

Newsletter February 2016

Welcome to our new year. Please join us at our first meeting of the year on 15th Feb at 7:00pm at the Elderly Citizens Centre in Clifford Pde.

Our agenda will be as follows:

7:00pm BHA business

- 1) Discussion of Victorian Electoral Commission draft report on CoGG boundaries (we have 2 days following our meeting to put in response submission please come and discuss)
- 2) removal of native vegetation in Warrenbeen Estate
- 3) Update pedestrian/traffic project

7:30pm Guest Speakers Margaret Griffith & Austin Paterson will talk about Bellarine for Refugees over a cup of tea.

1) VICTORIAN ELECTORAL COMMISSION DRAFT REPORT ON COGG BOUNDARIES

As you are aware the BHA made a submission to this review. We supported the following:

- a multi- councillor structure totaling 11 councillors;
- the division of the City of Greater Geelong into fewer but larger wards with a change of ward boundaries from the current 12 to 4 wards. 3x three-councillor wards 1x two-councillor ward;
- Barwon Heads joining a new Bellarine ward;
- an urgent review of the present system of election of the mayor.

We are planning to put in comments on the preliminary report, which has been published. PLEASE READ IT AND RESPOND ALSO OR JOIN US FOR DISCUSSION ON THE 15TH. Responses must be received by the VEC by 5.00 pm on Wednesday 17 February 2016. Submissions can be made via:

- the online submission form at vec.vic.gov.au
- email at greatergeelong.review@vec.vic.gov.au
- post to: Victorian Electoral Commission Level 11, 530 Collins Street Melbourne VIC 3000
- fax to (03) 9629 8632

<http://www.vec.vic.gov.au/files/RepReviews/GreaterGeelongPreliminaryReport2016.pdf>

Here are the first two options – extracts from the preliminary report

Option A: Four-ward model (preferred option)—three three-councillor wards and one two-councillor ward

The VEC's preferred option is a four-ward model with three three-councillor wards and one two-councillor ward. This option responds to submissions that described the municipality as naturally falling into four distinct areas: the northern suburbs; the

suburban centre including the CBD; southern residential and semi-rural areas; and the Bellarine Peninsula, grouping Barwon Heads and Ocean Grove together.

The model accommodates the uneven growth expected in specific parts of the municipality and keeps localities and townships intact where possible, such as Clifton Springs, Corio and Belmont. While the wards are larger, the model relieves the pressure on the current boundaries, which are already trending outside of the legislated voter-to-councillor ratio (including the current Buckley, Kildare, Cheetham and Windermere Wards). Option A uses strong and clearly identifiable boundaries such as the Geelong Ring Road, separating the northern suburbs around Corio from the suburban centre and the CBD. The Barwon River separates the Windermere, Kardinia and Brownbill Wards.

Under this model, the proposed northern Windermere Ward would have two councillors while the more densely populated and growing wards to the south, centre and east of the municipality would be served by three councillors each.

Option B: Five-ward model (alternative option)—four two-councillor wards and one three-councillor ward

As with the four-ward model, a five-ward model for the City of Greater Geelong encapsulates the geographic and socio-economic communities of the municipality. This model reflects the lower-density, light-industrial zones of the north to the commercial and residential centre and the Bellarine Peninsula in the east, also grouping Barwon Heads and Ocean Grove together. As with Option A, this model has larger wards than the municipality's current structure, providing capacity to absorb population growth and limiting the artificial division of communities between wards.

Under Option B, the Windermere and Kildare Wards of the north are separated by locality boundaries, rail lines and part of the Princes Highway. The Kildare and Deakin Wards are separated by the Barwon River, while the proposed southern-central Brownbill Ward is bordered by the Princes Highway and other major roads. This model is distinct from Option A in that the wards are slightly smaller. The wards also generally have fewer councillors, with two councillors per ward for the northern wards, central and southern wards, and three councillors for the larger Bellarine Ward. The smaller number of councillors makes this model closer to the current single-councillor model, allowing for direct, local representation where councillors are more easily able to get to know local issues. Localities are preserved where possible, as are the concentrated residential and commercial areas of Geelong, Geelong West, East Geelong and South Geelong, which are grouped intact in the proposed Brownbill Ward.

