

# comment

with Mayor Bill Shannon

## Divisional debate has many angles

**T**HE Minister for Local Government has informally asked council for its view on whether the next local government election should be on a divided or undivided basis.

The last election was held on a divided basis, with one councillor for each of six geographical divisions, as determined by the State Government.

Now, a new local government electoral act, when proclaimed, will say how future local government elections will be held.

I thought it would be useful to set out some of the arguments for and against each system.

### **Divisional Elections:**

#### **For:**

1. Each geographic area has a representative, who should be aware of the interests of the residents in their division.
2. The costs of campaigning in a smaller area are less.
3. The divisional system is the current one, familiar to voters.

#### **Against:**

1. Councillors can be placed in a difficult position where the overall good of the region may be in conflict with divisional interests.
2. Candidates can choose what division to stand for regardless of their place of residence. Electors can only vote for candidates in their division.
3. Councillors can be elected with few votes, especially if there are many candidates in one division. Councillors have been elected with as few as 350 votes in the past in these circumstances.

### **Undivided Elections:**

#### **For:**

1. Candidates will be required to be informed about issues across the whole region, regardless of their support base.
2. Candidates with the highest overall regional support will be elected.
3. Voters will have the full list of candidates to consider.

#### **Against:**

1. Candidates may need to raise campaign funds to meet increased costs.
2. Teams of candidates are possibly more likely.

likely.

3. Smaller geographic areas may be under-represented. Assuming that voters are more likely to know and vote for a local, the chance of being elected is reduced if there are many candidates.

As you can see, there are good reasons for and against both systems and the community is no doubt divided as to which is preferable.

Last month the CCRC deferred consideration of this topic to enable all councillors more time to consider their position and to allow for some public input, as has occurred.

At the last council meeting we voted on the issue and the outcome was five votes for no divisions and two for divisions.

It is now over to the State Government to decide.