



COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

December 1987

RIDING BOUNDARIES

The Council is under considerable pressure from the Minister for Local Government, Hon. Jim Simmonds, and the Chairman of the Local Government Commission, Russell Badham, to re-arrange the internal boundaries of the Shire.

Before the Shire was proclaimed in 1865, the Metcalfe Road District had been created in 1860. The Harcourt area was added subsequently. Two municipal amalgamations occurred: Taradale Borough and Metcalfe Shire combined in 1870 to form the United Shire of Metcalfe. In 1916, the Borough of Chewton was amalgamated with the United Shire, and the name of the municipality was changed to the Shire of Metcalfe. Each of the former boroughs became ridings of the Shire. No changes to the internal boundaries of the five-riding Shire have been made since that time.

During the Government's attempt last year to "re-structure" local government, the Local Government Commission made much of the supposed imbalance in voter strength between rural and urban ridings in some shires, claiming this was undemocratic.

Shortly after the abandonment of the re-structuring proposal, the Minister wrote inviting the Council's comments on -

- (1) The factual situation as it exists in this Shire;
- (2) If there is a disparity in the distribution of voters what remedy, if any, Council proposes;
- (3) The referral of this matter to the Commission or one of its Divisions pursuant to the Local Government Act; and
- (4) Whether Council believes there is any need to alter the number of councillors in the Shire.

The Council replied that it proposed to look into the possible advantages of internal boundary changes, and change in the number of councillors, but considered the question of internal boundaries to be an internal matter.

Currently, the numbers on the voters' rolls for this Shire are:

Chewton	620
North	287
South	280
Taradale	417
West	1,243
	2,847

Although the numbers in the various ridings have fluctuated considerably over time, the Council has not been aware of any ratepayer dissatisfaction over riding boundaries or differences in voting strengths in this Shire.

In July, the Minister wrote saying that, "... the Government regards the principle of **one vote; one value** to be of paramount importance to the community of Victoria and does not accept that the introduction of voting fairness and equity in municipalities should be put off indefinitely.

"Variations from the mean (570 voters) of +120% ie 1255 voters in the West Riding to -48% i.e. 294 voters in each of the North and South Ridings are simply not in accord with electoral fairness and equity and imbalances of this nature to the democratic voting system should be as unacceptable to your Council as they are to the Government."

He urged the Council to take immediate steps to reconsider its position on the resubdivision issue and prepare a proposal that properly reflects the **one vote: one value** principle.

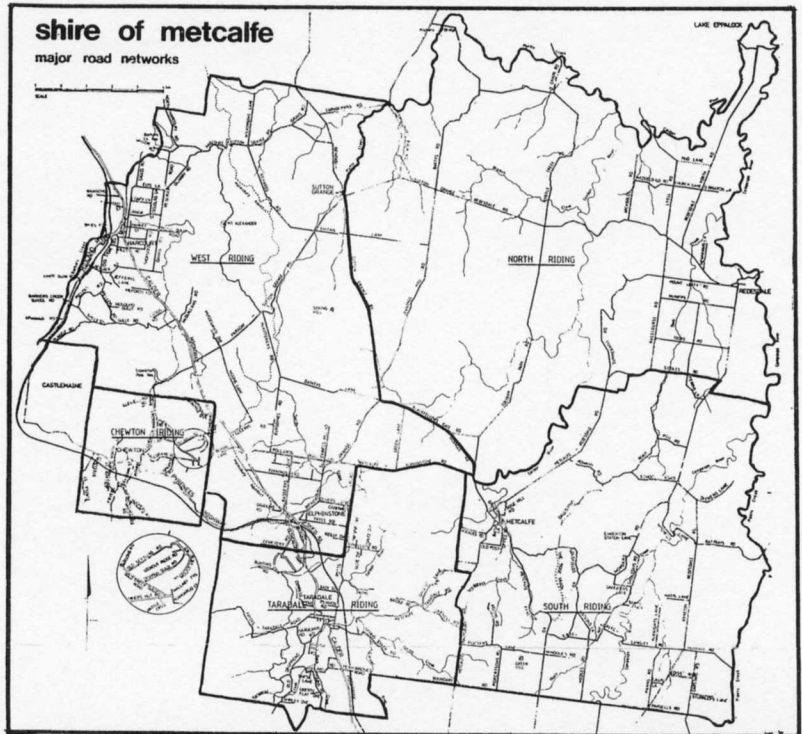
The Minister also pointed out that, under the Act, he has the power to appoint a Division of the Local Government Commission to inquire into a resubdivision proposal, and recommendations to the Governor in Council for the resubdivision of a municipality without even consulting with a council should the circumstances arise that warrant such a step.

