and five did not vote.

The table opposite outlines the most common reasons for voting (Note: respondents were able to select multiple responses in their answer and a total of 242 responses were received by the VEC).

Statement	Responses
'I think voting is an important part of the democratic process'	77
'I am interested in local council issues'	49
'It's important to have my say'	47
'I didn't want to get a fine'	47
'I wanted to vote for a particular candidate'	13
'I am interested in a particular local council issue'	6
Other, including voting 'against' a particular candidate	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>242</b>

The survey also captured reasons for not voting with the most common reason being a ballot pack not arriving (3), followed by a change in address (1) and not aware the election was on (1).

Overall, respondents rated their experience of voting in the South Gippsland Shire Council general election at an average of 7.3 (on a scale of one to 10 with one being poor and 10 excellent) and the VEC's performance at 7.3. These results were slightly lower compared with the satisfaction levels of 7.9 and 8.2 respectively recorded amongst voters following LG2020.

## Candidates

The VEC sent a survey in November 2021 to all candidates who nominated for the South Gippsland Shire Council general election to gauge their satisfaction with VEC election and candidate services. The survey was completed by 14 candidates, three of whom were elected and 11 that were not. Responding candidates rated their satisfaction with the written materials and information provided by the VEC (including the website) at an average of 7.6 on a scale of one to 10 (with one being poor and 10 being excellent).

Overall satisfaction with the level of support provided to candidates by election staff was rated at an average of 7.8.

The ratings recorded for South Gippsland Shire candidates were slightly above the aggregated results for candidates at 2020 elections, (7.2 and 7.4 respectively).

Overall, most candidates considered the support and assistance provided by election staff and by the VEC as highly effective. Candidates identified the work of election staff and the Election Manager as particularly supportive and helpful.

There was a small number of candidates dissatisfied with election staff and/or the support provided by the VEC. This included the systems designed to support the nomination process. The VEC will use this feedback to inform the design of future candidate services processes.

The overall experience of standing as a candidate was rated at an average of 7 on a scale of one to 10, slightly above the rating of 6.7 recorded amongst candidates in the 2020 elections.

## Election staff feedback

Debriefing sessions were conducted with election management and head office staff following the conclusion of the South Gippsland Shire Council general elections. The findings from these sessions will be utilised to improve the VEC's future election service.

## Appendices

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**Appendix 1: Election Timelines**

**SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE COUNCIL ELECTIONS 2021  
ELECTION TIMELINE**

Council primary enrolment data	JUL 12	MON	(Date fixed by VEC)
Public notice of Close of Roll Date (Published during this period)	AUG 7	SAT	
	AUG 13	FRI	
Close of Roll	AUG 27	FRI	Enrolment closes at 4 pm
Publication of Election Notice (Published during this period)	AUG 30	MON	
	SEP 4	SAT	
<b>Opening of election office</b>	SEP 15	WED	
Certification of voters' roll Opening of nominations	SEP 16	THU	
<b>Nomination Day</b>	SEP 21	TUE	Nominations close at 12 noon Ballot draw to follow
Lodgement of candidate statements, photographs and questionnaires	SEP 22	WED	Candidate statements, photos and questionnaires close at 12 noon
(AFL Grand Final public holiday)	SEP 24	FRI	
Mail-out of ballot packs	OCT 5	TUE	
	OCT 6	WED	
	OCT 7	THU	
Mail-out of re-issued ballot packs	OCT 18	MON	
Election Day	OCT 21	THU	Election office open until 8 pm
	OCT 22	FRI	Election office open until 6 pm
	OCT 23	SAT	
	OCT 28	THU	Election office open until 8 pm
<b>CLOSE OF VOTING</b>	OCT 29	FRI	Election office open until 6 pm Voting closes at 6 pm
Postal vote receipt period	NOV 1	MON	
	NOV 2	TUE	Melbourne Cup Day public holiday
	NOV 5	FRI	Postal vote receipt closes at 12 noon

**All elections to be declared by Friday 12 November.**

**Please note:**

The close of voting for the South Gippsland Shire Council elections has been extended by one week to 6 pm Friday 29 October 2021. The postal vote receipt period for the South Gippsland Shire Council elections has been extended by one week to Friday 5 November 2021.

