

LITCHFIELD COUNCIL



COMMUNITY EFFORT
IS ESSENTIAL

DISCUSSION PAPER

Review of Electoral Representation

(Section 23 of the Local Government Act 2008)

September 2014

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1. Introduction

Litchfield Council is undertaking an “electoral review” in accordance with the requirements of Section 23 of the Local Government Act (the Act). The review must:

- assess the constitutional arrangements presently in force;
- determine whether the current constitutional arrangements provide the most effective possible elector representation for the council area;
- be undertaken at least once in the Council’s term; and
- be completed by March 2015 (i.e. at least twelve months before the next general election in 2016).

The public consultation presently being undertaken by Council allows interested members of the community to express their views on the key issues which will determine the future composition and structure of Council. This report contains information pertaining to the review process; elector distribution and ratios; comparisons with other councils; demographic trends; population projections; residential development opportunities which may impact upon future elector numbers; and ward structure options.

The key issues that need to be addressed during the review include:

- the title of the principal member of Council (i.e. Mayor or President);
- the number of elected members required to adequately represent the community and perform the roles and responsibilities of Council;
- the division of the council area into wards or alternatively the abolition of wards;
- the number of required wards and the level of representation within each ward;
- the name of the council area and the name/title of any proposed ward; and
- potential future changes to the external boundaries of Council.

The opinions and comments of Council, as they pertain to the key issues, have been provided throughout the Discussion Paper.

At the end of the review process, any proposed changes to Council’s composition and/or ward structure must serve to uphold the democratic principle of “one person, one vote, one value”.

2. Review Process

Council must ensure that all aspects of its composition and the issue of the division or potential division of the council area into wards are comprehensively reviewed at least once in every term of Council (i.e. every four years). In order to ensure that the review will be comprehensive and transparent, Council has adopted the following process.

2.1 Discussion Paper

The review has been commenced with the preparation of this Discussion Paper and the instigation of public consultation. The Discussion Paper examines the advantages and disadvantages of the options available in respect to a range of issues relating to the composition and structure of Council, and in particular whether the current composition of Council is appropriate and/or the division of the council area into wards should be retained or abolished.

2.2 First Public Consultation

This is the current stage of the review process.

The community is being made aware that Council is undertaking an electoral review; is advised of the existence of the Discussion Paper; and invited to make a submission to Council (minimum public consultation of three weeks).

Council will give due consideration to each submission received.

2.3 Electoral Review Report

When Council has considered the options available and the submissions received from the community it will make "in principle" decisions regarding its future composition and structure. Council will then prepare a "Electoral Review Report" which outlines its proposal and the reasons for such, as well as provide details of the submissions that were received and the responses thereto.

It should be noted that such a report will not be required in the event that the elected members and the community opt for no or minimal change to the current composition and structure of Council.

2.4 Second Public Consultation

If changes are being proposed to Council's future composition and/or ward structure, Council will initiate a second public consultation (minimum consultation period of three weeks) which will enable interested members of the community to make a written submission to Council in regards the proposal and information contained within the Representation Review Report.

2.5 Final Decision

Council will ultimately consider all of the submissions received in response to the public consultation undertaken and will determine the outcome of the review. This decision and all supporting information relevant to the review will be contained within a report which will be presented to the Minister for Local Government and Regions.

Any proposed changes to Council's composition and/or ward structure will be considered by the Minister for Local Government and Regions and, if approved, will come into effect at the next Local Government election (i.e. March 2016).

3. Current Structure and Name

The Litchfield Shire Council was established in September 1985, initially comprising a Mayor (elected by the community) and four (4) Aldermen. The council area was divided into four (4) wards (i.e. Central, East, North and South wards), with each ward being represented by a single Alderman. The first municipal Council election was held on the 7th December 1985.

Council subsequently altered the titles of the elected members to president and Councillors (effective 1st July 1986).

Reform in the Local Government sector resulted in Council becoming the Litchfield Council in July 2008.

Litchfield Council is still divided into four (4) wards (refer Map 1) with each ward being represented by a councillor. However, as a result of the electoral review undertaken by Council in 2010/2011, the principal member of Council has the title of Mayor and is elected by the community.

3.1 Current Structure

Table 1 provides details of the elector representation within the current ward structure, including the number of elected members and electors per ward, and the difference in the elector ratios (i.e. the average number of electors represented by an elected member) between the existing wards.

Table 1: Elector details - existing ward structure

Ward	Crs	Electors	Elector Ratio	% Variation
Central	1	2,491	1:2,491	- 18.51
East	1	2,905	1:2,905	- 4.97
North	1	3,218	1:3,218	+ 5.27
South	1	3,613	1:3,613	+ 18.19
Total/Average	4	12,227	1:3,057	

Source: Northern Territory Electoral Commission (as at 9th April 2014)

Table 1 indicates the imbalance in the number of electors between the existing wards, however, this will likely improve in the foreseeable future given the residential development occurring in the suburb of Coolalinga (Central Ward). Notwithstanding this, alternatives to the existing ward structure should be considered with the view to identifying a ward structure which affords the desired level of representation; provides a more even balance of electors (which can be maintained over the four year period between reviews); and allows for anticipated fluctuations in elector numbers.

3.2 Council Name

The Council has been named Litchfield since it was initially established in 1985.

Litchfield Council is named after Frederick Henry Litchfield who, as a member of an early survey and settlement party, explored areas of the Northern Territory including lands within and around the current council area.

Given the historical significance of the current name of Council (in regards to both the Northern Territory and the local area) and the fact that nothing extraordinary has seemingly occurred in recent times to prompt change, the elected members of Council are not contemplating a change at this time. Notwithstanding this, Council welcomes the thoughts and suggestions of the community in respect to this matter.

Council supports the retention of the existing council name (i.e. Litchfield Council).

4. Composition of Council

4.1 Principal Member

Section 42(2)(b) of the Act specifies that the principal member of the Litchfield Council is to have the title President or Mayor; and Section 44(1)(a) of the Act requires the principal member to be elected by the community.

The principal member of Council currently has the title of Mayor. This arrangement was introduced after the previous electoral review in 2010/2011. Council is of the opinion that the title of Mayor best suits the principal member of the Litchfield Council because:

- the Council is a municipality and, as such, the title befits the status of the Litchfield Council within the hierarchy of Local Government in the Northern Territory;
- the other municipalities in the Northern Territory all have a Mayor (elected by the community) as the principal member, with the exception of the City of Darwin which has a Lord Mayor (specified by the Act);
- in the main, the principal members of municipal councils throughout Australia have the title of Mayor; and
- the title suits the developing urban character of the council area.

