

**To the Victorian Electoral Commission**  
**Preliminary Submission on the Port Phillip Electoral Representation**  
**Review by unChain Inc**

**March 2015**

Email to [portphillipreview@vec.vic.gov.au](mailto:portphillipreview@vec.vic.gov.au)

**Summary:**

Preliminary submissions on the Electoral Representation Review for Port Phillip are due by Wednesday 11 March. On 8 April the VEC will release a preliminary report that will take into account these submissions. Then the community can respond to this preliminary report by Wednesday 6 May. There will be a public hearing on Monday 11 May and the VEC will release its final report on Wednesday 3 June.

It is submitted that:

1. The current ward boundaries for the City of Port Phillip have worked well and should be retained with minimum changes.
2. If the recommendations of the Local Government Electoral Review (the Georgiou Committee) are adopted by the State government, the VEC should conduct an 'out-of-cycle' review of the boundaries of Port Phillip.

**What is unChain Inc?**

unChain Inc is a strong community voice on issues affecting citizens of the City of Port Phillip. As unChain St Kilda, we defeated the proposed shopping mall and nightclub precinct on St Kilda Triangle Crown Land. As unChain Port Phillip, we fielded candidates in the 2008 Council elections, winning Catani Ward (Councillor Serge Thomann) and Ormond Ward (Councillor Jane Touzeau). In April 2010 we changed our name to unChain Inc and changed our statement of purposes to embrace a wider range of activities. For further details see our website: ([www.unchain.org.au](http://www.unchain.org.au)). In the 2012 Council elections, we fielded candidates in all wards, winning Catani Ward (Councillor Serge Thomann), Carlisle Ward (Councillor Vanessa Haxley) and Ormond Ward (Councillor Jane Touzeau). We can therefore claim to speak for a wide range of Port Phillip residents and to speak with significant experience of local government in Port Phillip.

**That the current ward boundaries for the City of Port Phillip should be retained with minimum changes**

The Act allows for a municipality to have between 5 and 12 councillors and for various ward structures.

The City of Port Phillip is currently divided into seven single-Councillor wards. It is submitted that this has worked well.

The seven wards each represent a different community with different issues. Councillors are relatively accessible to their constituents because Port Phillip as a whole, and its individual wards, are compact geographical areas. It is not necessary to have more than seven councillors in order to ensure adequate representation of residents and ratepayers.

We believe that for this municipality single-councillor wards are appropriate. Each ward has special characteristics. In Catani ward, for example, which covers St Kilda, there are many specific social justice and tourism issues. It is preferable to have a single councillor representing this area rather than having (say) 3 councillors representing a geographical area three times larger. Similar considerations apply to the other wards. Having a single councillor for each ward also allows the voters to assess the performance of each councillor. Furthermore the experience of the last two Councils in Port Phillip has shown that the individual councillors have been very aware of their municipality-wide responsibilities and have not been guilty of focusing only on parochial issues.

Therefore it is submitted that the current ward boundaries for the City of Port Phillip should be retained with minimum changes

It is also submitted that it may be appropriate to change the name of the Albert Park ward. There is some confusion since this is also the name of a suburb and a state electorate.

**That the VEC should conduct an 'out-of-cycle' review of the boundaries of Port Phillip if the recommendations of the Local Government Electoral Review (the Georgiou Committee) are adopted by the State government**

It is not currently clear whether the State government intends to implement the recommendations of the independent Local Government Electoral Review. The Georgiou committee made a comprehensive review of the system of electing local government in Victoria.

We understand that the report had bipartisan support. We think that many of their recommendations were excellent.

The recommendations have more impact in Port Phillip than most other municipalities especially the move to compulsory postal voting, a possible increase in the number of Councillors and the new franchise for the absentee landlords.

In Port Phillip about 25% of voters on the roll for Council elections are absentee landlords. This is significantly greater than most municipalities. The absentee landlords are automatically on the Council electoral roll but voting is not compulsory for them. Most absentee landlords do not vote.

The Georgiou committee recommended a fundamental change in this: that absentee landlords can choose whether to be on the electoral roll for Council elections. If they choose to do so, then voting is compulsory. History would indicate that most absentee landlords will choose not to be on the electoral roll.

This will have a significant impact on the geographical distribution of electors on the Port Phillip roll. Assuming that 'legislative equality requirement' is retained under a Georgiou franchise, the boundaries for Port Phillip would be significantly different. The absentee landlords are concentrated in certain parts of our municipality.

Therefore it is submitted that the VEC should acknowledge this possibility and undertake to conduct an 'out-of-cycle' review of the boundaries of Port Phillip if the recommendations of the Local Government Electoral Review (the Georgiou Committee) are adopted by the State government

We anticipate making a subsequent submission after the VEC releases its preliminary report.

Regards

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