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EDITORIAL

Council unease lingers

SO what comes next? It's a valid question following Local Government Minister Natalie Hutchins' announcement that the State Government would shelve Geelong's directly-elected mayor model and revert to a 11-councillor, four-ward structure.

Ms Hutchins decision, based on the recommendations of the Geelong Citizens' Jury, opens the door for many questions before locals return to the polls on October 28.

What will be the geographical and suburban makeup of those wards?

What will be instituted to prevent a return to the party political backroom deals of years past?

And is the directly-elected mayor model — still successfully employed by Melbourne City Council — dead and buried forever?

The Government has declared that this decision does not rule out a return to the popularly-elected mayor model in Geelong's future, which poses the question as to the point and lasting validity of the whole exercise.

The Citizens' Jury concept was a smart way to promote inclusiveness and democracy in the aftermath of the Geelong council sacking. By taking the issues back to the people — in

this case a committee of diverse civic-minded locals. It empowered ordinary residents with input on fixing a system that had been broken in the hands of those presumably more experienced or qualified.

That the Government chose to then adopt the Jury's recommendations also strengthened the legitimacy of the exercise. But it is curious that in listening to the jury, the Government chose to overlook the experience of Geelong's only two popularly-elected mayors, both of whom advocated for a model identical to Melbourne — including an elected deputy on the same ticket.

It seems the former government erred when it first instituted the hybrid mayoral model. Let's hope the current one hasn't done the same in its haste to establish a democratic voting structure in time for this year's polls.