Council favours the retention of the title of Mayor for the principal member as this is consistent with the arrangements of the other municipal councils in the Northern Territory and befits the changing character of the council area.

4.2 Councillors/Aldermen

The Act does not identify the title to be utilised in respect to the elected members (other than the principal member).

The elected members of Litchfield Council have long held the title of councillor, with the most recent confirmation of the use of this title coming in a resolution of Council on the 12th April 2012. Of the four other municipal councils in the Northern Territory, the City of Darwin, the City of Palmerston and the Katherine Town Council all have aldermen, whilst the Alice Springs Town Council has councillors.

The title of alderman is an acceptable title option, however, it is gender specific and can be perceived as having higher status than a councillor, given that the title is only utilised in three municipal councils.

Despite their title, the roles of all of the elected members of Council are the same.

Section 35 of the Act specifies that the role of a member is:

- to represent the interests of all residents and ratepayers of the council area;
- to provide leadership and guidance;

- to facilitate communication between the members of the council's constituency and the council;
- to participate in the deliberations of the council and its community activities; and
- to ensure, as far as practicable, that the council acts honestly, efficiently and appropriately in carrying out its statutory responsibilities.

Council prefers the title of Councillor for the elected members. This title has been utilised by Council for many years; is known and accepted by the community; and is not gender specific.

5. Elector Representation

Regulation 63(1) requires Council to provide the most effective possible representation for the council area, and it is generally accepted that the composition and structure of Council should serve to uphold the democratic principle of “one person, one vote, one value”. This being the case, the review needs to identify the number of elected members who are required to adequately and fairly represent the electors of the council area and perform the roles and responsibilities of Council.

As there is no established formula or guideline to assist in determining an appropriate level of elector representation for Litchfield Council, the members of the community will have to call on their previous experiences dealing with Council and can also take some guidance from the structures of other councils. On the other hand, the elected members will ultimately need to draw upon their practical experience in dealing with their constituents; their understanding of the demands of the position; and the structures of other councils within the Northern Territory and, to a lesser degree, across the nation.

A comparison of the elector representation arrangements of the other municipal Councils, as detailed in Table 2, provides some assistance given that Litchfield Council:

- exhibits the lowest number of elected members (i.e. councillors or aldermen); and
- has the second highest elector ratio (i.e. the average number of electors represented by an elected member) of the cited councils, despite having the second lowest number of electors.

It is also noted that the Litchfield Council covers a significantly larger area than all of the other municipal councils.

Table 2: Elector details - Northern Territory municipalities

Council	Members	Electors	Elector Ratio
Katherine Town Council (7421km ²)	6	5,318	1: 886
Alice Springs Town Council (327km ²)	8	14,093	1:1,762
City of Palmerston (52.9km ²)	6	17,475	1:2,913
Litchfield Council (3100 km²)	4	12,227	1:3,057
City of Darwin (141.75km ²)	12	46,214	1:3,851

Source: Northern Territory Electoral Commission (25th March & 9th April 2014)

A comparison with the elector representation arrangements of the regional councils within the Northern Territory is of little or no assistance, given that these councils generally cover expansive areas of open rural land/natural landscape and contain relatively small elector numbers which are either contained within small communities or spread sparsely across the council area.

Table 3 provides elector details of twenty (20) interstate councils which have comparable elector numbers to that of the Litchfield Council. This data indicates that the Litchfield Council compares favourably with all of the cited councils, given that it has the lowest number of elected members and the highest elector ratio. It is also interesting to note that Litchfield Council covers a larger area than ten (10) of the cited councils.

Table 3: Elector details - various interstate councils (similar elector numbers)

Council	Members	Electors	Elector Ratio
City of Subiaco (WA)	12	11,196	1: 933
City of Port Pirie (SA)	10	12,213	1:1,221
Inverell Shire (NSW)	9	11,384	1:1,265
City of Victor Harbor (SA)	9	11,400	1:1,267
Huon Valley Council (Tas)	8	11,197	1:1,400
Isaac Regional Council (Qld)	8	11,564	1:1,446
Rural City of Murray Bridge (SA)	9	13,023	1:1,447
City of Broken Hill (NSW)	9	13,591	1:1,510
City of Prospect	8	13,947	1:1,743
Nambucca Shire (NSW)	8	14,017	1:1,752
Burnie City (Tas)	8	14,006	1:1,751
Meander Valley (Tas)	8	14,114	1:1,764
Northern Grampians Shire (Vic)	6	10,864	1:1,811
Rural City of Benalla (Vic)	6	11,335	1:1,889
Alpine Shire (Vic)	6	11,522	1:1,920
Burdekin Shire (Qld)	6	11,930	1:1,988
Indigo Shire (Vic)	6	12,865	1:2,144
Corangamite Shire (Vic)	6	13,332	1:2,222
Murrindindi Shire (Vic)	6	13,629	1:2,272
Moyne Shire (Vic)	6	14,124	1:2,354
Litchfield Council	4	12,227	1:3,057

Source: State Electoral Commissions (data as at 2011 and 2012)

The above provides no reason to prompt the consideration of a reduction in number of elected members.

On the other hand, consideration could be given to increasing the number of elected members to five or six councillors. The impact (in terms of elector ratio) would be as follows.

Five Councillors	1:2,445
Six Councillors	1:2,079

An increase in the number of elected members would:

- afford Council the opportunity to establish smaller wards or wards with a greater level of representation (i.e. more than one elected member), thereby improving the lines of communication between the community and Council and likely reducing the workload of the elected members;

- result in an elector ratio which is still comparable with the elector ratios of all of the cited councils (Table 3), including those Councils which comprise six elected members;
- achieve a greater diversity in the characteristics, skill-set and opinions of the elected members; and
- enable Council to accommodate the anticipated future growth in population/elector numbers without placing its elected members and/or structure under stress.

On the downside, additional members will incur costs to Council (e.g. elected member's allowances which are to be a total (maximum) of \$29,671.14 per annum (as from the 1st July 2014), including the base, electoral, professional development and additional meeting allowances).

