



Hammond Woodhouse
Advisory

SHIRE OF ASHBURTON

REVIEW OF WARD BOUNDARIES AND REPRESENTATION DISCUSSION PAPER



OCTOBER 2022

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 This review

The Shire of Ashburton has resolved to undertake a review of its ward system to comply with the requirements of the Local Government Act 1995 (“the Act”). The Shire has developed this discussion paper to support a 6 week public submission period as advertised by local public notice. Following the advertising period, a report will be prepared incorporating a record of any public submissions and submitted to the Council for consideration.

1.2 The last review

Schedule 2.2 of the Act requires a local government, with ward representation, to carry out a review of its ward boundaries, and the number of councillors representing each ward, from time to time so that no more than 8 years elapse between successive reviews.

The last review of wards in the Shire of Ashburton was undertaken in 2014 and it is now appropriate to carry out another review so that any changes can be in effect prior to the October 2023 local government elections.

1.3 The existing wards and representation

Currently, the Shire has 6 wards and 9 councillors including the Shire President. A map showing the existing ward boundaries is set out in Annexure A. The existing wards and representation are shown in the following table:

Ward	Number of councillors
Ashburton	1
Onslow	1
Pannawonica	1
Paraburdoo	2
Tablelands	1
Tom Price	3

1.4 The existing ratio of councillors to electors

The existing ratio of councillors to electors, as between the wards (“the representation ratio”), represents a significant imbalance and is radically beyond the range (i.e. +/- 10%) stated to be preferred by the Local Government Advisory Board (“the Board”).

The existing representation ratios represent a range between -88% and +53%. Greater detail of the representation ratios is shown in the Table set out in paragraph 3.3.

1.5 Relevant legislative reform

A review of the Act has been undertaken by the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries.

Recently, and following that review, the Minister has announced a number of proposed reforms which include “*a range of measures to strengthen local democracy and community engagement in relation to ward boundary reviews*”.

These reforms include:

- “*requiring Band 1 and Band 2 local governments to hold a public vote for the Mayor or President, directly empowering ratepayers*”; and
- “*reducing the number of elected members within a local government, setting clear limits on the number of councillors a local government can have, based on the population of the local government area*”.

It is to be noted, in relation to those reforms that:

- The Shire is a “Band 2” local government and, if the reforms become law, the Shire will be required to hold a public election for the office of Shire President (currently the Shire President is elected by the Council).

- The Shire has a population of around 13,000. The proposed reforms are to the effect that, where the district population is between 5,000 – 75,000, there will be a capping on the number of elected members from between 5 – 9 inclusive of the President.
- Therefore, if the upper end of the allowable range is utilised, 8 councillors and a Shire President all publicly elected will be a required outcome under law.

The review of the Act and any legislative changes are anticipated to come into effect in 2023 to take effect for the October 2023 local government elections. The Board's view and the Government's reforms will most likely have a bearing on the Shire's recommendation to the Board.

Therefore, this review has provided options that accommodate these proposed legislative changes.

2. REVIEW PROCESS

2.1 The review process

The review process is set out in Schedule 2.2 of the Act. In summary, the steps are as follows:

- (1) In order to begin a review, the Shire is to pass a resolution this effect at a council meeting.
- (2) Prior to carrying out a review, the Shire is to give local public notice advising that the review is to be carried out and that submissions may be made to the Shire.
- (3) The public submissions period is to be not less than 6 weeks after the notice is first given.
- (4) The Shire is encouraged to provide several options as a basis to generate discussion.
- (5) When the public submission period closes, the submissions received are collated and reviewed.
- (6) The Council considers all submissions received.

- (7) The Council reaches a decision based on an assessment of the options against a number of established criteria as contained in the Act.
- (8) A report is then submitted to the Local Government Advisory Board.
- (9) If a change is proposed and the Board is satisfied with the recommendation, then the Board submits the recommendation to the Minister for Local Government.

3. FACTORS RELEVANT TO THE REVIEW

3.1 The statutory factors

Clause 8 of Schedule 2.2 of the Act sets out the matters to which a local government is to have regard when considering a proposal to change a ward system. These matters are:

- (a) community of interests;
- (b) physical and topographic features;
- (c) demographic trends;
- (d) economic factors; and
- (e) ratio of councillors to electors in the various wards.

3.2 The Board's view as to the statutory factors

The Local Government Advisory Board has advised as to its view in relation to each of those matters and those views are set out below:

(a) Community of interest

The term community of interest has several elements. These include a sense of community identity and belonging, similarities in the characteristics of the residents of a community and similarities in the economic activities. It can also include dependence on the shared facilities in an area as reflected in catchment areas of local schools and sporting teams, or the circulation areas of local newspapers. Neighbourhoods, suburbs and towns are important units in the physical, historical and social

infrastructure and often generate a feeling of community and belonging.

(b) Physical and topographical features

These may be natural or man-made features that will vary from area to area. Water features such as rivers and catchment boundaries may be relevant considerations. Coastal plain and foothills regions, parks and reserves may be relevant as may other man-made features such as railway lines and highways.

(c) Demographic trends

Several measurements of the characteristics of human populations, such as population size, and its distribution by age, sex, occupation and location provide important demographic information. Current and projected population characteristics will be relevant as well as similarities and differences between areas within the local government.

(d) Economic factors

Economic factors can be broadly interpreted to include any factor that reflects the character of economic activities and resources in the area. This may include the industries that occur in a local government area (or the release of land for these) and the distribution of community assets and infrastructure such as road networks.

(e) Ratio of councillors to electors in the various wards

It is expected that each local government will have similar ratios of electors to councillors across the wards of its district. It is the Board's preference for the ratio between wards to fall between the plus or minus 10% range.

3.3 Current position – Ratio of councillors to electors in the various wards

The existing representation ratios are shown in the following table:

Ward	No of electors	No of councillors	Cr/elector ratio	% Deviation
Ashburton	40	1	40	-88%
Onslow	417	1	417	25%
Pannawonica	286	1	286	-14%
Paraburdoo	650	2	325	-2%
Tablelands	80	1	80	-76%
Tom Price	1524	3	508	53%
Total	2997	9	333	

3.4 Current position – demographic trends

This review has been undertaken utilising the most recent population data available from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

On the available data no material increase in population is predicted. That is, there is no predicted increase in population that might influence the allocation of the number of elected members to respective wards.

