

# Electoral Arrangement & Divisional Boundary Review

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**2019 FINAL DETERMINATION**  
IPSWICH CITY COUNCIL

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## INTRODUCTION

The *Local Government Act 2009 (Qld)* (the Act) provides for an independent body known as the Local Government Change Commission (Change Commission) to assess whether proposed changes to Queensland's local councils are in the public interest.

The Change Commission has finalised its assessment of the Ipswich City Council's electoral arrangements and divisions on Friday, 18 October 2019. This report outlines the recommended divisional arrangement and boundaries and sets out the reasons for the Change Commission's decisions. Maps of the final boundaries are attached at Appendix A.

The Change Commission for this review consisted of:

- Mr Pat Vidgen PSM, Electoral Commissioner; and
- Mr Wade Lewis, Casual Commissioner.

The casual commissioner was appointed by the Governor in Council on 1 November 2018.

## Background

On 7 May 2019, the Minister for Local Government, Minister for Racing and Minister for Multicultural Affairs, The Honourable Stirling Hinchliffe MP referred an electoral arrangement and divisional boundary review of the Ipswich City Council. The Minister's referral is available to view at Appendix B.

The Minister advised that the Council Administration had undertaken consultation with the Ipswich community and commissioned a report regarding Ipswich's electoral arrangements and divisional boundaries. The *City of Ipswich Divisional Boundary Review Report* (the Report) was included in the Minister's referral and he requested the Change Commission review the recommended option from the Report.

The change proposed was for the Council to have multi-member divisions, instead of the current single-member divisional arrangement. A single-member division has one councillor representing it, whereas a multi-member division can have more than one councillor per division. The Minister recommended four (4) divisions with two (2) councillors per division to allow for future population growth and to offer greater flexibility to increase the number of Councillors as population requires without requiring frequent boundary changes.

The Ipswich City Council and its electors are in a unique situation given recent political circumstances, including the Council's dissolution and subsequent management by an Interim Administrator and Interim Management Committee. While acknowledging the recommended electoral arrangements and boundaries are a significant change to the status quo, the Change Commission also notes that the current Council Administration has no perceived benefit regardless of the outcome of this review.

## ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENT REVIEW

On 9 July 2019, the Change Commission published its electoral arrangement decision, recommending the Ipswich City Council be redivided into four (4) multi-member divisions with two (2) councillors representing each division (see Appendix C). Ipswich will therefore have nine councillors in total (eight (8) councillors and a mayor).

In reviewing the proposed change for the Ipswich City Council, the Change Commission was cognisant that it represents a significant alteration to the long-standing electoral arrangements. It noted in the proposed determination report that there would need to be compelling reasons to assess such a change as being in the public interest and that it looked for evidence that:

- there was demonstrated community support for the proposed change;
- the proposed arrangement would be more workable than the existing one, especially when considering Council's current and projected enrolment, and the likely need to accommodate rapid growth in some areas; and/or
- the proposed change was consistent with the 'local government principles' set out in section 4 of the Act, such as decision-making in the public interest, and ensuring democratic representation, social inclusion and meaningful community engagement.

The Change Commission determined that while both single-member and multi-member divisions provide the community-specific representation that is important to Ipswich residents, multi-member divisions are more likely to meet all the criteria outlined above.

On the strength of the evidence presented in the Report, including the results from extensive public consultation, multi-member divisions were found to be the preferred option. While there was clear support shown for both single-member and undivided electoral arrangements, there was also significant opposition to both systems. On the other hand, multi-member divisions were found to be supported by a greater number of people:

- nearly 90% of respondents ranked multi-member divisions as either their first or second preference;
- 75% of respondents who preferred undivided arrangements, voted multi-member divisions second; and
- nearly 90% of respondents who preferred single-member divisions, voted multi-member divisions second.

The Change Commission also noted that multi-member divisions provide greater scope to have more councillors representing rural areas within the Council area, offering the opportunity for more inclusive representation and engagement with the community. The Change Commission considers this relevant given its awareness that a key community concern in the region is a perceived lack of rural representation under the current arrangements.

The following points about rural representation paraphrase public comments in the Report:

- rural areas need their own representation;
- people living in urban areas, have little understanding of the reality of life in rural or semi-rural areas;

- small towns need a voice, if they do not have someone allocated to them that lives in the area, they will be forgotten;
- without divisional councillors, it's less likely that a councillor will be elected from the smaller communities and the urban councillors will not understand the needs of the rural sector; and
- Ipswich has a mix of country and city and needs divisions to meet everyone's needs.

