



Opposition to 'Reform 2' in Victoria's Local Government Bill 2019 – a 'reform' that would weaken local democracy, and decrease accountability

Removal of multi-councillor wards is unreasonable: The [current proposal](#) of Victoria's [Minister for Local Government](#), Adem Somyurek MLC - in his bill above - to remove the present option for 'multi-councillor wards' for all of Victoria's councils is the single most backward step in true democratic representation in local government in many years.

The Proportional Representation Society urges MPs to [oppose this backward step](#), which will lead to fewer contested elections and less genuine representation of the community's will. The 'Reform 2' should be altered so it retains the important and popular options of multi-member wards and undivided municipal districts, rather than forcing a reversion to [single-councillor wards](#). It should also include the requirement in Labor's lapsed [Local Government Bill 2018](#) for [parity](#) in all of a council's wards.

Labor's record: The Bracks Government's excellent *Local Government (Democratic Reform) Bill 2003* gave Victoria much more representative and democratic councils. Its option for multi-councillor wards elected by proportional representation with the single transferable vote ([PR-STV](#)) led to:

- representation of both majority and minority opinions in each multi-councillor ward,
- far fewer uncontested elections,
- councils that better represent the breadth of opinions and gender balance in the community,
- easier and cheaper filling of casual vacancies through the [countback](#) system, and
- a much higher percentage of the votes cast actually electing councillors than is the case with single-councillor wards.

The Bracks Labor Government's reforms, quite rightly entitled 'Democratic Reform', have served local government in Victoria very well. For example, Recommendation 6 on Page 13 of the [115-page report](#) of the 2016 Commission of Inquiry in the City of Greater Geelong - which the Andrews Government implemented - was, "*The individual Councillor ward electoral system be replaced with multi-councillor wards to share representative responsibilities.*"

Policy reversal: Erratically reversing previous Government policy, Mr Somyurek's thin justification is: "*Single member wards for each council enable residents to more effectively receive direct representation. Councillors will be more accountable to local communities, fostering true 'local' government.*"

There is no evidence whatsoever that single-councillor wards make councillors more accountable. The Commission of Inquiry into the City of Greater Geelong above found the exact opposite. Experience shows that such wards lead to many more uncontested elections, like [MPSC's last use of them in 2008](#), with 6 uncontested wards. That outcome led the [VEC to recommend](#) most of its councillors be elected from multi-councillor wards. Because voters in single-councillor wards have only one councillor representing them, they are poorly represented if they hold generally different views from their councillor.

In contrast, where a council is divided into 3 wards each electing 3 councillors, at least 75% of voters in each ward are represented by a councillor that they gave their first or subsequent effective preference vote to. Where there are issues that the community has different opinions on, those different opinions are represented on council in proportion to the respective numbers in the community.

We urge you to modify 'Reform 2' - to retain the necessary option of multi-councillor wards - with [parity](#) among such wards in a council. Keep Victoria's local government democratic and representative.