Notwithstanding the above and following discussions with the Shire's Chief Executive Officer and senior planning officials, this review has made provision for an increase of 200 electors in the town of Onslow.

This increase is based upon projected growth in the burgeoning tourism industry and major infrastructure investment by the oil and gas sector supporting offshore exploration and mining activities.

This growth is anticipated to occur over the next 4 years which is considered to be an appropriate calculation time frame upon which to inform this review.

The projection has been made acknowledging the constraints of limited available housing land in Onslow and an anticipated high level of fly in fly out labour force activity.

3.5 Current position – community of interests

In the past, the Shire has had 3 “mining based” towns and one “non-mining based” town, being Onslow. This dynamic has changed dramatically in more recent times. While Onslow Salt was established in 1991 and has had an impact on Onslow, the formalisation on the Ashburton North Strategic Industrial Area (ANSIA) Structure Plan in 2011 means that Onslow will become more resource driven in the future. Chevron is currently constructing its Wheatstone Project, a liquefied natural gas project, in the ANSIA. BHP has also commenced processing at the Macedon Plant near Onslow in 2013.

While long term life of mining at Tom Price, Paraburdoo and Pannawonica is well established, it seems that staff expansion preferences at these locations and at the several other aligned and independent mining tenements is shifting from “live in” to “fly in/fly out”. Permanent residents in these towns are predominantly employed by the mining sector and traditionally subject to high levels of turnover or “churn”.

Ashburton has a pastoral community comprising of almost 40 stations and several indigenous communities geographically spread throughout the entire Shire. Tourism interests are also diverse ranging from coastal areas around Onslow to the inland National Parks.

3.6 Current position – physical and topographical features

The pastoral and town boundaries are often features that can be easily used when determining ward boundaries.

Unfortunately, although the Shire has many natural features such as National Parks, rivers and mountain ranges by their nature and location they are less useful in this instance to define boundaries. Straighter man-made features such as roads and railway lines also tend not to be useful for this purpose as they usually terminate at towns within the Shire rather than divide the Shire in a meaningful manner.

In this Shire, physical and topographical characters do not feature strongly in any debate on ward boundaries.

3.7 Current position – economic factors

All major towns in Ashburton are now dependant on resource activities and associated industries. While there have been attempts to grow an independent economy based on tourism, this is not yet entrenched.

Major infrastructure investment in the resources sector does drive economic development and generates significant increase in human activity and movement in both the construction and operation phases.

It follows however that these significant increases in human activity might not directly contribute to increases in permanent resident populations given the propensity of the resource sector to utilise fly in fly out workforces.

This review is based upon the number of electors who are either permanent residents of the Shire or non-residents who qualify as an elector by way of land ownership.

Large scale resource sector development is therefore carefully assessed and analysed prior to making future permanent residential projections.

Onslow has previously had a steady tourism industry, commercial fishing and the Onslow Salt Project, but the boom in resource construction has seen constraints placed on the tourism. Most tourism operators have of recent times, preferred to benefit from high value resource industry customers than lower value camping/fishing/caravanning tourists.

Pastoral stations and remote communities are spread throughout the Shire and generally use the towns to undertake basic business and social activities. There is minimal home ownership in the traditional mining towns compared to Onslow and almost no retirees or pensioners except for Onslow. Average household income for the mining towns is about double the national average.

4. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

4.1 Introduction

This discussion paper has been developed to assist the community in considering options and ideas as well as clarifying factors that will form part of the review. The options presented are a few of the possible options and scenarios that are open to the Shire to consider.

This discussion paper will outline 5 options, and provide an overview of each option assessed against the following matters:

- (a) community of interests;
- (b) physical and topographical features;
- (c) demographic trends;
- (d) economic factors; and
- (e) ratio of elected members to electors in the various wards.

The Shire will determine a preferred option relating to ward boundaries and elected member representation following consideration of all submissions.

4.2 5 Options for discussion

This review sets out 5 options for discussion.

The 5 options are summarised in the following table.

TABLE OF DISCUSSION OPTIONS

Option No.	Option name	Number of wards	Number of ward councillors	Total number of elected members	Shire President elected by the public
1	No change option	6	9	9	No
2	No wards option	0	0	9	Yes
3	5 Wards option	5	8	9	Yes
4	4 Wards option	4	8	9	Yes
5	2 Wards option	2	8	9	Yes

These 5 options are examined in greater detail in the paragraphs that follow.

4.3 OPTION 1 - No Change Option

(1) Description

- No changes to existing number of wards or ward boundaries (i.e., 6 wards)
- No change to the number of councillors (i.e., 9 councillors who include a Shire President elected by the Council).

(2) Arguable strengths

- No change to existing situation. No disruption.

(3) Arguable weaknesses

- The ratios of councillors to electors (“representation ratio”) between wards differs significantly and is far more than the maximum 10% variation preferred by the Board.
- The variation in representation ratios ranges between -88% and +53% and is the largest variation of the options.
- The option is at variance with the position likely to be mandated by government that the Shire President must be elected by all electors and not by the Council.
- The electors have no say in the election of the Shire President.
- If the government implements the announced reforms, then the Shire will be required to carry out another review and to make changes within a relatively short time frame.

(4) Community of interests

- No change.

(5) Physical and topographical features

- No change.

(6) Demographic trends

- This option is not materially affected by demographic trends.

(7) Economic factors

- No change.

(8) Ratio of elected members to electors

- There is no change to the existing representation ratios and this option remains well outside the range preferred by the Local Government Advisory Board.

4.4 OPTION 2 - No Wards Option

(1) Description

- No wards.
- The election of the Shire President by the public and not by the Council.
- No change to the total number of 9 elected members (i.e. a Shire President, elected by all electors, and 8 councillors).

(2) Arguable strengths

- Elected members are elected by all electors of the district and not just one section of the district.
- Members of the community are able to approach all elected members without the perceived barrier of having to approach the ward elected member.
- Each elected member represents the whole district and not a specific ward.
- Social networks and communities of interest are often spread across the district.
- No wards will mean there will be no need for further ward boundary changes in the future and removes any concerns with over or under elected member representation.
- Only one election will be held every 2 years, instead of the current 6 elections that are held every 2 years.

(3) Weaknesses

- Some electors may feel that they are losing their local community representative.
- It may be more difficult to canvass for an election across the entire district.