Having fewer divisions has enabled the Change Commission to place larger amounts of rural areas within them and means that residents in these areas are being directly represented by more councillors. Indeed, under the Change Commission's final boundaries, rural communities in Ipswich will have half the divisional councillors directly representing their areas.

The Change Commission deliberated on the number of multi-member divisions that would best meet the needs of the Ipswich local government area. It was decided that four (4) divisions, with two (2) councillors each, would cater for the current council size, while providing scope to add additional councillor/s to all or some of the divisions as communities expand and elector numbers increase.

Table 1 shows the Council's enrolment quota as at 31 January 2019 and the projected quota for 31 March 2024 under a four division multi-member arrangement.

<b>Table 1 - Current and Projected Multi-Member Divisional Enrolment &amp; Quota</b>		
	<b>31 January 2019</b>	<b>31 March 2024</b>
<b>Number of divisions</b>	4	4
<b>Councillors per division</b>	2	2
<b>Enrolment</b>	128,049	165,213
<b>Average enrolment per division</b>	32,012 <i>(16,006 voters per councillor)</i>	41,303 <i>(20,652 voters per councillor)</i>
<b>Average enrolment (+10%) per division</b>	35,213	45,433
<b>Average enrolment (-10%) per division</b>	28,811	37,173

## DIVISIONAL BOUNDARY REVIEW

The Change Commission is responsible for periodically reviewing the internal boundaries of divided councils so that each division has relatively the same number of enrolled voters. This upholds the key democratic principle of 'one vote, one value', by ensuring each person's vote carries the same weight.

In conducting its assessment of the Ipswich City Council, the Change Commission was legally required to ensure each division of the Council has a reasonable proportion of enrolled voters, herein referred to as 'quota'. Community interests, such as uniting entire suburbs within divisions and selecting easy-to-identify boundaries, have also been considered.

Assessments are conducted in any way the Change Commission deems appropriate, unless the Minister has provided specific directions.

The process for this review is as follows:

1. Review the Report and make an electoral arrangement determination
2. Publish the Change Commission's electoral arrangement decision and divisional boundary proposal
3. Invite comments on the proposed divisional boundaries
4. Publish the Change Commission's final determination report
5. Final determination report provided to the Minister for Local Government, for implementation by the Governor in Council
6. New boundaries come into effect at the 2020 Local Government Quadrennial Election

### Determining the quota

A quota is determined by dividing the total number of enrolled voters by the number of councillors (other than the mayor), plus or minus 10%. The Change Commission also considers projected enrolment, so the divisions remain in quota for as long as possible.

Current enrolment data has been sourced from Queensland's electoral roll and projected enrolment data from the Queensland Government Statistician's Office of Queensland Treasury. Projections are based on the timing of future local government quadrennial elections.

Enrolment information is based on Statistical Areas Level 1 (SA1). SA1s are geographical units used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) for the release of census data. According to the ABS most SA1s have a population of between 200 to 800 persons with an average population of approximately 400 people.

Current and projected enrolment data is available for download on the Ipswich City Council webpage on the Electoral Commission of Queensland's (ECQ) website.

## Proposed Determination

The Ipswich City Council has 128,049 voters and is currently divided into ten (10) single-member divisions. As at 31 January 2019, Division 9 had far exceeded the enrolment quota and was 25.88% above the average enrolment, thereby initiating this review.

Having reviewed the findings and recommendations of the Council Administration's community consultation in the Report, the Change Commission published its electoral arrangement decision and divisional boundary proposal on 9 July 2019. The proposed boundaries brought enrolment in each multi-member division into quota, while also catering for the significant growth projected in certain parts of the region. The Change Commission made a concerted effort to unite suburbs within divisions where practicable and create clearly definable boundaries by following suburb boundaries or roads.

One of the key community concerns identified by the Council Administration and in the Report was that rural communities did not believe they had adequate representation. The proposal sought to address these concerns, with the proposed Divisions 1 and 4 including a mix of urban and significant portions of rural areas. In doing so, this means four councillors, or half of the elected divisional councillors, will have some responsibility for rural suburbs and communities.