Another issue that may impact upon the number of elected members is whether Council should comprise an even or odd number of elected members (i.e. councillors or aldermen). Whilst there is no inherent disadvantage with either option, an odd number of councillors will, under most circumstances, overcome the potential for a tied vote of Council.

Council believes that four (4) councillors can continue to provide fair, adequate and direct representation of the existing communities located throughout the council area, but is prepared in due course to consider an increase in the number of elected members if there are elector representation benefits to be achieved.

6. Assessment Criteria

Regulation 63(2) stipulates that, when carrying out an electoral review, a Council must give proper consideration to the following matters.

- Communities of interest in the area including economic, social and regional interests.
- Types of communication and travel in the area with special reference to disabilities arising out of remoteness or distance.
- The trend of population changes in the area.
- The density of population in the area.
- The physical features of the area.

In addition, the provisions of Regulation 63(3) require Council take into account the following when the council area is to be divided into wards.

- The desirability of the number of electors for each ward being as near to equal as practicable at the next general election.
- The desirability of keeping the area of each ward containing rural and remote areas as small as practicable.
- The desirability of keeping the demographic and geographic nature of each ward as uniform as practicable.
- The desirability of including an identifiable community wholly within one ward if practicable.

In summary, any proposed future ward structure should exhibit wards which have an equal number of electors (or an equitable elector ratio); and should take into account such matters as communities of interest; population; ward area; topography; transport opportunities; and demographic change. Neither the Act nor the Regulations places any priority upon these criteria.

6.1 Communities of Interest

Regulation 63(2)(a) and 63(3)(d) require Council give proper consideration to community of interests in the council area, including economic, social and regional interests; and the desirability of including an identifiable community wholly within one ward if practicable.

For the purpose of electoral review proposals, “communities of interest” can be defined as aspects of the physical, economic and social systems which are central to the interactions of communities in their living environment. They can be identified by considering factors relevant to the physical, economic and social environment; regional communities; history and heritage communities; and environmental and geographic interests.

Litchfield Council incorporates significant residential and rural sectors, as well as commercial, retail and industrial precincts. Further, due to the locality and size of the council area, and the diversity in the characteristics and circumstances of the local population, the socio-economic status of the community can vary considerably.

Given the complexities of the “community of interest” concept, a simple solution is to ensure that whole districts or suburbs (i.e. perceived established communities of interest) are included within a single ward, thereby protecting and maintaining their identity and character.

6.2 Communication and Travel

Regulation 63(2)(b) seeks consideration of the issues of communication and travel in the council area, with specific reference to disabilities arising out of remoteness or distance.

Whilst the Litchfield Council covers approximately 3,100km² in area, the higher populated residential/urban precincts are generally consolidated within the central and north-western parts of the council area. As such, direct communication with the majority of electors can be readily achieved.

As for the smaller, more remote communities and settlements, and the sparsely populated parts of the council area, improved access to these communities can likely be achieved as a result of the advances made in information technology.

6.3 Demographic and Population Trends.

Regulation 63(2) requires Council give proper consideration to:

- the trend of population changes in the area;
- the density of population in the area; and
- the desirability of keeping the demographic and geographic nature of each ward as uniform as practicable.

Allowances should be made in the development of future ward structure options so as to accommodate any anticipated future fluctuations in elector numbers.

The following Australian Bureau of Statistics documents provide demographic information of some relevance.

- ABS 3218.0, Regional Population Growth in Australia, 2012 - 2013, indicates that the resident population of the council area increased by 560 people during the twelve month period to June 2013, with the largest growth being recorded in Humpty Doo (220 residents) and Howard Springs (140 residents).
- ABS 3218.0, Regional Population Growth in Australia, indicates that the population of Litchfield Council increased by 4,851 or 31.15% over the period June 2001 - June 2012, including an increase of 385 or 1.9% in 2011/2012.
- ABS 3222.7 Population Projections, Northern Territory, 1999 - 2021, predicts that the population of Litchfield Council will likely double (at least), increasing from 15,400 in 1999 to between 29,400 and 59,500 in 2021.

- The 2001, 2006 and 2011 ABS Census Community Profiles – Litchfield (M) (NT) Local Government Area) indicate that the total population of the council area decreased by 341 (-2.15%) over the period 2001 – 2006 but then increased by 3,440 (22.12%) during the period 2006 – 2011. Overall, the population in the council area increased by 3,099 (19.5%) over the 2001 – 2011 period. In addition, over the same period the total number of dwellings (all forms) within the council area increased by 1,626 (27.58%).

Elector data provided by the Northern Territory Electoral Commission indicates that elector numbers within the council area increased by 6,869 (264.45%) during the period between the May 1998 and March 2012 local government elections, including an increase of 1,433 (10,760 to 12,193) or 13.32% during the period June 2009 to March 2014.

Council is also aware of the current residential development which is occurring in the suburb of Coolalinga. This development will result in an additional 198 dwellings (of various forms) which could ultimately realise approximately 400 additional electors (based on an assumption of an average occupancy rate of 2.9 persons per dwelling and 70% of the population being eligible to vote, as per the 2011 ABS census).

6.3 Topography.

Regulation 63(2)(e) requires Council consider the physical features of the council area.

The Litchfield Council area covers approximately 3,100 km² and is bounded by the Adelaide River to the east, Van Diemen Gulf in the north and the Cities of Darwin and Palmerston to the north-west. The municipality is primarily rural or rural-residential in character; exhibits tropical rural bushland; accommodates a mix of rural residential, horticultural, agricultural and industrial land uses; and has the Stuart and Arnhem Highways running through it.

Ward boundaries should, where possible, be aligned with prominent physical features including local roads, watercourses and green belts.

7. Wards

The provisions of Section 9 of the Act and Regulation 63(3) infer that a council area may or may not be divided into wards. Further, Regulation 63(3) states that, if a council area is divided into wards, Council must consider the desirability of the number of electors for each ward being as near to equal as practicable at the next general election. The regulation also seeks to include an identifiable community wholly within one ward (if practicable).

Accordingly, consideration should be given to three (3) alternatives, these being the abolition of wards; the creation of a more evenly balanced ward structure (in terms of elector numbers per ward) comprising single member wards (as per the current structure); and/or a new ward structure based on more elected members and/or multi-member wards. The following provides information relevant to all three alternatives.

7.1 Wards/No Wards

The abolition of wards will result in all elected members representing the council area as a whole, rather than a ward.

