

Scott Samuel

30 Beech St
Malvern East VIC 3145
Phone: 9571 6541

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Electoral Representation Review For City of Stonnington Preliminary Submission

Stonnington should revert to 9 Councillors representing 9 single member wards. In its 2004 Preliminary Report, the VEC acknowledged that the previous single-member ward structure had “functioned satisfactorily”. The current multi-councillor ward structure, on the other hand, fails to uphold the principles set out by the VEC in the 2011 *Guide to Submissions*:

1. To ensure that the number of voters represented by each councillor is within 10% of the average number of voters per councillor for that municipality.

Multi-councillor wards in Stonnington have not achieved this in practice. Councillors vary greatly in diligence and participation, so that it is possible for only one or two Councillors to actively represent our current large wards. Hence the *effective* number of voter per active councillor can vary well beyond the stated 10%. Poor councillor participation can easily be masked in multi-councillor wards, making it easier for poor participators to be re-elected, especially if they have the support of a major political party.

3. To ensure that communities of interest are as fairly represented as possible.

The large multi-councillor wards encompass areas that are so geographically, economically and culturally disparate that they have little common interest. It is difficult for Councillors to represent such disparate areas, even when the workload is shared fairly. Consider East Ward. People in Gascoigne Estate have no sense of relationship and little common interest with people east of Chadstone Rd.

Multi-councillor wards have also failed to increase diversity of representation. The majority of current Councillors served under the previous system, and new Councillors represent similar interests to those they replaced. Furthermore, large wards increase the cost of campaigning and create significant barriers to new would-be independent candidates who are not supported by major political or commercial interest groups. The influence of the major parties in Stonnington appears to have increased.

The choice of proportional representation for the multi-Councillor wards has had a negative impact on the electoral process, as it has encouraged “dummy” or “stooge” candidates. As one of the organizers of an electoral forum during the previous election, I personally spoke to some of these dummy candidates. Preferential voting does not reward use of dummy candidates in the same way.