

Barwon Heads Association Inc.

Reg. No. A0030244U

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31 July 2020

The Hon Lisa Neville

By email: lisa.neville@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Lisa

Local Government Elections

The Barwon Heads Association Inc.(BHA) represents well over 200 members who are residents and ratepayers of Barwon Heads. The BHA is also a member of the Combined Bellarine Communities Association (CBCA). The BHA and the CBCA in submissions to Local Government (DELWP) in July 2019 supported the findings of the Commission of Inquiry into Greater Geelong City Council in 2016 that “the single ward councillor system has not served the city well” and “the Commission’s view is that there should be multi councillor wards to share representative responsibility”. Further the recommendations of the Geelong Citizens Jury was supported by your government and the Victorian Electoral Commission to replace individual councillor wards with multi councillor wards to share representative responsibility and further still, extensive community consultations for the proposed Local Government Bill did not consider single councillor electorates. We understand that most Councils and the Municipal Association of Victoria also opposed the change. Our experience with single councillor wards has not been good.

In view of the significant concern and opposition to the proposed change, we were very disappointed that your government ignored the recent adverse experience of the Bellarine area and the considered opposition to the change to our representation. The fact that promotion and carriage of the legislation was entrusted to a now discredited minister adds to our concern and disappointment in the integrity and stated reasons for such change.

It is our understanding that the council election due later this year will not be deferred in line with many other activities and is to be conducted on the basis of the multi councillor system but there has been some confusion and doubt on these points. The BHA and other groups are seriously concerned that in view of the present restrictions on public meetings there may be no, or extremely limited opportunity to meet candidates in person in a public forum , to hear and assess their policies and potential abilities to represent our community as we have done in prior elections. We believe that this would significantly impact on the conduct of a fair democratic election process particularly as it affects independent candidates who may not enjoy the administrative support and publicity opportunities available to candidates representing major parties. We are particularly disappointed by the timing and manner in which the government is undertaking these changes.

We request :

1.your government review its proposed change to revert to single councillor wards (particularly in the City of Greater Geelong) and give further consideration to the views of and evidence from the Commission of Inquiry in 2016, the Geelong Citizens Jury and the Municipal Association of Victoria,

2 your advice and confirmation that the proposed 2020 election for the Council of Greater Geelong will proceed this year notwithstanding any restrictions on public meetings and will remain for the next election as multi councillor wards.

Yours sincerely,

Barwon Heads Association Inc.

Colin Bridges

Secretary