(4) Community of interests

- Communities of interest are not reflected by the local government boundary.

(5) Physical and topographical features

- The district boundary does not follow any physical or topographic features.

(6) Demographic trends

- This option is not materially affected by demographic trends.

(7) Economic factors

- This option is not materially affected by economic factors.

(8) Ratio of elected members to electors

- This option results in a balanced representation.

4.5 OPTION 3 – 5 Wards Option

(1) Description

- The existing 6 wards would be reduced to 5 by:
 - Combining the existing Ashburton Ward and Tablelands Ward to form a new Rural Remote Ward; and
 - Retaining the existing Onslow, Pannawonica, Paraburdoo and Tom Price wards.
- The result would be a decrease in the size of the variation in the representation ratios as between wards although a very significant variation would remain.
- The new Rural Remote Ward would have a total of 120 electors as a result of combining the Ashburton ward which has 40 electors and the Tablelands ward which has 80 electors.
- The election of the Shire President by the public and not by the Council.
- No change to the total number of elected members (i.e. a Shire President, elected by all electors, plus 8 ward councillors).

(2) Arguable strengths

- The variation of representation ratios is reduced to between -70% and +54% which is marginally better than the existing scenario where the variation is between -88% and +53%.

(3) Arguable weaknesses

- The variation of representation ratios remains significantly outside the Board's recommended position of +/- 10% and is the Option with the second largest variation. It does however represent a material improvement on the current ratios of Ashburton and Tablelands wards.
- Onslow's councillor to elector ratio of 1: 617 provides for an under representation of 54% which might be considered too high given the economic activity and infrastructure development projected in the area.
- If the current electoral population of 417 is applied the variation is 11% which is more than acceptable.

(4) Community of interests

- Community of interests in Onslow, Pannawonica, Paraburdoo and Tom Price wards would not be affected by this proposal.
- The amalgamation of Ashburton and Tablelands Wards into one ward would maintain the shared interests, aspirations and challenges of the residents of pastoral stations and remote communities that are spread throughout the shire.

(5) Physical and topographical features

- The vast area of the proposed ward of around 100000 km² provides for a significant distance between electors.
- No other physical or topographical features have a material impact on this proposal.

(6) Demographic trends

- This option is not materially affected by demographic trends

(7) Economic factors

- This option is not materially affected by economic factors

(8) Ratio of elected members to electors

- The variation of representation ratios remains significantly outside the Board's recommended position of +/- 10% and is the Option with the second largest variation. It does however represent a material improvement on the current ratios of Ashburton and Tablelands wards.

4.6 OPTION 4 – 4 Wards Option

(1) Description

- The existing 6 wards would be reduced to 4 by:
 - incorporating the existing Pastoral Ward into the Onslow ward; and
 - incorporating the existing Tablelands ward into the Tom Price ward.
- The result would be the abolishment of the 2 smallest wards namely the Ashburton ward which has 40 electors and the Tablelands ward which has 80 electors.
- The election of the Shire President by the public and not by the Council.
- No change to the total number of elected members (i.e. a Shire President, elected by all electors, plus 8 ward councillors).

(2) Arguable strengths

- The variation in representation ratios is reduced to between -34% and +28% and is better than the existing scenario.
- The option results in the deletion of the 2 wards which present the greatest and least acceptable variation in the ratios, namely the Ashburton and Tablelands wards.

(3) Arguable weaknesses

- The variation of ratios remains outside the Board's recommended position of +/- 10% and is at greater variance than the No Wards Option and the 2 Wards Option.

- Some electors in the 2 “abolished” wards may feel that they are losing their local community representative.

(4) Community of interests

- Community of interests in Onslow, Pannawonica, Paraburdoo and Tom Price wards would not be affected by this proposal.
- The geographical proximity of Onslow and Tom Price to Ashburton and Tablelands wards imply those town’s roles as hubs for major civic, administrative, health, economic and community services.
- The shared interests, aspirations and challenges of the residents of pastoral stations and remote communities of Ashburton and Tablelands wards would be diluted within the incumbent Onslow and Tom Price populations.

(5) Physical and topographical features

- The vast distances between some remote communities and pastoral stations and the Onslow and Town Price townsites is a significant physical challenge.
- This challenge of distance might be ameliorated by the role that Onslow and Tom Price play as hubs for major civic, administrative, health, economic and community services for the surrounding areas.
- No other physical or topographical features have a material impact on this proposal.

(6) Demographic trends

- This option is not affected by demographic trends.

(7) Economic factors

- This option is not affected by economic trends.

(8) Ratio of elected members to electors

- The variation of representation ratios improves significantly and, whilst 3 of the 4 ratios are outside of the recommended 10% variation, they are an improvement on the current situation.

4.7 Option 5 – 2 Wards Option

(1) Description

- There would be 2 wards only, namely:
 - A new “West Ward” comprising the existing 3 wards of Onslow, Pannawonica and Ashburton; and
 - A new “East Ward” comprising the existing 3 wards of Tom Price, Paraburdoo and Tablelands.
- The election of the Shire President by the public and not by the Council.
- No change to the total number of elected members (i.e. a Shire President, elected by all electors, plus 8 ward councillors).

(2) Arguable strengths

- There would be an 18% variation between the ratio of electors to councillors as between the 2 wards.
- This is greater than the Board’s preferred variation of +/- 10% but is the closest of the options other than the No Wards Option.

(3) Arguable weaknesses

- Some electors may feel that they are losing their local community representative.
- It may be more difficult to canvass for an election across a very large ward.

(4) Community of interests

- Amalgamating two towns (Onslow and Paraburdoo and Tom Price and Pannawonica) and their contiguous rural and remote communities into one ward might expose differences in the prevailing community of interest and sense of place experienced under the current arrangements.
- Onslow, having a broader economic base and burgeoning tourist industry probably conveys a difference sense of place and community than the Pannawonica, a town solely established for the purpose of mining iron ore.

- Recent major developments in Onslow establishing infrastructure to support offshore oil and gas exploration and mining may see the culture of the town shift towards more of a resource sector base thus ameliorating some of the differences between the towns.
- Whilst both being towns were established ostensibly for the purposes of mining iron ore, over time the smaller community of Paraburdoo would have developed a different sense of place, culture and shared aspiration to the larger and arguably more sophisticated Tom Price.
- This difference in sense of place might be ameliorated by the role that Tom Price plays as a hub for major civic, administrative, health, economic and community services for Paraburdoo residents.
- The shared interests and aspirations of the electors of the rural and remote communities of Ashburton and Tablelands wards would be diluted within the incumbent Onslow, Pannawonica, Tom Price and Paraburdoo electorates.