While there are clear advantages to the larger wards and comparatively smaller number of councillors per ward, there are some limitations arising from the subdivision boundaries proposed under this model. While the boundaries are clear and use natural divisions to some extent, the boundary of the Barwon River is not used to the same extent as it can be in Option A. The growth area of Armstrong Creek is spread over two wards, and the suburbs of Belmont and Grovedale are also divided, although the main shopping district of Belmont is preserved intact within Deakin Ward. Despite this division of some localities, the subdivision groups similar residential districts around Belmont, such as Highton and Newtown.

2) REMOVAL OF NATIVE VEGETATION IN WARRENBEEN ESTATE – WHAT ARE THE MEANS TO PROTECT NATIVE VEGETATION IN BARWON HEADS

COGG has an obligation to provide native vegetation protection through Section 52-17 of the Planning Scheme and this could be extremely effective. It could be acted on, by COGG, today. But they do nothing. And it is clear from the fluff we had to endure at the recent Council meeting that they have no intention of doing anything. Waiting for another 14 days for written rationalisations will achieve nothing for the environment.

Right now, all indigenous vegetation in the COGG is at risk.

Barwon Heads Association members have reported that, when observing removal of native vegetation on private properties, they are advised by CoGG there is no protection for that vegetation if it is not in an “overlay” area. A case of considerable concern is the current activity at 16-17 Warrenbeen Court, Barwon Heads. The titles of all 14 properties in the Warrenbeen Estate are subject to covenants to protect the precious indigenous vegetation. These covenants are formally endorsed by CoGG.

We note that the Greater Geelong Planning Scheme Section 52.17 applies. Section 52.17-2 states

“A permit is required to remove, destroy or lop native vegetation.”

We therefore believe that such removal requires appropriate permits and that the Planning Scheme puts obligations on the Council to ensure compliance and in the absence of a permit the covenants can not protect the indigenous vegetation.

We attended the CoGG meeting on 27th of January – (avoiding the floods). We asked the following questions on notice:

- Why does COGG inform complainants that it has no role in enforcing the Planning Scheme?
- If it has no role where do residents go to ensure protection of indigenous vegetation?
- How many complaints has CoGG received on this matter?
- How are such complaints (by phone or mail) registered?
- How many cases of enforcement have COGG carried out in the last 2 years to protect indigenous vegetation?
- For the future can we urgently request that the Council prepare an overlay to protect this very precious area.

We await intelligent and positive answers with baited breath.

OUR GUESTS BELLARINE FOR REFUGEES

This is a local Barwon Heads based group, which is part of a network that extends across Victoria. They offer local residents opportunities to:

- advocate to politicians for refugees and asylum seekers
- provide practical assistance to refugees and asylum seekers
- be involved in activities that raise local awareness of the issues confronting refugees and asylum seekers

- Host refugee and asylum seeker families during school holidays for lunch (usually in the BH Community Garden) and an activity that familiarises our guests with the Bellarine Peninsula (eg Jirrahlinga, Lobster Pot, Queenscliff Marine Discovery Centre)
- Support asylum seekers in applying for Temporary Protection Visas

BfR's current major project (supported by a \$60000 grant from the Ross Trust) is called **Seeking Refuge**, and involves co-ordinating a service that recruits, trains and allocates volunteers (lawyers and local community) to assist asylum seekers in the Geelong region (approx 300) in the very difficult task of applying for Temporary Protection Visas. Partners in this project are Barwon Community Legal Service, Asylum Seekers Resource Centre, Refugee Legal, Diversitat, Combined Refugee Action Group and the Wesley Centre for Life Enrichment. This is a 2-year project.

PLEASE JOIN US AT 7PM AND PARTICIPATE IN AN INTERESTING AND DIVERSE EVENING.