Arguments supporting the “no ward” alternative are that:-

- it affords an elector the opportunity to vote for all of the vacant positions on Council;
- it provides some opportunity for the small communities to be directly represented on Council, if they are able to muster sufficient support for a candidate and vote;
- the most supported candidates from across the council area will likely be elected, rather than candidates who may be favoured by the peculiarities of the ward based electoral system (e.g. elected unopposed or having attracted less votes than defeated candidates from other wards);
- as ward councillors/aldermen do not have to reside within the ward that they represent, a ward structure does not guarantee that a ward councillor will have empathy for, or an affiliation with, the ward;
- elected members generally consider themselves to represent not only their ward, but the council area as a whole, and it is suggested that their role and actions as an elected member of Council, and the functions they perform on behalf of Council, generally reflect this attitude and circumstance;
- the elected members should be free of parochial ward/local community attitudes;
- the lines of communication between Council and its community may be enhanced, given that members of the community will be able to consult with any and/or all members of council, rather than perhaps feel obliged to consult with their specific ward councillors; and
- candidates for election to Council will require the genuine desire, ability and means to succeed and serve on Council, given the perceived difficulties associated with contesting “at large” elections.

The primary arguments opposing the “no ward” option are that:-

- the elected members may not have any empathy for, or affiliation with, all parts of, or communities within, the council area;
- local interests and/or issues are not overlooked in favour of the bigger council-wide picture;
- communities within the council area will not be guaranteed direct representation;
- the task of contesting “at large” elections can be daunting, and therefore may deter candidates; and
- the cost (to Council) of conducting elections and supplementary elections (council-wide).

At present three of the municipal councils (i.e. the City of Palmerston, the Alice Springs Town Council and Katherine Town Council) and one regional council (Wagait Regional Council) have no wards.

Council supports the division of the council area into wards primarily as it ensures direct representation of all electors and the various existing “communities of interest” within the council area.

7.2 Single Member Wards

Single member wards (as per the current ward structure) allow the local community to elect their representative; afford the elected member the opportunity to be more accessible to their constituents; and enable the elected member to also concentrate on issues of local importance (rather than just the bigger council-wide picture).

On the downside the work load of the elected member can be demanding and absenteeism of the elected ward member (for whatever reason and/or period) will leave the ward without direct representation (as there is no legislative provisions for a short-term proxy member).

7.3 Multi Member Wards

Multi-member wards (i.e. wards with two or more elected members):

- allow for the sharing of duties and responsibilities amongst the elected members;
- can achieve a greater diversity in the characteristics, skill-set and opinions of the elected members;
- lessen the likelihood of ward parochialism;
- increase the lines of communication between the community and Council;
- afford continuous ward representation should a member be absent; and
- can be greater in area and therefore can afford the opportunity to maintain whole identified communities of interest within the one ward.

Varying levels of ward representation within a structure based on multi-member wards has no disadvantage provided the elector ratio within all of the wards is similar. However, such a structure can be seen to lack balance and/or equity, with the larger wards (in elector and elected member numbers) being perceived as having a greater, more influential voice on Council.

Council has an open opinion regarding the level of representation in a ward provided the elector ratio within each ward is as equal as practicable.

7.4 Ward Identification

The existing wards are identified in accordance with their general location (e.g. north, south, east and central). This practice is a conventional means of ward identification and generally enables electors to readily identify the ward in which they reside.

The alternative means of ward identification are limited. The allocation of letters or numbers is considered to be acceptable, but it is suggested that these methods lack imagination and fail to reflect the character and/or history of the council area. The same cannot be said for the allocation of names of local historical significance, but reaching consensus over the selection of appropriate names can prove to be a difficult exercise.

Future ward boundaries should be aligned with easily identifiable features, such as main roads, property boundaries, Hundred boundaries (and alike) and/or prominent geographical or man-made features.

Council favours a simple means of ward identification which generally identifies the location of the ward within the council area (e.g. north, south, east, west and/or central).

8. Ward Structure Options

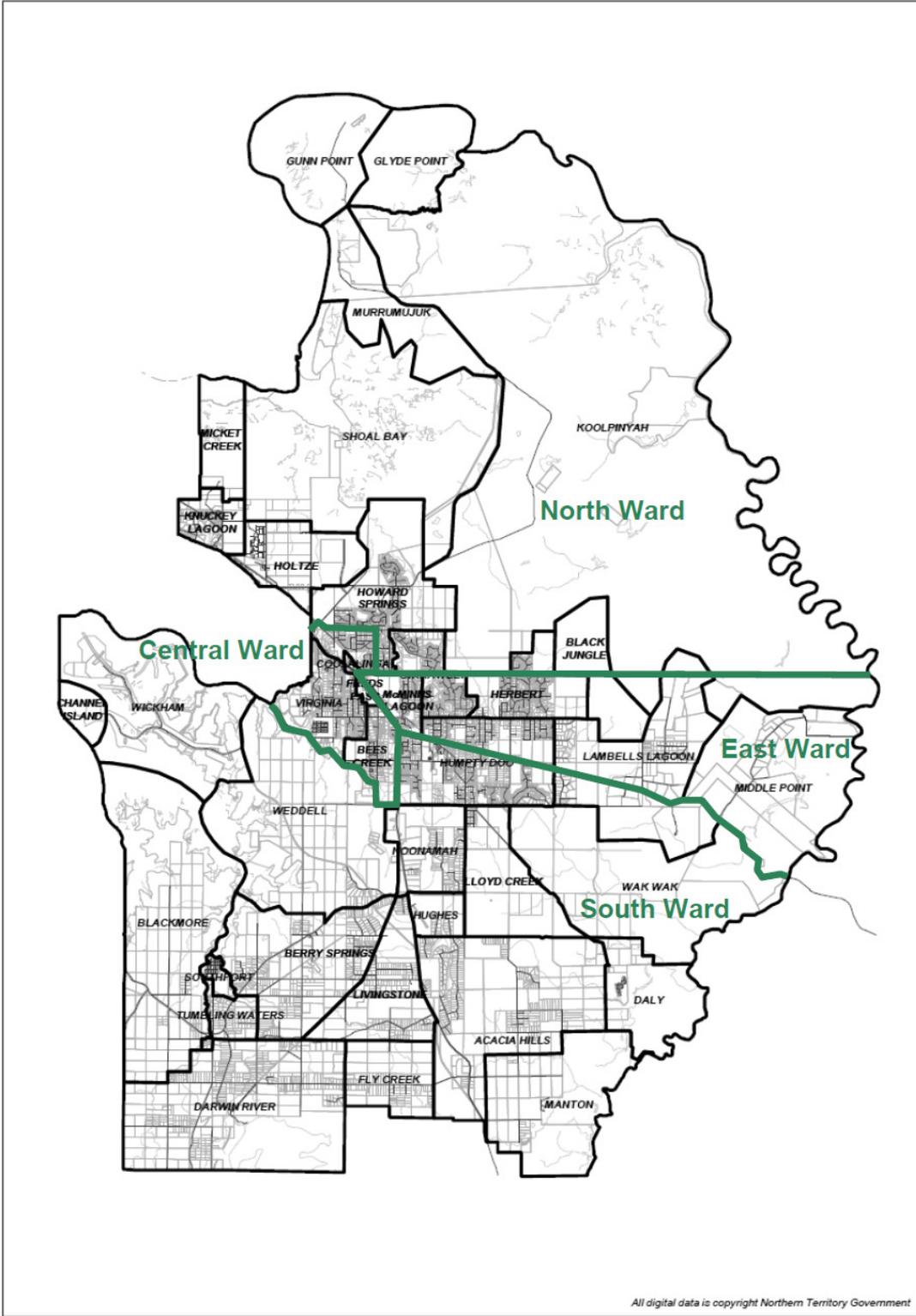
The following ward structure options are only examples of how the Litchfield Council can be divided into wards. They have been developed to reflect some logical basis and an equitable distribution of elector numbers; to accommodate anticipated future residential development (and the resultant increase in elector numbers); and to maintain existing communities of interest, where possible.