## Comments on the Proposal

Comments on the proposal were invited from 9 July 2019 to 30 July 2019. Advertisements were placed in the Queensland Times, on the ECQ website and its social media platforms. Emails were also delivered to 46,840 Ipswich voters (those with up-to-date email addresses on the electoral roll), notifying of the publication of the proposal and of the opportunity to provide feedback. Seventy-six (76) comments were received during this timeframe, with three (3) late submissions also received. These comments are available to view at Appendix D.

The Change Commission notes that the comments expressed a variety of views, with some clearly for or against the proposed boundaries, while others objected to certain parts of the proposal or had alternative boundary recommendations. Close to a third of the comments expressed their support and some of the paraphrased feedback includes:

- fully support the concept of more than one councillor in each area and that the number of divisions proposed is appropriate;
- support the four (4) division, eight (8) councillor model;
- the proposal addresses concerns and issues that have been with us for a long time;
- the number of divisions proposed, and mathematical calculations used to formulate the boundaries is appropriate;
- the balance of voters across divisions appears to be as good as anyone could achieve, offering a voice to both urban and rural voters;
- it will ensure that more people get the Councillor they want;
- the combination of old boundaries with new will help dissolve the toxic culture from previous administrations;

- having two Councillors per division will bring greater transparency to the division and will make Councillors more accountable; and
- the proposed boundaries are clear, address the long-standing issues and concerns and will facilitate the renewal necessary for local government to rehabilitate itself.

More than fifty of the comments expressed opposition to the electoral arrangement decision and/or the proposed boundary changes. Key themes to emerge concerned the size and combination of urban and rural areas within the divisions. Other comments objected to the introduction of multi-member divisions, or requested the existing divisional boundaries be retained. Some suggested different arrangements should be implemented such as being undivided, having more divisions or adding more councillors. Some of the paraphrased feedback includes:

- oppose multi-member divisions, as we will lose the local face to face interaction required to re-build confidence;
- need smaller divisions with more members on the ground;
- leave the boundaries as they are and stop attempting to short-change us;
- give us back our Council the way we voted at the last election;
- two representatives in each division isn't enough to ensure accountable democracy;
- local areas will be forgotten and only CBD areas cared for;
- satisfied with the way the council is being run under an administrator;
- the limited number of divisions unfortunately means the divisions are very diverse;
- the divisions are too large to manage and will create representation issues;
- the change will dilute the care that a councillor provides within the division;
- the change should not be able to happen without a democratic vote;
- Divisions 1 and 4 are too large and two councillors are not enough;
- few individual candidates will have the money to fund such a large campaign;
- two councillors per division might not be enough and three might work better;
- happy with the current administration, please abolish local government;
- Council should operate at a strategic level and an undivided council would mean councillors act in the best interests of all residents; and
- potential for rural areas to not receive the attention and support they require with representatives focusing on urban areas.

Regarding those comments recommending the number of divisions or councillors be increased, the Change Commission notes that it settled upon the number of divisions and councillors as it provides scope to increase representation as Ipswich continues to grow. It is also noted that the average enrolment per councillor under the four multi-member divisions is similar to neighbouring Logan City Council at around 16,000 voters per councillor. The Change Commission was therefore not persuaded that representation would be insufficient.



Rural representation was also raised as a significant concern, and particularly having rural areas combined with more urban and residential suburbs. The Change Commission modelled scenarios where the rural suburbs were held together in one division, however noted that to meet the enrolment quota, it was still necessary to include some urban areas. Therefore, while acknowledging the divisions do encompass some diverse areas, the Change Commission is of the view that having rural areas in two divisions and represented by half of the Council, will give these areas a greater chance at being heard. It is noted however, that regardless of the boundaries, it will be the task of the elected councillors to provide adequate representation to their constituents.

One comment provided extensive boundary realignment suggestions, while a few other submitters also offered alternative suggestions such as moving entire suburbs to other divisions. The Change Commission modelled but did not implement these suggestions, noting the proposed boundaries were at the upper and lower limits of the enrolment quota and to move suburbs or make more extensive realignments would have required significant changes to be made without the possibility of further public consultation.

A submitter also recommended renumbering the proposed divisions, while the Council's Interim Administrator recommended describing Ipswich's divisions by name rather than number in an email on 21 August 2019 (see Appendix D). The Change Commission was not persuaded of the need to renumber the divisions or rename them, noting that only the Brisbane City Council has named wards (divisions) at this time. As a result, the Change Commission agreed upon retaining the proposed boundaries as the final boundaries.