**Appendix 2: Voter numbers and roll amendments by ward**

Council name	Ward	E-C List	Chief Executive Officers List					Certified Roll Total		
			N	A	P	O	T		Total	
South Gippsland Shire Council	Coastal-Promontory	4,671	3,265	9			4		3,278	7,949
	Strzelecki	9,324	530	5			1		536	9,860
	Tarwin Valley	9,077	477	12			1		490	9,567
	<b>Total</b>	<b>23,072</b>	<b>4,272</b>	<b>26</b>			<b>6</b>		<b>4,304</b>	<b>27,376</b>

**N** The number of non-resident ratepayers automatically entitled to enrolment as per section 243 of the LG Act), forms the bulk of the council list.

**A** Applicant Resident voters – Resident ratepayers who are entitled for council elections but are not on the state register – Non-citizen ratepayers basically, from the council list.

**P** Occupier ratepayers – People who pay rates on a leased property and have applied to council to vote for that entitlement with agreement of the property owner, from the council list.

**O** Corporation (owner) applicants – People who have applied to vote on behalf of a corporation that owns a rateable property in the council.

**T** Corporation (occupier) applicants – Like occupier ratepayers (P), but for corporations.

**Appendix 3: List of candidates**

Council	Candidate Name	Ward
South Gippsland Shire Council	RAE, Scott	Coastal-Promontory Ward
South Gippsland Shire Council	DAVIES, Mohya	Coastal-Promontory Ward
South Gippsland Shire Council	LIEBELT, David	Coastal-Promontory Ward
South Gippsland Shire Council	BANIKOS, Anda	Coastal-Promontory Ward
South Gippsland Shire Council	MORGAN, Mat	Coastal-Promontory Ward
South Gippsland Shire Council	PLOWRIGHT, Sue	Coastal-Promontory Ward
South Gippsland Shire Council	GILLIGAN, Sarah	Coastal-Promontory Ward
South Gippsland Shire Council	AMOR, David	Strzelecki Ward
South Gippsland Shire Council	FORBES, Jim	Strzelecki Ward
South Gippsland Shire Council	FELTON, Michael Patrick	Strzelecki Ward
South Gippsland Shire Council	HIRST, Frank	Strzelecki Ward
South Gippsland Shire Council	McEWEN, Andrew	Strzelecki Ward
South Gippsland Shire Council	HERSEY, Nathan	Strzelecki Ward
South Gippsland Shire Council	KEERIE, Jenni	Strzelecki Ward
South Gippsland Shire Council	CURTIS, Jeremy	Tarwin Valley Ward
South Gippsland Shire Council	LOVE, Lindsay	Tarwin Valley Ward
South Gippsland Shire Council	CORCORAN, Andrew	Tarwin Valley Ward
South Gippsland Shire Council	DARAKAI, Adrian	Tarwin Valley Ward
South Gippsland Shire Council	COUSIN, Rosemary	Tarwin Valley Ward
South Gippsland Shire Council	SCHELLING, John	Tarwin Valley Ward
South Gippsland Shire Council	EDWARDS-GALAL, Nicole	Tarwin Valley Ward
South Gippsland Shire Council	WILLIAMS, Clare	Tarwin Valley Ward
South Gippsland Shire Council	HILL, Don	Tarwin Valley Ward
South Gippsland Shire Council	HARMER, Leslie John	Tarwin Valley Ward