(5) Physical and topographical features

- The proposal seeks to utilise the existing boundary between the Ashburton (west) and Tablelands (east) wards.
- The vast distances between the remote and rural communities and the 2 townsites within each of the proposed wards might present significant logistical and physical challenges.

(6) Demographic trends

- This option is not materially affected by demographic trends.

(7) Economic factors

- This option is not materially affected by economic factors.

(8)Ratio of elected members to electors

- The variation of representation ratios improves significantly and whilst the two ratios are outside of the recommended 10% variation, they are an improvement on the current situation.

4.8 The representation ratios of the 5 Options

The representation ratios for the 5 options are shown in the following 5 tables.

OPTION 1 No Change Option REPRESENTATION RATIO TABLE

Ward	Number of electors	Number of councillors	Representation ratio	% Variation
Ashburton	40	1	40	-88%
Onslow	417	1	417	25%
Pannawonica	286	1	286	-14%
Paraburdoo	650	2	325	-2%
Tablelands	80	1	80	-76%
Tom Price	1524	3	508	53%
Total	2997	9	333	

OPTION 2 No Ward Option REPRESENTATION RATIO TABLE

Ward	Number of electors	Number of elected members	Representation ratio	% Variation
No wards	3197	9	355	0%

OPTION 3
5 Wards Option
REPRESENTATION RATIO TABLE

Ward	Number of electors	Number of councillors	Representation ratio	% Variation
Onslow	617	1	617	54%
Pannawonica	286	1	286	-28%
Paraburdoo	650	2	325	-19%
Rural Remote	120	1	120	-70%
Tom Price	1524	3	508	27%
Total	3197	8	400	

OPTION 4
4 Wards Option
REPRESENTATION RATIO TABLE

Ward	Number of electors	Number of councillors	Representation ratio	% Variation
Onslow	657	2	327	-18%
Pannawonica	286	1	286	-28%
Paraburdoo	650	2	325	-19%
Tom Price	1604	3	534	34%
Total	3197	8	400	

OPTION 5
2 Wards Option
REPRESENTATION RATIO TABLE

Ward	Number of electors	Number of councillors	Representation ratio	% Variation
East	2254	6	376	-6%
West	943	2	472	18%
Total	3197	8	400	

5. SUBMISSIONS

5.1 Public invited to make submissions

Members of the public are invited to make a written submission about any aspect of ward boundaries and representation.

Submissions can express support for, or variation to, any or all of the options discussed above. New options can also be proposed.

5.2 How to make submission

Your written submission should be addressed to the Chief Executive Officer and clearly marked “Ward and Representation Review” and can be lodged by any of the following methods:

- Online Submission: www.ashburton.wa.gov.au
- Email to: soa@ashburton.wa.gov.au
- In person at any Shire of Ashburton office
- Post to: Shire of Ashburton
PO Box 567, Tom Price WA 6751

All submissions must be received by 4.30pm on Friday 13 January 2023.

5.3 Submission form

A submission form is provided at the end of this document for your convenience. See Annexure B. You do not have to use this form for your written public submission.