The “no ward” option is included because the provisions of the Act allow for the abolition of wards.

8.1 Option 1

Description

The retention of the existing ward structure, that being the division of the council area into four (4) wards, with each ward being represented by one (1) elected member (i.e. a total of four (4) elected ward representatives).



Elector Distribution

Ward	Crs	Electors	Elector Ratio	% Variation
Ward 1	1	2,494	1:2,494	- 18.4
Ward 2	1	2,902	1:2,902	- 5.1
Ward 3	1	3,218	1:3,218	+ 5.3
Ward 4	1	3,613	1:3,613	+ 18.2
Total/Average	4	12,227	1:3,057	

Source: Northern Territory Electoral Commission (as at 9th April 2014)

Comments

The council area has been divided into four wards since its establishment in 2008.

Whilst the existing ward structure may be known and accepted by the community, it exhibits a significant imbalance in the distribution of electors between wards, with the elector numbers being 45.0% higher in the South Ward than the Central Ward.

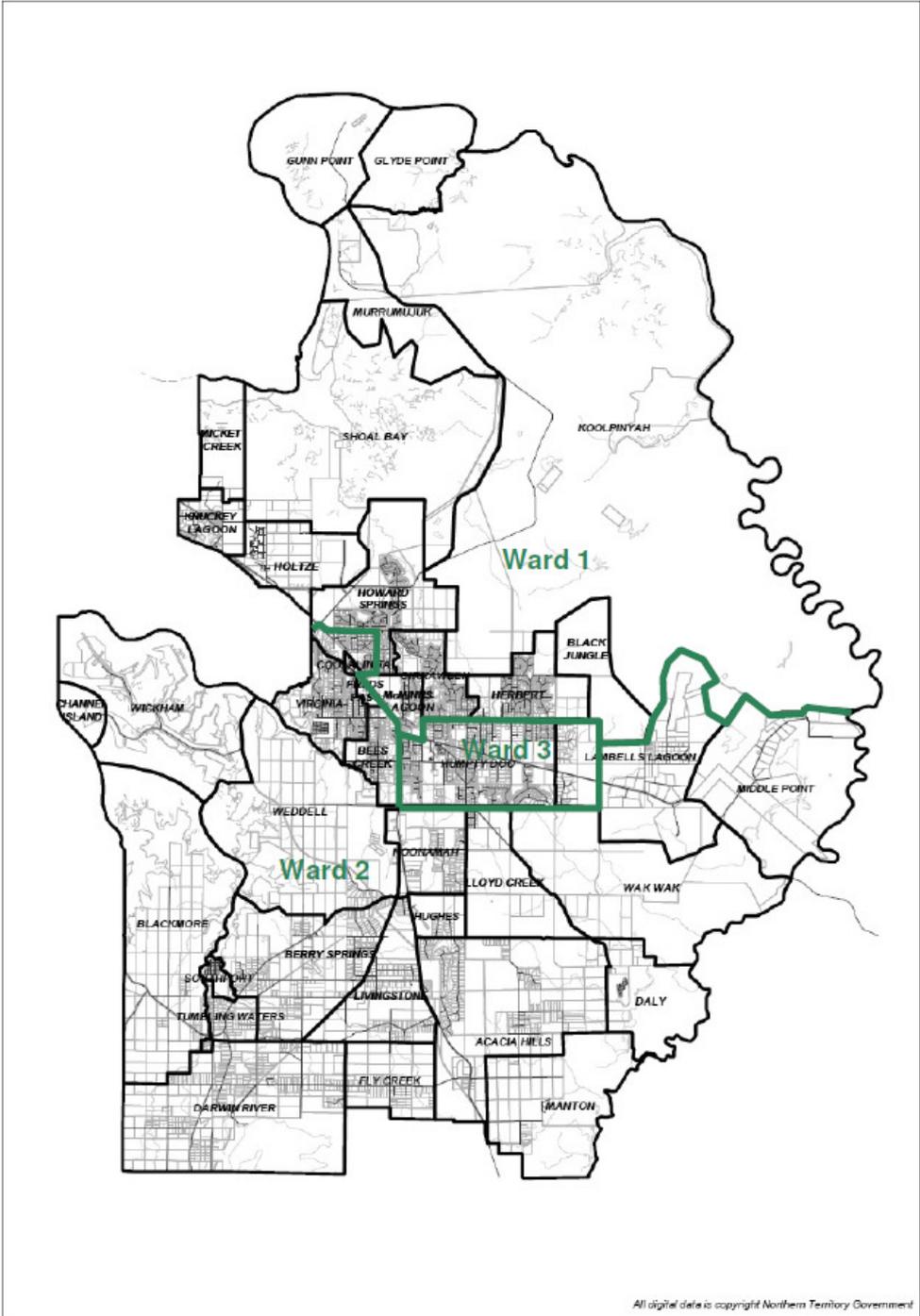
Regulation 63(3)(a) states that, if a council area is divided into wards, Council must consider the desirability of the number of electors for each ward being as near to equal as practicable at the next general election (in keeping with the fundamental democratic principle of “one person, one vote, one value”).