## Appendix 4: Sample of ballot pack Coastal-Promontory Ward

### Outer Envelope

IF UNCLAIMED, RETURN TO  
Locked Bag 7777, LEONGATHA VIC 3953



South Gippsland  
Shire Council

POSTAGE  
PAID  
AUSTRALIA  
**PRIORITY**

**South Gippsland Shire Council election 2021  
OFFICIAL ELECTION MATERIAL**

Victorian  
Electoral  
Commission

STAT-ENV038 AUG 2021

**Don't risk a fine**  
 Voting closes 6 pm  
 Friday 22 October

### Ballot Paper Envelope

## BALLOT PAPER ENVELOPE


**VOTING INSTRUCTIONS**

1. Detach and complete your ballot paper.
2. Put your completed ballot paper in this envelope and seal the envelope.
3. **Sign and date** the flap on this envelope.  
An election official will remove the flap before opening the envelope to ensure the secrecy of your vote.
4. Place this envelope in the reply paid envelope, seal and post it straight away.

**NOTES**

- Any voter unable to vote without assistance may authorise a person to sign on their behalf. The authorised person must ensure their name is clearly written beneath their signature along with the words "authorised signatory".
- Date of birth information may be provided to council to maintain accuracy of Council rolls.

VOTING IS SECRET


Victorian Electoral Commission
M931P 2020

### Reply Paid Envelope



South Gippsland  
Shire Council

**Delivery Address:**  
Locked Bag 7777  
LEONGATHA VIC 3953

No stamp required  
if posted in Australia





Post your completed  
ballot material  
**BEFORE \*6 pm on  
Friday 22 October**

\*Note: Local mail clearance times may vary. Ballot material must be mailed before final clearance times in the last week of voting.



Election Manager  
South Gippsland Election Office  
Coastal-Promontory Ward  
Reply Paid 93097  
LEONGATHA VIC 3953





## Strzelecki Ward

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South Gippsland  
Shire Council

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PAID  
AUSTRALIA  
**PRIORITY**

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OFFICIAL ELECTION MATERIAL**

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Electoral  
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STAT-ENV038 AUG 2021

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VOTING IS SECRET


Victorian Electoral Commission
M931P 2020

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South Gippsland  
Shire Council

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LEONGATHA VIC 3953

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Election Manager  
South Gippsland Election Office  
Strzelecki Ward  
Reply Paid 93099  
LEONGATHA VIC 3953



## Tarwin Valley Ward

### Outer Envelope

IF UNCLAIMED, RETURN TO  
Locked Bag 7777, LEONGATHA VIC 3953



South Gippsland  
Shire Council

POSTAGE  
PAID  
AUSTRALIA  
**PRIORITY**

**South Gippsland Shire Council election 2021**  
**OFFICIAL ELECTION MATERIAL**

STAT-ENV038 AUG 2021



Victorian  
Electoral  
Commission

**Don't risk a fine**

Voting closes 6 pm  
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Victorian Electoral Commission

M931P 2020

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Shire Council

**Delivery Address:**  
Locked Bag 7777  
LEONGATHA VIC 3953

No stamp required  
if posted in Australia





**Post your completed  
ballot material  
BEFORE \*6 pm on  
Friday 22 October**



Election Manager  
South Gippsland Election Office  
Tarwin Valley Ward  
Reply Paid 93098  
LEONGATHA VIC 3953

\*Note: Local mail clearance times may vary. Ballot material must be mailed before final clearance times in the last week of voting.




## Appendix 5: Example Council-specific advertising

### Close of roll example – Statutory (postal elections)

# South Gippsland Shire Council postal election

*Your council, your vote*



South Gippsland  
Shire Council  
*Care for the beauty. Stay for the lifestyle!*

---

**You must be enrolled to vote**

A general election will be held for South Gippsland Shire Council in October 2021. To be able to vote in the election, you must be enrolled by the close of roll at **4 pm on Friday 27 August 2021**. Two categories of voters can be enrolled to vote in the South Gippsland Shire Council election: State-enrolled voters and Council-enrolled voters.

**State-enrolled voters**

**Am I enrolled to vote?**

You are automatically enrolled for this election if:

- you will be 18 years of age or over on Saturday 23 October 2021 **AND**
- you live in South Gippsland Shire **AND**
- you are on the State electoral roll for your current address.