6. ANNEXURES AND FORMS

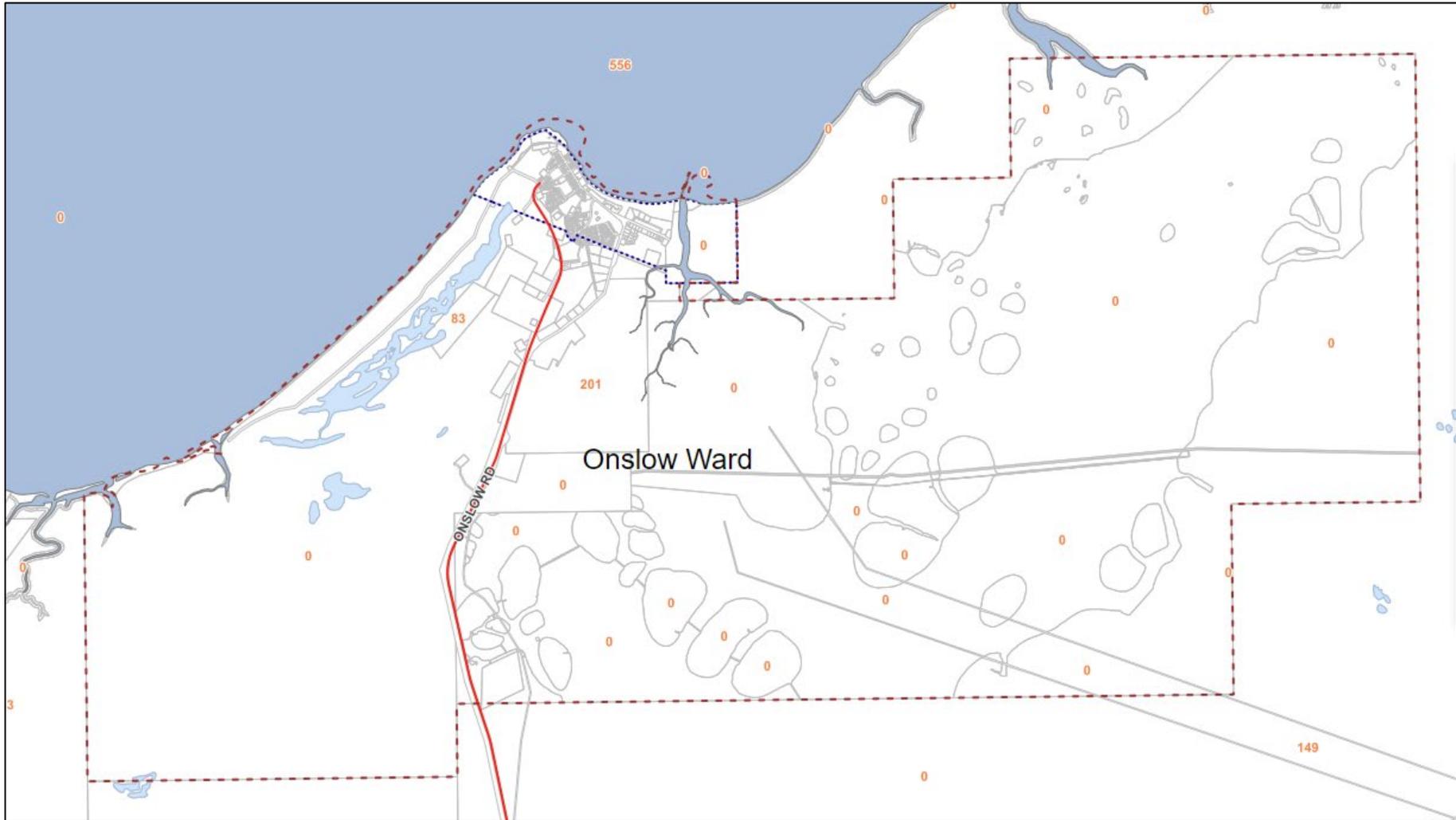
6.1 Annexure A – Maps

This legend is provided for assistance when reading the following maps.

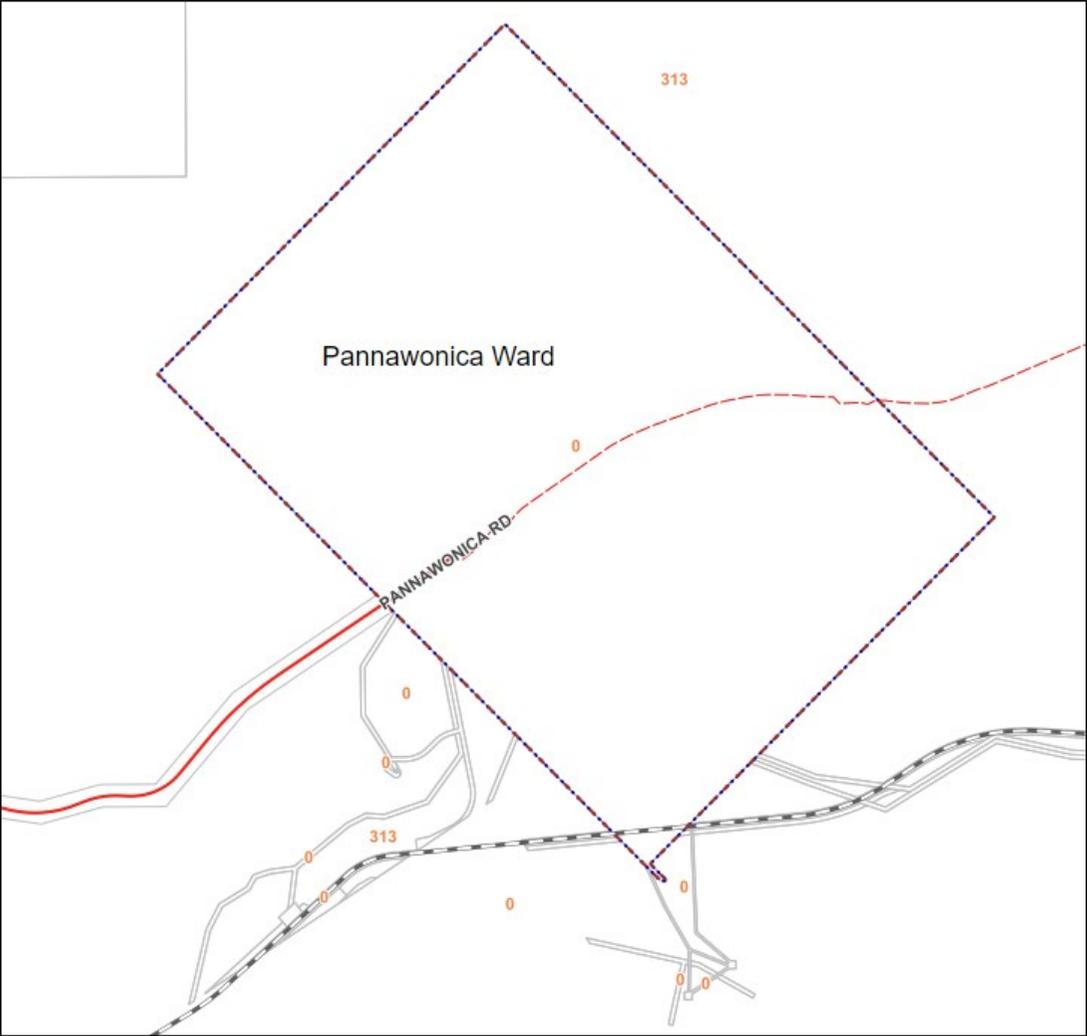
LEGEND	
Az	Towns of Pilbara
Az	Tom Price
Az	Paraburdoo
Az	Onslow
Az	Pannawonnica
•	Places
///	wards
///	ASHBURTON WARD
///	ONSLow WARD
///	PANNAWONICA WARD
///	PARABURDOO WARD
///	TABLELAND WARD
///	TOM PRICE WARD
~	LGA Boundary
□	Surrounding LGA Boundaries
~	Pilbara Major Roads
~	Sealed
~	Unsealed
~	Railway
■	Water Bodies
■	Crown Reserves
■	Town Boundaries

Note: Option 2 is a “no ward” option so maps are not applicable.