The retention of the existing ward structure could be justified, in part, by the fact that there is likely to be significant population (elector) growth in the Central Ward within the foreseeable future due to residential development occurring in the suburbs/districts of Coolalinga and Howard Springs. This predicted population/elector growth should serve to improve the balance in elector numbers (and elector ratios) between the wards over time.

8.2 Option 2

Description

The division of the council area into three (3) ward structure, with two (2) of the proposed wards each being represented by two (2) elected members and the remaining proposed ward being represented by one (1) elected member (i.e. a total of five (5) elected ward representatives).



Elector Distribution

Ward	Crs	Electors	Elector Ratio	% Variation
Ward 1	2	5,005	1:2,503	+ 2.3
Ward 2	2	4,689	1:2,345	- 4.1
Ward 3	1	2,533	1:2,533	+ 3.6
Total/Average	5	12,227	1:2,445	

Source: Northern Territory Electoral Commission (as at 9th April 2014)

Comments

This option proposes to divide the council area into three (3) wards.

The proposed ward structure is a relatively simple configuration which is well balanced in terms of ward elector ratios. Further, it is generally accepted that the larger the ward (in terms of elector numbers), the greater the capacity of the ward to accommodate larger fluctuations in elector number.

Whilst there is no inherent disadvantage with a varying level of representation between the wards, the community within proposed ward 3 may consider that the structure favours the other two wards due to the increased number of elected members representing the other wards (i.e. additional votes on Council).

The proposed ward boundaries generally align with existing suburb boundaries, however, the suburb of Howard Springs continues to be divided under this ward structure option.

Elector Distribution

Ward	Crs	Electors	Elector Ratio	% Variation
Ward 1	2	3,942	1:1,971	- 3.3
Ward 2	2	3,978	1:1,989	- 2.4
Ward 3	2	4,307	1:2,154	+ 5.7
Total/Average	6	12,227	1:2,038	

Source: Northern Territory Electoral Commission (as at 9th April 2014)

Comments

Option 3 proposes the division of the council area into three (3) wards, with each ward being represented by two (2) elected members.

The provision of two elected members in each of the proposed wards ensures equal representation between the wards and guarantees continued ward representation under circumstances where one elected ward representative is absent.

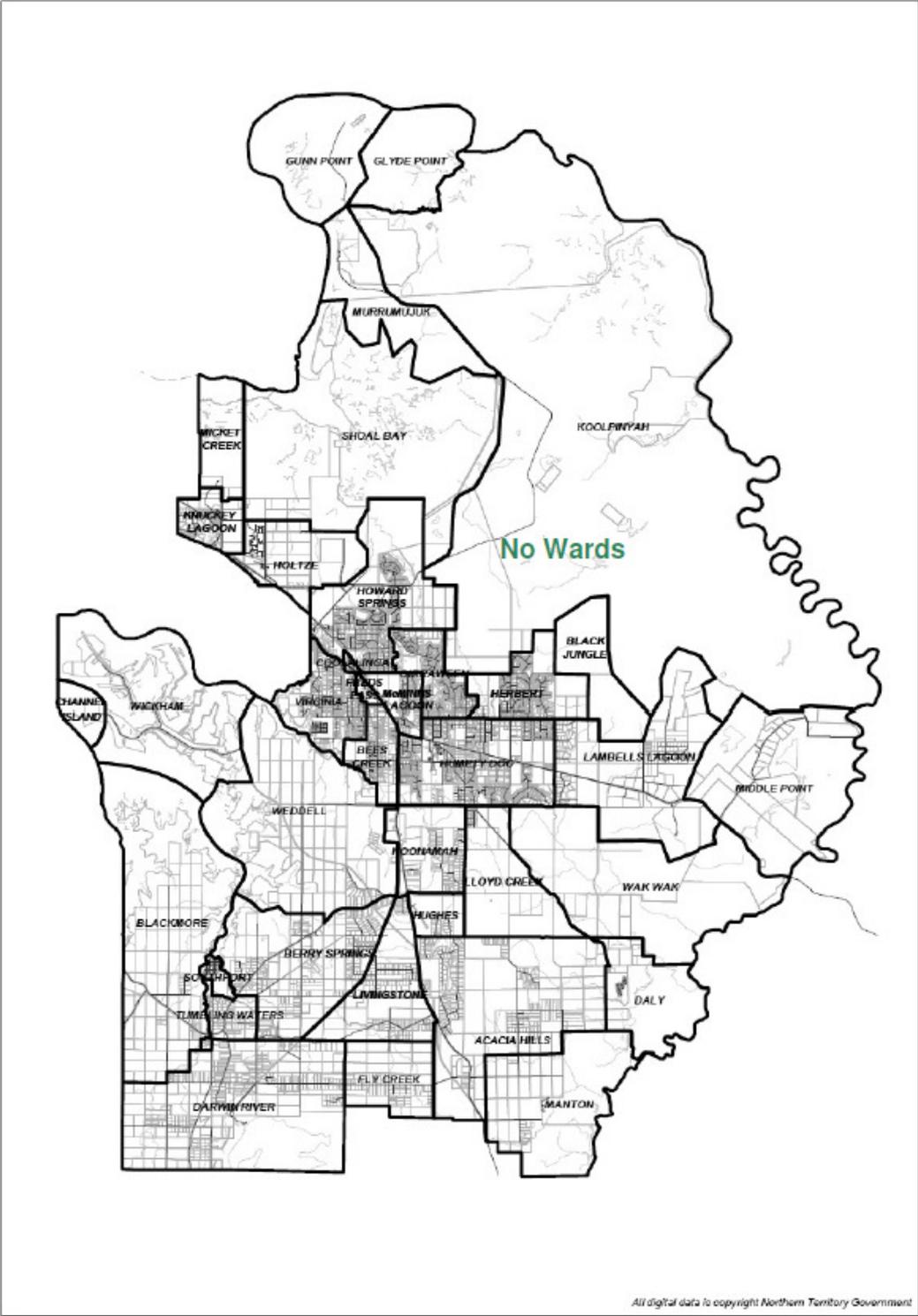
The ward boundaries within the proposed structure are not dissimilar to the existing ward structure; the distribution of electors between the proposed wards is reasonably well balanced; and the proposed wards are all capable of sustaining reasonable fluctuations in elector numbers.