**You need to enrol if:**

- you are an Australian citizen aged 18 or over on Saturday 23 October 2021 **AND**
- you live in South Gippsland Shire and you are not on the State electoral roll **OR**
- you have lived at your current residential address within South Gippsland Shire for at least a month and have not yet updated your enrolment details, including any changes to your postal address.

**How do I enrol?**

You can enrol online at [vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au)

You can also download an enrolment form from the website. All enrolment applications must be received by the Victorian Electoral Commission by the close of roll at **4 pm on Friday 27 August 2021**.

**How can I check my State enrolment?**

You can check your enrolment details online at [vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au) at any time, or call 1300 805 478.

**Council-enrolled voters**

**Am I enrolled to vote?**

To be a Council-enrolled voter, you must be:

- 18 years of age or over on Saturday 23 October 2021 **AND**
- not a State-enrolled voter within South Gippsland Shire.

You are automatically enrolled for this election if you were enrolled as a non-resident owner at the most recent election for your local area.

If your circumstances have changed since the most recent election and you are no longer a non-resident owner of that property, you will not be automatically enrolled for this election. Depending on your circumstances, you may still be eligible to apply to be enrolled as a Council-enrolled voter.

**Who else can enrol & vote?**

You may also apply to enrol if:

- you have purchased a rateable property in South Gippsland Shire since the last election or by-election and you are not automatically enrolled **OR**
- you are not an Australian citizen and you live in, and pay rates for, a property within South Gippsland Shire **OR**
- you pay rates on a property you occupy in South Gippsland Shire, for example you are a shop tenant and pay rates to the Council for the tenancy, and you have no other voting entitlement within South Gippsland Shire **OR**
- you are a director or company secretary of a corporation that pays rates to South Gippsland Shire Council and you have no other voting entitlement within South Gippsland Shire.

**How do I apply to be a Council-enrolled voter?**

If you meet any of the mentioned criteria and wish to enrol, contact South Gippsland Shire Council on (03) 5662 9200 for a council enrolment form. Council enrolment forms must be received by the Council by the close of roll at **4 pm on Friday 27 August 2021**.

**How can I check if I am Council-enrolled?**

You can check your enrolment details by contacting the Council on (03) 5662 9200.

**Thinking about standing for election?**

Candidate requirements have recently changed. To nominate as a candidate for South Gippsland Shire Council, you must:

- be an Australian citizen and enrolled on the voters' roll for South Gippsland Shire Council **AND**
- be eligible to become a councillor should you be elected **AND**
- have completed the mandatory candidate training before lodging your nomination with the Election Manager.

For further information, visit [vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au)

**Enrolment closes**

**4 pm Friday 27 August**

State-enrolled voters can register for free VoterAlert SMS and email reminders at [vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au)


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**vec.vic.gov.au | 131 832**

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 • Dinka 9209 0119 Dinka • 𐀀𐀂𐀃𐀄 9209 0103 Greek • Italiano 9209 0104 Italian • ភ្នំ 9209 0192 Khmer • 한국어 9209 0194 Korean • Македонски 9209 0105 Macedonian  
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Notice of Election example – Statutory

## South Gippsland Shire Council postal election

*Your council, your vote*



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### Vote by post this October

#### Voting

Ballot packs will be mailed to voters enrolled in the South Gippsland Shire Council election from Tuesday 5 October 2021. Return your completed ballot material by mail ASAP or hand-deliver it to the Election Manager by the close of voting at **6 pm on Friday 22 October 2021**.

#### If you will be away

If you will be away when ballot packs are mailed, or your address has changed since Friday 27 August 2021, you can request for your ballot pack to be redirected by writing to:

Election Manager  
South Gippsland Shire Council election  
c/- Victorian Electoral Commission  
Level 11, 530 Collins Street  
Melbourne VIC 3000

Alternatively, you can email your request to:  
[redirections@vec.vic.gov.au](mailto:redirections@vec.vic.gov.au)

Please include the address for redirection. Each voter requesting redirection must sign their request. Requests for redirection must be received by **Thursday 16 September 2021**.

