

REFERENDUM 2008

1. PREAMBLE

- Since 1975 Weddin Shire has been divided into five wards (or ridings) comprising three “rural” and two “town” wards.
- The State Government now requires ward populations not to vary by more than 10%.
- To comply with this requirement, new ward boundaries will have effect as from the elections on 13 September 2008.
- From that date, there will be two “rural” wards and three “town” wards.
- At the suggestion of the Department of Local Government, Council has decided to hold a referendum on the abolition of all wards, so that the community may voice its opinion.
- If the referendum is passed, the open voting system will not commence until the next election in 2012.
- If the referendum is not passed, the ward system will stay in place.
- The question in the referendum is:
“Currently Weddin Shire Council is divided into five wards. Do you favour Weddin Shire Council abolishing wards so that all electors would vote for all councillors?”
- Voters are required to answer “Yes” or “No”.
- Brief information on the “Yes” and “No” cases is given overleaf.
- More detailed information is available on Council’s website at www.weddin.local-e.nsw.gov.au
- **VOTING IS COMPULSORY**

2. THE “YES” CASE, FOR THE ABOLITION OF WARDS

(a) Advantages of open voting (no wards):

- (i) Every elector gets to vote on every candidate, which is more democratic.
- (ii) Every councillor would be required to take an interest in the whole shire, not just a section of it.
- (iii) Decisions should be made for the overall good of the shire rather than the good of a ward.
- (iv) Because the town and rural populations are approximately equal, the town vote should not dominate the rural vote as has happened in other shires.
- (v) The total number of councillors may be subsequently decreased without the need for another referendum, (with the Minister’s consent).

(b) Disadvantages of the ward system:

- (i) An elector only gets to vote for two of the ten councillors.
- (ii) Voting may be influenced by ward factors, rather than what is best for the shire as a whole.
- (iii) The boundaries will have to be continually adjusted (at considerable cost) so that their populations remain within the prescribed 10% variation.
- (iv) The 2008 wards will not give the same level of representation as the previous wards did.
- (v) Both Quandialla and Caragabal are now included in the same ward, and it is possible that only one area will be represented.
- (vi) The three “town” wards each contain large areas of rural land, so these councillors will have to represent both urban and rural areas.
- (vii) Funding allocations for road works etc on a ward basis are no longer permissible, and works programmes are now determined on a merit basis.
In essence, wards have become irrelevant to Council’s business.
- (viii) The number of councillors must remain at ten unless there is another referendum to decrease the number of wards (to, say, 4).

3. THE “NO” CASE, AGAINST THE ABOLITION OF WARDS

(a) Advantages of the ward system:

- (i) The ward/riding system has served the shire well for many years and is well regarded, particularly in the rural areas.
- (ii) The wards enable all sections of the shire to have a share of representation.
- (iii) The wards enable rural residents to identify specific councillors with a real interest in and knowledge of their area.
- (iv) Many ward elections are decided without the need for voting, when only two candidates nominate.
- (v) Councillors don’t have to travel so far to visit constituents or to inspect problems.
- (vi) Councillors build up a knowledge bank of their particular ward.
- (vii) Councillors are well known by and responsive to their constituents.

(b) Disadvantages of open voting (no wards):

- (i) Some sections of the shire may not have a local councillor.
- (ii) All councillors could come from Grenfell, or all from rural areas.
- (iii) Some electors may not know their closest councillor.