Obviously, the greater the number of elected members, the greater the expense to Council (e.g. member's allowances, administrative support, personal development initiatives and travel expenses).

8.4 Option 4

Description

The abolition of wards resulting in council-wide or “at large” elections.



Elector Distribution

Ward	Crs	Electors	Elector Ratio	% Variation
Ward 1	4	12,227	1:3,057	N/A
Total/Average	4	12,227	1:3,057	

Source: Northern Territory Electoral Commission (as at 9th April 2014)

Comments

The "no ward" structure is a practical option as it affords some benefits, including:

- avoiding the division of the local community into wards based solely on the distribution of elector numbers;
- affording the electors within the community the ability to vote for all members of Council, with the most favoured candidates being elected to represent (and act in the best interests of) the whole of the city (despite the geographical location of their place of residence);
- overcoming the potential for the elected members to have a parochial ward attitude; and
- flexibility, as the "no ward" option can accommodate any number of elected members and is not affected by fluctuations in elector numbers.

The arguments for and against the "no ward" option have been previously presented (refer page 15, 7.1 Wards/No Wards).

9. Council Boundary

The opportunity exists for Council to consider possible future changes to its boundary and the likely impacts thereof in terms of future elector representation (including the configuration of any future ward structure options).

Advice received from the Department of Local Government and Regions suggests that any proposed changes will need to have the consensus of all interested Councils and/or authorities.

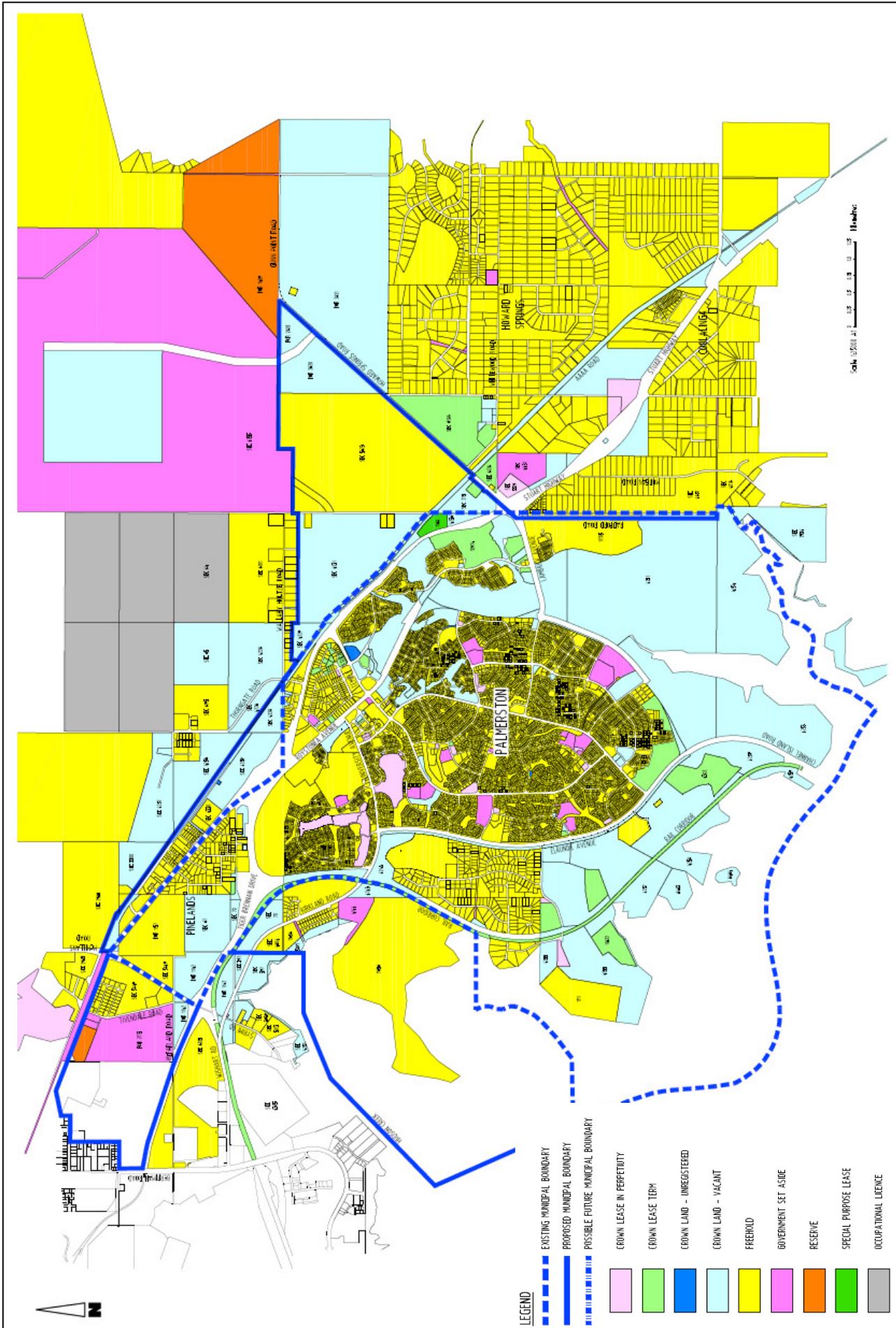
Council has not been contemplating a change to its municipal boundary. However, Council has received advice from the City of Palmerston to the effect that it is considering proposed amendments to its boundary in several areas which will effect Litchfield Council. The following information is relevant to the amendments proposed by the City of Palmerston.