#### Large print and braille ballot papers

Large print or braille ballot papers are available for voters who are blind or have low vision—please register by **Tuesday 14 September 2021**. To register, call (03) 8620 1222 during business hours.

#### Request an early postal vote

To apply for an early postal vote, contact the Election Manager from **Wednesday 15 September 2021** on 1300 202 885 and make an application. You must provide a valid reason.

#### How to nominate as a candidate

**Candidate requirements have recently changed. To nominate as a candidate, you must:**

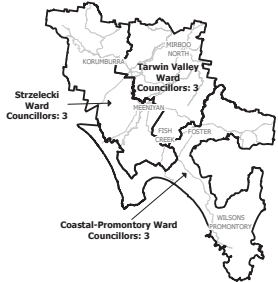
- be an Australian citizen and enrolled on the voters' roll for South Gippsland Shire Council **AND**
- be eligible to become a councillor should you be elected **AND**
- have completed the mandatory candidate training before lodging your nomination with the Election Manager.

To nominate, complete the nomination form and lodge it with the Election Manager together with the \$250 nomination fee. Nomination forms can be lodged by appointment during business hours from **Thursday 16 September 2021** until **12 noon on Tuesday 21 September 2021** at:  
37 Bair Street, Leongatha

Visit [vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au) for more information and to pre-complete your nomination form using the online Candidate Helper. The online Candidate Helper will be available from **Thursday 2 September 2021**.

If you use the online Candidate Helper, print your pre-completed form and make an appointment to lodge it with the Election Manager along with the nomination fee.

Call the Election Manager from **Wednesday 15 September 2021** on 1300 202 885 to make a nomination appointment.



#### Online candidate information session

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the VEC's recorded candidate information session will be available on [vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au) from **9 am Monday 6 September 2021**.

A live interactive candidate session will take place online at **6 pm Wednesday 8 September 2021**. Registrations for this session open on **Thursday 2 September 2021**. For more information please visit the VEC website.

Candidate Information Kits containing nomination forms and other electoral information will be available online and from the Election Manager.

#### Nominations close

### 12 noon Tuesday 21 September




State-enrolled voters can register for free VoterAlert SMS and email reminders at [vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au)


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Voting Details example – Statutory

## South Gippsland Shire Council postal election

*Your council, your vote*



---

### Check the mail for your ballot pack

Ballot packs containing voting material will be mailed to enrolled voters from **Tuesday 5 October 2021**.

**This is a postal election only.**

If you do not receive your ballot pack by **Wednesday 13 October 2021**, please call 1300 202 885 during office hours to arrange a replacement.

#### How to vote correctly

You must complete your ballot paper correctly for your vote to count. Put the number 1 in the box next to the candidate you most want to see elected, then number **ALL** the other boxes in order of your choice. You must number **EVERY BOX** and only use each number once.

#### How to return your completed ballot paper

Follow the instructions on your ballot paper to complete your vote. To return your completed ballot paper, put it in the ballot paper envelope then use the reply-paid envelope provided or hand-deliver it during office hours to:

**37 Bair Street, Leongatha**

#### Voting is compulsory

Voting is compulsory for all voters who were on the State roll at **4 pm on Friday 27 August 2021**.

**You may be fined if you do not vote — this includes homeowners and tenants.**

You are encouraged to vote, but you will not be fined if you don't vote, if:

- you live outside this local council area **OR**
- you are enrolled directly with the Council to be on the voters' roll for this election.

#### Your completed ballot pack must be in the mail or hand-delivered by 6 pm\* Friday 22 October

\*Local mail clearance times vary. Ballot packs must be mailed before final clearance times in the last week of voting. Don't risk a fine.