He concluded that a consensus solution would, of course, be a better method to achieve the proper resubdivision of the Shire.

A reply was sent saying that rearrangement of the internal boundaries is not seen as the Council's most urgent task. Staff resources have been and are being fully stretched in dealing with more pressing matters. A good deal of research and council consideration is required, so that any changes proposed will be soundly based.

The Council took issue with the Minister over the degree of importance he attaches to "one vote: one value", and suggested that rigid adherence to that objective could well lead to a quite inequitable and unsatisfactory result. There is no legal basis for requiring that there be approximately equal numbers of ratepayers in the various ridings. In fact, this is only one of the considerations listed in Section 24G of the Local Government Act which does not apply when a Division of the Local Government Commission is inquiring into the resubdivision of a shire.

In his reply, the Minister said that the principle of **one vote: one value** is the Government's policy and it will be implemented. However, he went on to say that the Government regards some shires as quite special because of factors of isolation, topography, geography, sparse population and so forth and accordingly



Map of present riding distribution

encouragement has been given to all shires where major variations exist between electoral subdivisions to redraw those boundaries to achieve as close as is achievable voter equity wherever possible and without extending the principle to the ridiculous. The Government is anxious to see proper resubdivisions in place in time for the 1988 municipal elections.

In order to give Council one final opportunity to locally mould such a resubdivision, he had asked the Chairman of the Commission to work closely with the Council to produce such a recommendation in the immediate future.

An indication was given by Commission representatives that variations in voter enrolment of up to 10% from the mean could be acceptable, and the Council is endeavouring to keep within that limit in preparing its preferred proposal.

Various alternative possibilities have been prepared by staff for Council's consideration, an Internal Boundaries Review Committee formed. Although a reduction to four ridings was favoured by some councillors, it was found that to meet the Minister's enrolment guidelines would involve the creation of one very large rural riding.

The Council has now approved in principle the submission of a five ridings proposal to the Minister, with a strong case in support. One such map has found considerable favour, but at least two other five-riding alternatives are being prepared for Council's consideration on 15 December. The Council's reasons for supporting the continuance of five ridings include -

- a more equitable territorial distribution
- a more even spread of councillor duties and workload
- grouping within the one riding of areas having a community of interest
- separation of ridings by natural boundaries wherever practicable
- readier compliance with voter distribution targets
- more balanced representation of rural and urban interests.

Mr Badham, the Commission Chairman, has accepted an invitation to address the Council on the subject of internal boundaries at the meeting on 15 December.

In endeavouring to retain five ridings, the Council is aware that the Minister may insist on four, or even three. From the Council's viewpoint, four ridings would be much less acceptable than five, and three would be totally out of the question.

The Council would like to have the views of as many ratepayers and residents as possible, but the time is extremely short. Your comments will be welcomed, and should be directed to the Shire Secretary by telephone (23 2302) or letter (Shire Office, Metcalfe 3448) without delay.

MINING PROPOSALS

Understandable concern has been expressed by many people in the Shire who feel threatened by mining proposals in former mining areas.

Some of these proposals have been rejected by the Minister for Industry, Technology & Resources; others of which notification has been given may go no further.

In addition to compliance with the provisions of the Mines Act, no new mining venture may go ahead until a planning permit has been obtained, except in areas where such activity is a prohibited use under the Shire Interim Development Order. A proposal to amend the IDO so that mineral working would become a consent use in that part of the Rural Highway zone which is south of the Taradale township attracted a number of submissions, and was abandoned at the November Council meeting.

For the benefit of affected ratepayers, supplies of a booklet entitled "Landowner Provisions - Mines Act" have been procured from the Department of Industry, Technology & Resources. Copies are available from the Shire Office on request.

New Councillor For Chewton

Since the previous issue of the Newsletter, Cr. Ray Applebee was elected for the Chewton Riding, replacing former Cr. Alan Elliot. Further particulars will be given in the next Newsletter.