- It is proposed that the boundary along Radford Road be shifted to the western side of the road which will result in this road being under the care, control and ownership of the Litchfield Council. The City of Palmerston has no rateable properties which have frontage to this road (and never will), however, the Litchfield Council has numerous properties with a frontage to Radford Road and has previously maintained this road.
- The announcement of a new site for the Palmerston Regional Hospital has created interest in a review of the council boundary in this locality. The City of Palmerston has suggested that the new hospital may be within 3 kilometres of the Palmerston CBD and will be closely affiliated with the Palmerston GP Super Clinic and the other local existing health/community care providers.
- With residential growth expected to occur within the area known as Holtze, it is suggested this area will likely become heavily reliant on the retail, commercial, recreational and service provision facilities which are currently available within Palmerston. The proposed boundary is to extend from the existing municipal boundary in the east, along Howard Springs Road to Gunn Point Road and then in a westerly direction to link up with the existing municipal boundary. This new area affects very few rateable properties within the Litchfield Council and does not include the existing properties which have frontage onto Wallaby Holtze Road.
- It is proposed to incorporate the Industrial land opposite Pinelands (within the Litchfield Council) with the General Industrial land on the other side of the Stuart Highway which lies within the City of Palmerston.

The following map delineates the aforementioned areas.

Council is not proposing any change to its municipal boundary at this time.

Map 2 – Proposed Boundary Changes (City of Palmerston)



10. Summary

Litchfield Council is undertaking an electoral review which requires an assessment of the adequacy of the constitutional arrangements presently in force and, in particular, whether such arrangements provide the most effective possible representation for the council area.

At the culmination of this stage of the review process Council will have to make some “in principle” decisions regarding its future composition and the future division of the council area into wards (if required).

The electoral review:

- is being undertaken in accordance with the provisions and requirements of Section 23 of the Local Government Act and Regulation 63 of the Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2008;
- is to be based upon the current elector numbers; and
- must be completed by the 31st March 2015 in order to have any proposed amendments in place before the 2016 Local Government elections.

The key issues that need to be addressed during the review include:

- the title of the principal member of Council (i.e. President or Mayor);
- the composition of Council, more specifically the number of elected members required to adequately and fairly represent the electors and communities within the council area and to perform the roles and responsibilities of Council;
- the title of the elected members (i.e. councillor or alderman);
- whether or not the council area should be divided into wards;
- if the council area is to be divided into wards, the identification of a ward structure which exhibits a reasonably equitable distribution of electors between the proposed wards and provides opportunities for the representation of all existing communities;
- the title of any proposed future wards; and
- the name and external boundaries of the council area.

The title of the principal member of Council can be either President or Mayor. Council opted to change the title of the principal member to Mayor during the previous electoral review in 2010/2011, as it was considered to be consistent with the other municipal councils (which are required to have a Mayor or a Lord Mayor in the case of the City of Darwin) and to reflect the developing urban character of the council area.

As for the title of the remaining elected members, Council has (to date) preferred councillor rather than alderman, but the latter is being utilised by three of the other four municipal councils. The title has no impact upon their status, role and/or responsibilities of the elected members.

In respect to the future size of Council (in terms of elected members), neither the Local Government Act nor the Local Government (Electoral) Regulations provide any guidance in regards to this matter. Accordingly, Council (with the assistance of the community) has to determine, based on past experience, how many elected members are required to fulfil the roles and responsibilities of Council; provide fair and adequate representation of the electors; and afford sufficient lines of communication with the community. To date four councillors (each representing a ward) has been appropriate and sufficient in number, however, the demands of an ever increasing community must be taken into account to ensure the most appropriate level of representation is provided until the next schedules review in 2018/2019.

Litchfield Council already has the lowest number of elected members of any council in the Northern Territory. It is also the smallest (in terms of the number of elected members) when compared to interstate councils which are comparable in size (i.e. elector numbers).

Increasing the number of elected members should enhance the lines of communication between the community and council; enhance elector representation (i.e. reduce the number of electors represented by a single councillor); reduce the workloads of the elected members; and further diversify the skill set, opinions, expertise and experience of the elected members (as policy and decision makers). On the downside, an increase in the number of elected members will come at a financial cost to Council.

The council area is currently divided into four wards, an arrangement that has been in existence for many years. The division of the council area into wards guarantees the direct representation of all parts of the council area; ensure local interests are not overlooked in favour of the bigger council-wide issues; prevents a single interest group from gaining considerable representation on Council; enables and attracts candidates to contest ward elections; reduces the cost and effort required to campaign at an election; and potentially provides cost savings to Council in regards the conduct of elections and supplementary elections.

On the other hand, wards serve to divide the community; can foster parochial ward attitudes; and may require on-going review so as to ensure an equitable distribution of elector numbers. In addition, as ward councillors do not have to reside within the ward that they represent, there is the potential (albeit limited) for a ward councillor to have no empathy for or affiliation with the ward or local community that he/she represents.

Importantly, the “no ward” option also affords all electors the ability to vote for all of the vacant positions on Council, guaranteeing that the most supported candidates from across the council area will be elected.

If it is determined that the council area continue to be divided into wards, the existing ward structure should not be maintained in its current configuration because of the inequitable distribution of electors between the wards and the likelihood that this will get worse over time.

A variation to the existing ward structure has been presented with the view of achieving a more equitable balance in the distribution of electors between wards and to align all ward boundaries to existing district/suburb boundaries (where possible). In addition, a number of simple alternative ward structure options have also been presented to demonstrate how the council area can be divided into wards under circumstances whereby the Council comprises an additional elected member or two.

These alternative ward structures are all relatively well balanced (in regards to elector numbers) and are capable of sustaining considerable fluctuations in elector numbers.

As for the issue of ward identification, changes may be required depending on a future decision regarding the division of the council area into wards. Whilst further consideration will be given to this matter later in the review process, it is suggested that the allocation of names indicating the general location of the wards will continue to be a favoured means of ward identification. Notwithstanding this, Council welcomes submissions promoting alternative ward names.

On the issue of the Council name, the council area has been identified as "Litchfield" since its establishment in 1985. This name has local and wider heritage significance and, whilst the electoral review affords the opportunity to consider a change to the name, there appears to be little to justify such action at this time. As such, a change to the Council name is not a matter that is being contemplated by Council.

Finally, the electoral review provides the opportunity for Council to consider possible future changes to the Council boundary. The Department of Local Government and Regions has advised that any proposed changes will need to have the consensus of the affected Councils and/or authorities. It should be noted that Council is not contemplating any boundary changes at this time.

Interested members of the community are invited to make a written submission expressing their views on the key issues contained within this report and the future composition and structure of Council. Submissions should be addressed to the Chief Executive Officer, PO Box 446, Humpty Doo NT 0836.

Further information regarding the electoral review can be obtained by contacting Derrick Tranter, Governance Manager, on telephone (08) 8983 0600 or by emailing council@lc.nt.gov.au.