State-enrolled voters can register for free VoterAlert SMS and email reminders at [vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au)


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Voting Reminder example – Non-statutory

## South Gippsland Shire Council postal election

*Your council, your vote*



South Gippsland  
Shire Council

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**Check the mail for your ballot pack**

Ballot packs containing voting material were mailed to enrolled voters from Tuesday 5 October 2021.

**This is a postal election only.**

If you do not receive your ballot pack by **Wednesday 13 October 2021**, please call 1300 202 885 during office hours to arrange a replacement.

**How to vote correctly**

You must complete your ballot paper correctly for your vote to count. Put the number **1** in the box next to the candidate you most want to see elected, then number **ALL** the other boxes in order of your choice. You must number **EVERY BOX** and only use each number once.

**How to return your completed ballot paper**

Follow the instructions on your ballot paper to complete your vote. To return your completed ballot paper, put it in the ballot paper envelope then use the reply-paid envelope provided or hand-deliver it during office hours to:

**37 Bair Street, Leongatha**

**Voting is compulsory**

Voting is compulsory for all voters who were on the State roll at **4 pm on Friday 27 August 2021**.

**You may be fined if you do not vote – this includes homeowners and tenants.**

You are encouraged to vote, but you will not be fined if you don't vote, if:

- you live outside this local council area **OR**
- you are enrolled directly with the Council to be on the voters' roll for this election.

**Your completed ballot pack must be in the mail or hand-delivered by 6 pm\* Friday 22 October**

\*Local mail clearance times vary. Ballot packs must be mailed before final clearance times in the last week of voting. Don't risk a fine.

State-enrolled voters can register for free VoterAlert SMS and email reminders at [vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au)


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Amended Voting Reminder example – Non-statutory

## South Gippsland Shire Council postal election

*Your council, your vote*



South Gippsland  
Shire Council

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**Voting deadline extended**

The South Gippsland Shire Council election close of voting deadline has been extended to 6 pm Friday 29 October 2021.

This extended deadline applies to all voters eligible to vote in the South Gippsland Shire Council election, including those who have already received ballot packs with the original deadline date printed on them.

**Check the mail for your ballot pack**

Ballot packs containing voting material were mailed to enrolled voters from Tuesday 5 October 2021, with re-issued ballot packs for affected voters mailed from Monday 18 October 2021.

**This is a postal election only.**

If you have not received your ballot pack please call 1300 202 885 or visit the election office during office hours to arrange a replacement.

**How to vote correctly**

You must complete your ballot paper correctly for your vote to count. Put the number **1** in the box next to the candidate you most want to see elected, then number **ALL** the other boxes in order of your choice. You must number **EVERY BOX** and only use each number once.

**How to return your completed ballot paper**

Follow the instructions on your ballot paper to complete your vote. To return your completed ballot paper, put it in the ballot paper envelope then use the reply-paid envelope provided or hand-deliver it during office hours to:

**37 Bair Street, Leongatha**

**Voting is compulsory**

Voting is compulsory for all voters who were on the State roll at **4 pm on Friday 27 August 2021**.

**You may be fined if you do not vote – this includes homeowners and tenants.**

You are encouraged to vote, but you will not be fined if you don't vote, if:

- you live outside this local council area **OR**
- you are enrolled directly with the Council to be on the voters' roll for this election.

**Your completed ballot pack must be in the mail or hand delivered by 6 pm\* Friday 29 October**

\*Local mail clearance times vary. Ballot packs must be mailed before final clearance times in the last week of voting. Don't risk a fine.