A few of the comments discussed the Council Administration's Report and survey findings and were critical of the Change Commission's use of these findings in coming to its electoral arrangement decision. Some of the feedback included:

- the survey had a predestined conclusion in favour of multi-member divisions;
- the results of the Report were based on a small number of respondents in comparison to the population of the Ipswich City Council; and
- the survey results ignored the primary vote and counting preferences.

While acknowledging these concerns, the Change Commission notes that it supported an electoral arrangement change to multi-member divisions because the multi-member arrangement was found to be the most acceptable system for the largest number of Ipswich voters. The most polarising views regarding the Council's electoral arrangements as noted in the Report related to single-member divisions and undivided electoral arrangements.

It is also noted that while the participation rates are fairly low on a population basis, the Council Administration undertook a significant advertising and consultation campaign. Similarly, the Change Commission also received relatively few comments on its proposal, despite contacting close to 50,000 Ipswich voters by email in addition to its other advertising methods.

### Out of Scope

Some of the comments raised matters that were unable to be considered by the Change Commission. For example:

- change the suburb boundaries rather than dividing the suburbs into different divisions;
- the Council should become undivided;
- catchment areas to be based upon GDP average to ensure votes are apportioned according to average meaningful income producing households;
- rename the Council as Ipswich Regional Council or Ipswich Shire Council;
- implement different processes for electing Council representatives, the Mayor and for determining the method in which Councillors should be paid;
- reduce dumping fees to minimise rubbish being dumped on private land;
- concerns with the emergency rates being charged to their area; and
- concerns with the first-past-the-post voting system.

A number of these concerns are matters for residents to raise with Council, such as dumping fees or emergency rates. Other matters relate to Queensland legislation which is determined by the Queensland Parliament, such as the voting system or how the boundaries should be determined. The Change Commission notes the Act designates a formula for determining how many voters must be in each electoral division which is its primary consideration.

## FINAL DETERMINATION

After assessing the material submitted and having considered the requirements of the Act, the Change Commission is recommending the proposed divisional boundaries become the final divisions for the Ipswich City Council.

The Change Commission is satisfied the final boundaries meet the enrolment requirements of the Act, unite suburbs within individual divisions where practicable, and balance the number of representatives responsible for rural and urban areas as evenly as possible in keeping with community sentiment.

It is noted that the implementation of this recommendation is expected to result in the following divisional enrolment:

Table 2 – Summary of Enrolment for the Final Multi-Member Divisions				
Division	Enrolment as at 31/01/2019	(%) Deviation from Average	Projected Enrolment as at 31/03/2024	(%) Deviation from Projected Average Enrolment
Division 1	28,854	-9.87	44,796	8.46
Division 2	33,189	3.68	43,297	4.83
Division 3	35,070	9.55	38,790	-6.08
Division 4	30,936	-3.36	38,330	-7.2

## RECOMMENDATION

Given the unique situation in Ipswich and the significance of the changes being recommended by this review, the Change Commission recommends the Minister consider directing the Ipswich City Council, in consultation with the Change Commission, to conduct a mid-term review and community consultation in 2022 to gauge residents' experiences and satisfaction with the multi-member arrangement and divisional boundaries.

Due to the high-level growth anticipated in the Ipswich region, the Change Commission notes it will likely be reviewing Ipswich's divisional boundaries in 2023 prior to the next quadrennial election. Therefore, it is of the view that it will assist the 2023 assessment process to have a better understanding of the community's experiences, and particularly whether the multi-member arrangements are meeting the community's representation requirements.

The Change Commission has provided its assessment to the Minister for Local Government and recommends the Governor in Council implement the following recommendations:

- the Ipswich City Council be divided into four (4) multi-member divisions with two (2) councillors representing each division, plus a mayor (nine (9) councillors in total); and
- for the purpose of the 2020 Local Government Quadrennial Election, the boundaries of the four (4) multi-member divisions are as shown in the maps in Appendix A.

In accordance with the Act, the Change Commission has published a notice of results in the Government Gazette, a newspaper circulating in the local government area and on the ECQ website.



**Pat Vidgen PSM**  
Casual Commissioner



**Wade Lewis**  
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