In its Preliminary Submission dated 24 August 2015, Proportional Representation Society of Australia (Victoria-Tasmania) Inc. advocated the exclusive use for Ballarat City Council of proportional representation.

PRSA V-T Inc. recommended a continuance of three 3-councillor wards, or failing that an undivided city, if the VEC Preliminary Report were to favour that option. It advised against having any number of councillors overall, or in a ward, that would be an even number.

Section 5B of Victoria’s Local Government Act 1989 is so loose that it allows the Minister to approve a wide range of options that includes a number that PRSA V-T Inc. considers inconsistent with good use of the proportional representation system that finally became the predominant electoral system for local government in Victoria by 2008 (compared with NSW by 1953, SA by 1991, and Tasmania by 1993). Unlike those other States, whose laws prescribe more consistent patterns of representation State-wide, Victoria’s ministers have been able to approve a miscellany of ad hoc municipal electoral arrangements since then, although the recommendations to recent ministers are steadily becoming more rationalized.

Given that background, PRSA V-T Inc. considers that it needed to make a strong case against:

- single-councillor wards, in which the ward’s sole councillor need only poll 50% plus one vote;
- electoral districts with an even number of councillors, which produce stalemate wards; and
- the disparity of having wards with different numbers of councillors, and hence different quotas.

Most admirably, none of the above defective arrangements formed part of either of the two options for Ballarat City Council. The recent Georgiou Panel Report’s recommendations on those aberrations were well thought out.

PRSAV-T Inc. is pleased that the VEC’s Options A and B in its Preliminary Report are each for three 3-councillor wards, as it considers that such an arrangement is better for Ballarat City Council than an undivided City, given the need to avoid unwieldy ballot papers, as the number of candidates per general election has ranged from 22 to 40 in Ballarat City Council’s four general elections this century.

Either Option A or Option B would wisely have Ballarat City Council gain an arrangement that would:

- ensure it as a decisive council not vulnerable to stalemates overall, or within one or more wards,
- maintain parity between all elected candidates by setting the same quota for the election of each, and
- ensure that 75% of votes in the entire municipality elect a candidate (effective votes), leaving only 25% thus not electing a candidate, which is far superior to any use of wards with fewer councillors per ward.

Geoffrey Goode,
President
for Proportional Representation Society of Australia (Victoria-Tasmania) Inc.

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