State-enrolled voters can register for free VoterAlert SMS and email reminders at [vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au)


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Victorian Electoral Commission



## Results notice example – Statutory

## South Gippsland Shire Council election

### *Declaration of results*



South Gippsland  
Shire Council

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The following candidates were elected to the South Gippsland Shire Council at the general election held in October 2021:

<p><b>Coastal-Promontory Ward</b></p> <p>GILLIGAN, Sarah (1st elected)</p> <p>RAE, Scott (2nd elected)</p> <p>DAVIES, Mohya (3rd elected)</p>	<p><b>Tarwin Valley Ward</b></p> <p>SHELLING, John (1st elected)</p> <p>WILLIAMS, Clare (2nd elected)</p> <p>DARAKAI, Adrian (3rd elected)</p>
---	--

**Strzelecki Ward**

KEERIE, Jenni (1st elected)

FELTON, Michael Patrick (2nd elected)

HERSEY, Nathan (3rd elected)

Further details about the results are available at [vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au)


**Janine Taylor**  
**Election Manager**

Tuesday 9 November 2021

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[vec.vic.gov.au](http://vec.vic.gov.au) | 131 832

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**Appendix 6: Declaration of results**

Council Name	Ward	Vacancies	Successful Candidates	Declaration
South Gippsland Shire Council	Coastal-Promontory Ward	3	GILLIGAN, Sarah (1st elected) RAE, Scott (2nd elected) DAVIES, Mohya (3rd elected)	1:30 pm Tuesday 9 November 2021
	Strzelecki Ward	3	KEERIE, Jenni (1st elected) FELTON, Michael Patrick (2nd elected) HERSEY, Nathan (3rd elected)	
	Tarwin Valley Ward	3	SCHELLING, John (1st elected) WILLIAMS, Clare (2nd elected) DARAKAI, Adrian (3rd elected)	

**Appendix 7: South Gippsland successful candidates and voter statistics by ward**

Council / ward name U = Uncontested	Elected	Number of vacancies	Number of candidates	% of Voter Turnout in Contested Election	% Informality Rate in Contested Election	Voters in Contested Election
<b>Coastal-Promontory Ward</b>		<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>77.85%</b>	<b>2.60%</b>	<b>7,949</b>
	GILLIGAN, Sarah (1st elected)					
	RAE, Scott (2nd elected)					
	DAVIES, Mohya (3rd elected)					
<b>Strzelecki Ward</b>		<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>82.51%</b>	<b>3.93%</b>	<b>9,860</b>
	KEERIE, Jenni (1st elected)					
	FELTON, Michael Patrick (2nd elected)					
	HERSEY, Nathan (3rd elected)					
<b>Tarwin Valley Ward</b>		<b>3</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>83.53%</b>	<b>3.84%</b>	<b>9,567</b>
	SHELLING, John (1st elected)					
	WILLIAMS, Clare (2nd elected)					
	DARAKAI, Adrian (3rd elected)					

**Appendix 8: 2021 and 2016 – A comparison**

<b>Election Statistics comparison</b>											
Postal Metropolitan	Number of vacancies	Number of electorates	Number of candidates	Average # candidates/ election	% voter turnout	% informal votes	Voters in contested elections	# informal votes	Total Votes	Change in % voter turnout from last election	Change % informal votes from last election
2021 South Gippsland Shire Council	9	3	24	8	81.51	3.53	27,376	788	22,314	+1.62%	-0.74%
2016 South Gippsland Shire Council	9	3	32	11	79.89	4.27	28,745	980	22,964	+5.18%	+2.27%
Postal (ex City of Melbourne Leadership Team)	621	297	2,168	7.30	81.47	4.76	4,251,540	165,027	3,463,911	+5.8%	-1.3%

### Appendix 9: Election Participation by category

#### Participation by Enrolment category

Participation records marks on roll and can vary from turnout (total ballot papers counted)

	Voters enrolled through section 241 of the LG Act (EC list)	Voters aged 18-69 years old on election day	Voters aged 70 years and over on election day	Voters enrolled through sections 243 - 245 of the LG Act (CEO list)	Council total
Coastal Promontory Ward	86.32%	84.14%	91.65%	71.81%	80.34%
Strzelecki Ward	86.47%	85.20%	91.52%	64.18%	85.25%
Tarwin Valley Ward	87.02%	85.31%	92.33%	71.84%	86.24%
Whole of South Gippsland Shire Council participation	86.65%	85.04%	91.89%	70.86%	84.17%
Statewide postal election comparator for 2020 LG elections (excl. Melbourne City Council)	86.27%	85.48%	90.14%	60.96%	84.12%

## Appendix 10: Informal vote analysis

The VEC analysed all of the informal votes cast in the South Gippsland Shire Council election to learn the types of mistakes voters made. The same, expanded categories as those adopted to analyse LG2020 informal votes were used for South Gippsland.