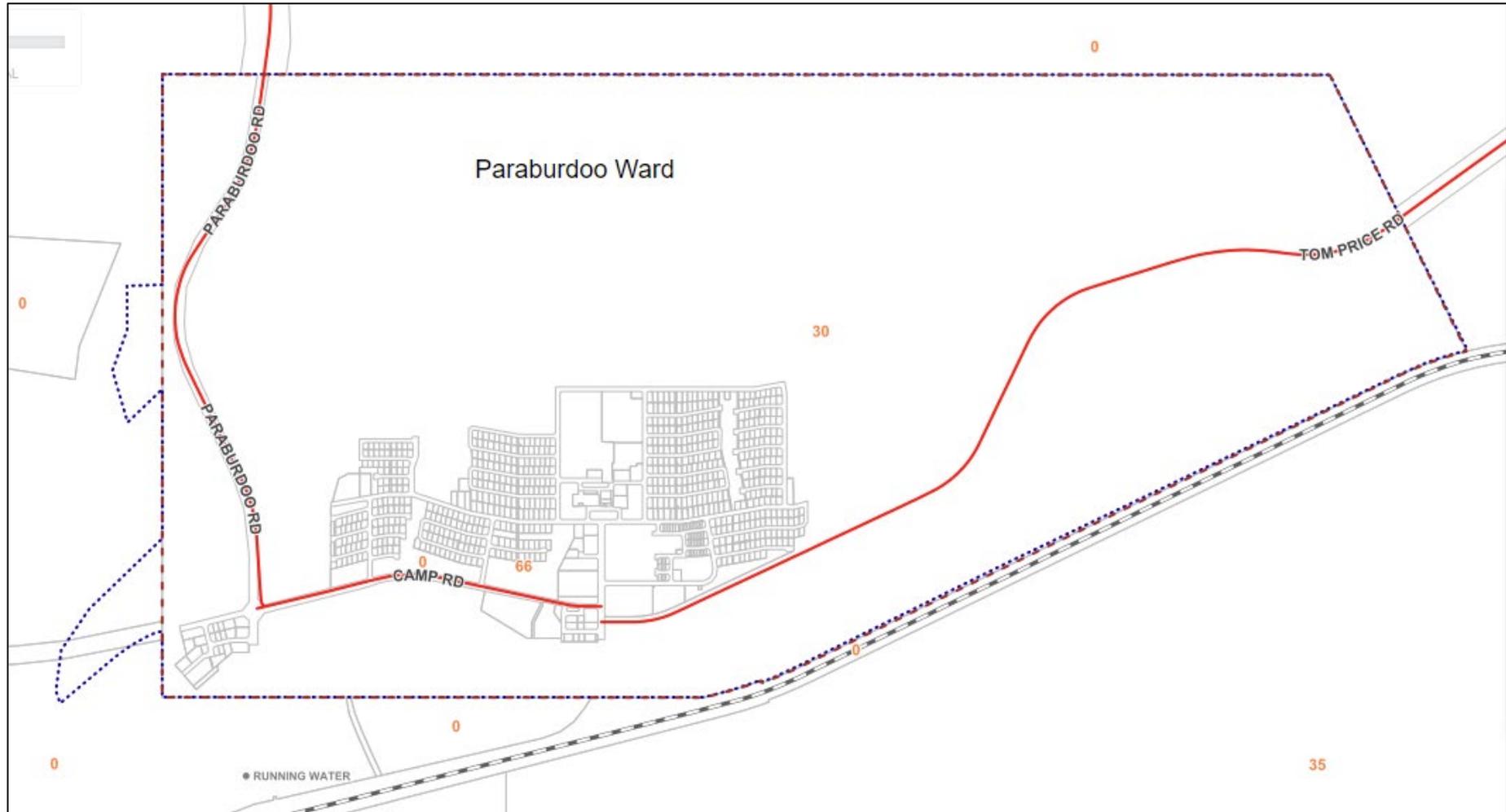
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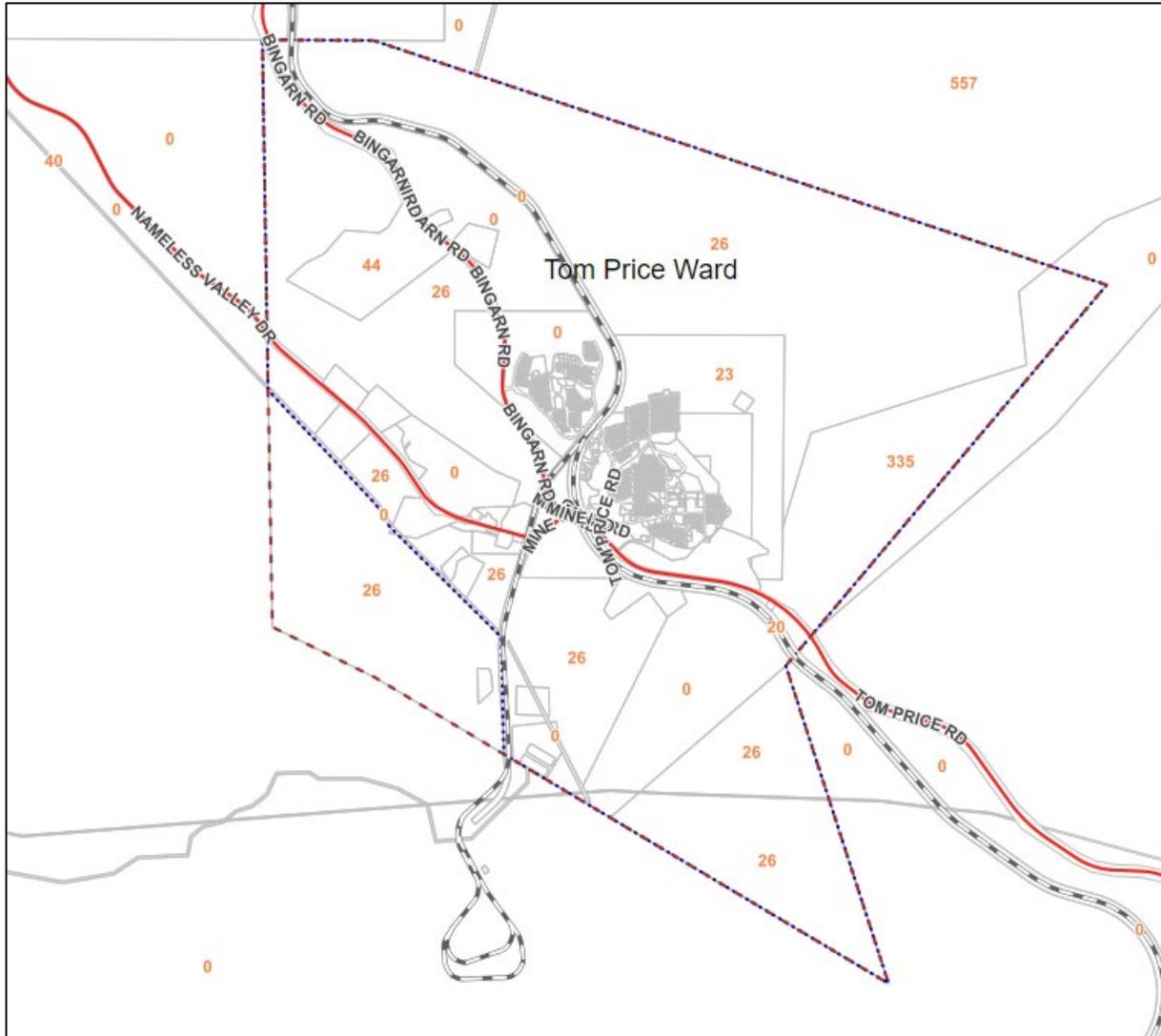
Current Pannawonica Ward