The results of applying these categories are provided in the table below (with the largest category overall and for each ward in bold):

**Table 1: Detailed categories of informal votes**

Category	Coastal-Promontory	Strzelecki	Tarwin Valley	Total	Total %
<b>Blank</b>					
Ballot paper left blank	36	83	83	<b>202</b>	25.63%
<b>Drawing</b>					
Ballot paper crossed out	13	29	28	<b>70</b>	8.88%
Offensive		1		<b>1</b>	0.13%
Other		5		<b>5</b>	0.63%
<b>Writing</b>					
Against compulsory voting	1		2	<b>3</b>	0.38%
Corruption		1		<b>1</b>	0.13%
Voting makes no difference				<b>0</b>	0.00%
Against the system	2		1	<b>3</b>	0.38%
None of the above	4	10	2	<b>16</b>	2.03%
Other protest		4		<b>4</b>	0.51%
Other	5	23	10	<b>38</b>	4.82%
<b>Numbers</b>					
1 only	12	12	12	<b>36</b>	4.57%
1 and other symbols			1	<b>1</b>	0.13%
No 1 marked, but expresses preferences				<b>0</b>	0.00%
Insufficient	11	16	24	<b>51</b>	6.47%
Sequence error	44	68	80	<b>192</b>	24.37%
One box blank, one number missing	5	1	24	<b>30</b>	3.81%
Larger vote		1		<b>1</b>	0.13%
Includes 0				<b>0</b>	0.00%
Obscured				<b>0</b>	0.00%
Deliberate	15	33	23	<b>71</b>	9.01%
Other				<b>0</b>	0.00%
<b>Ticks/crosses</b>					
Preference	2	8	5	<b>15</b>	1.90%
Deliberate	10	22	10	<b>42</b>	5.33%
Other	1	2	2	<b>5</b>	0.63%
<b>Administrative error</b>					
Actually formal		1		<b>1</b>	0.13%
<b>Total</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>320</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>788</b>	

As the table shows, over a quarter of informal votes were 'blank' ballots. This was the largest category of informal votes in the 2021 South Gippsland Shire Council general election. Sequencing errors in the numbering of ballot papers accounted for the second largest category of informal votes and was the largest category for Coastal-Promontory Ward. These results are somewhat different to the informal vote survey conducted following the 2020 local government elections, where sequencing errors were by far the largest category (almost 40% of all informal votes surveyed), while blank ballots accounted for 14.21% of all informal votes cast.

Note: 'Drawing – other', Writing – other', 'Numbers – obscured', Numbers – other' and 'Ticks and crosses – other' are not included, as they were neither deliberate nor expressed a preference.

Deliberate informal votes accounted for more than half the number of informal votes across South Gippsland Shire, and was highest in Strzelecki ward. This suggests some dissatisfaction amongst voters with the choice of candidates.

As the following table shows, deliberate informal votes were recorded at a significantly higher rate than was the case for the 2020 local government elections. Table 2 shows the types of informal votes in broader categories.

**Table 2: Types of informal votes**

Ward	Deliberate	Deliberate including blank	Preference	Total
Coastal-Promontory	45	81 (50.31%)	75 (46.58%)	161
Strzelecki	101	184 (57.50%)	108 (33.75%)	320
Tarwin Valley	66	149 (48.53%)	148 (48.21%)	307
<b>Total</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>414 (52.54%)</b>	<b>331 (42.00%)</b>	<b>788</b>