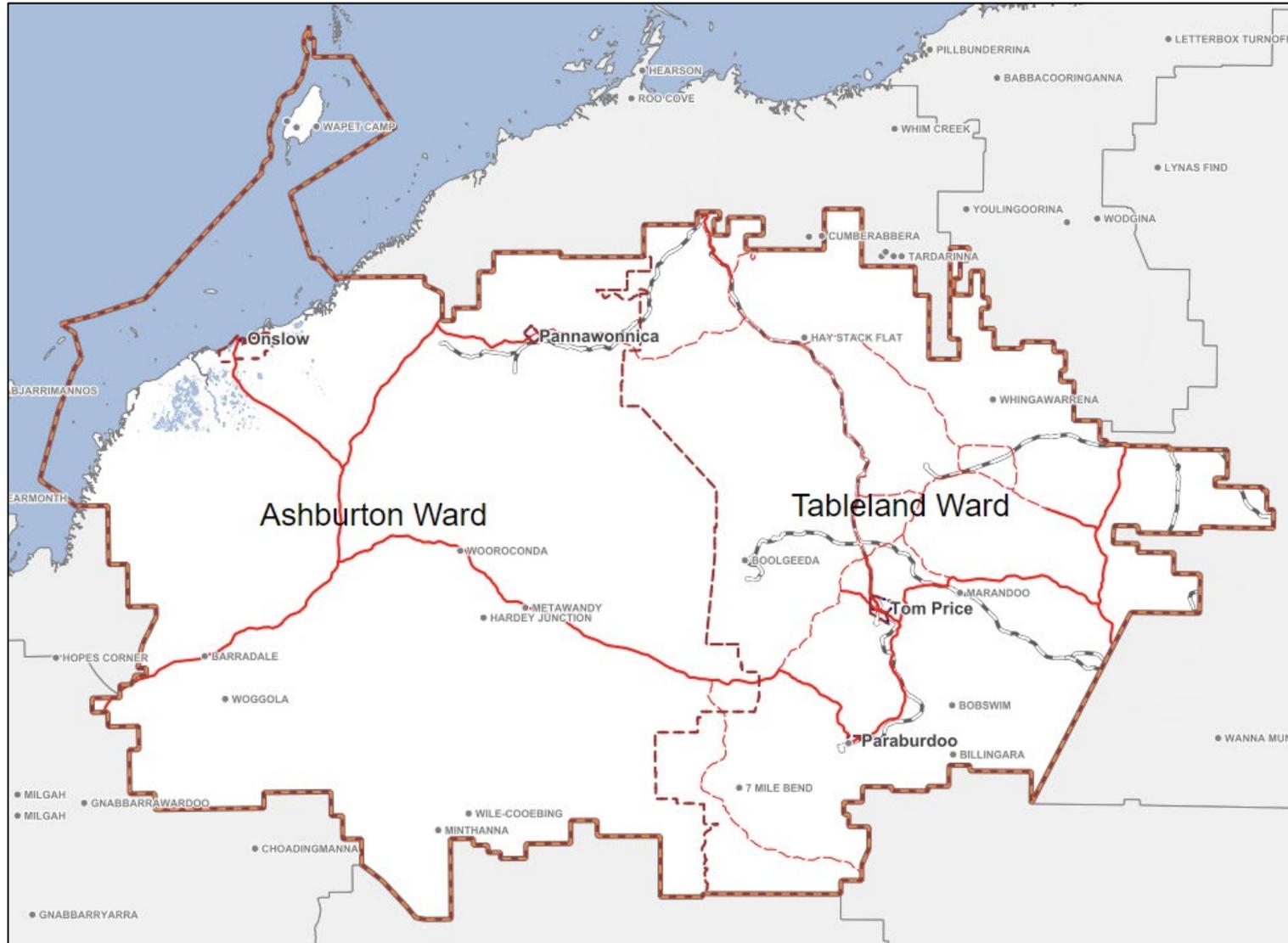
Current Paraburdoo Ward



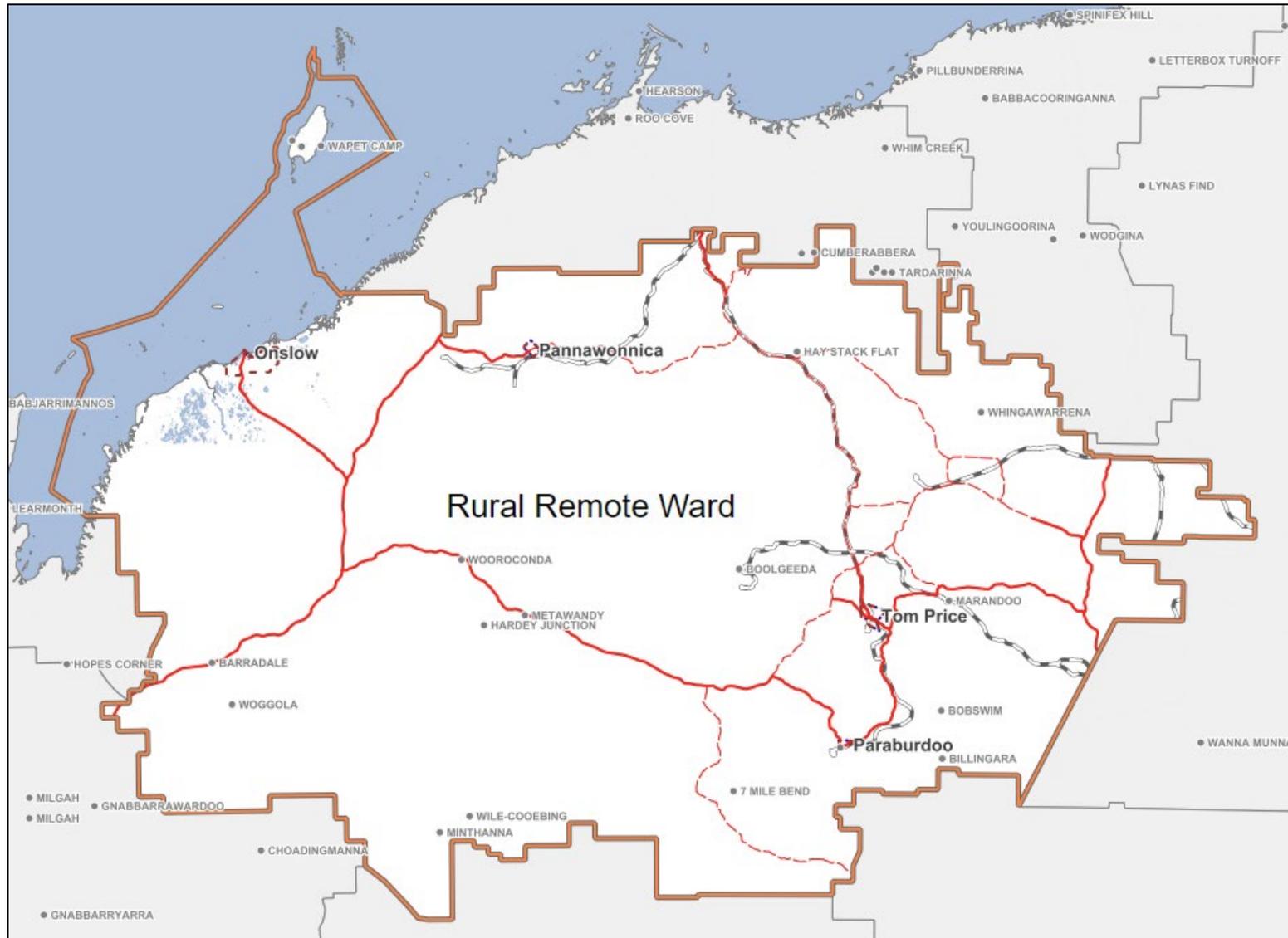
Current Tom Price Ward



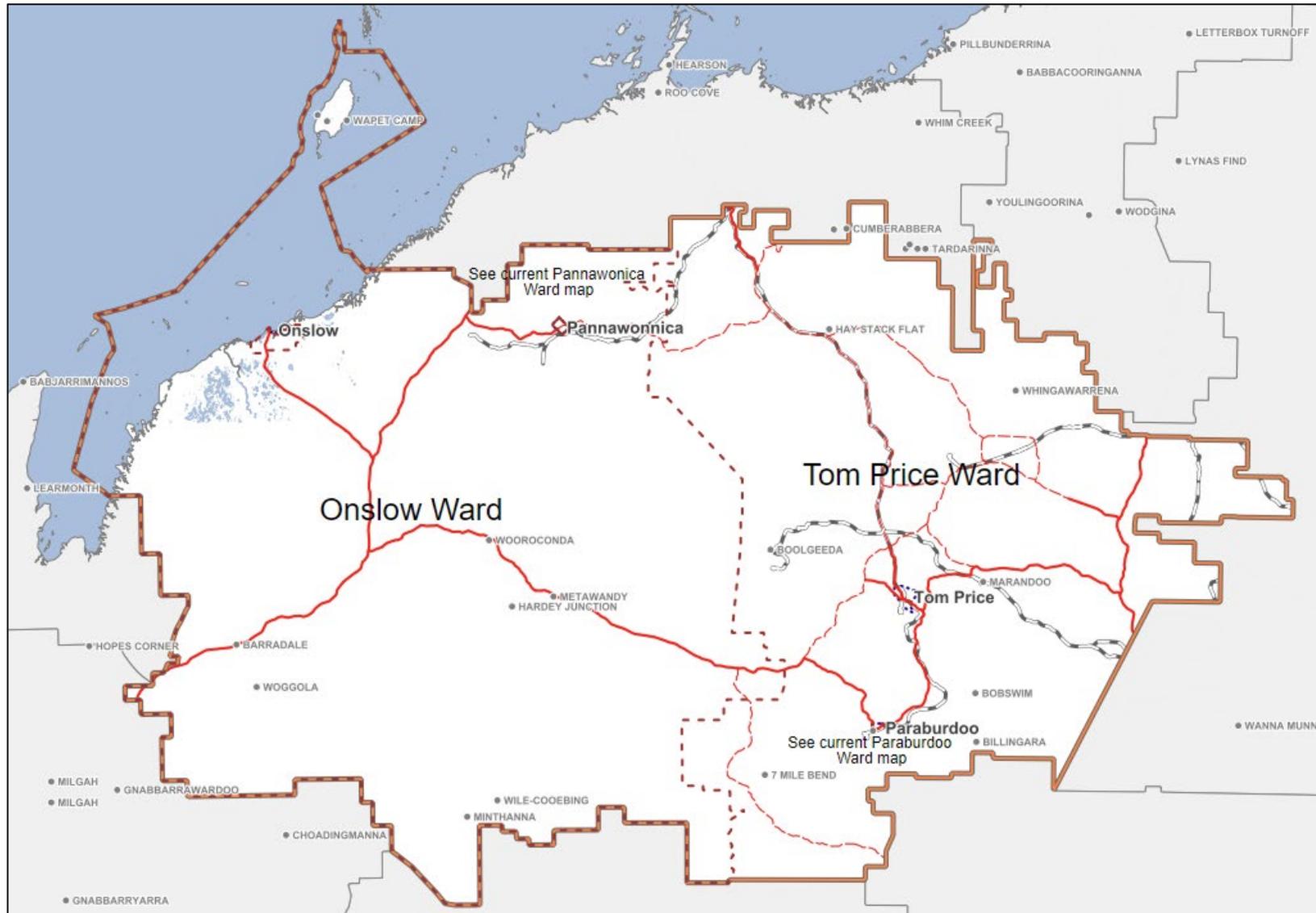
Existing option 1 - Current Ward Boundaries



New option 3 – 5 Wards



New Option 4 – 4 Wards



6.2 Annexure B – Submission form

Name / Organisation _____

I / We support Option _____

I / We Support a different option as follows

My / Our Reasons are as follows

Please feel free to add more pages to your submission