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Electoral District: Hinchinbrook

Submission:

I wish to formally object to the proposed expansion of the Hinchinbrook electorate.

While I acknowledge the Commission's obligation to ensure electorates meet the required enrolment quota, I do not believe quota compliance alone justifies the scale and shape of the proposed Hinchinbrook electorate. The Commission itself states that, in addition to quota, it must consider community of interest, ways of communication and travel, physical features, existing boundaries and demographic trends.

In my view, the proposed Hinchinbrook boundary gives too much weight to the numbers and not enough to the practical reality of how North Queensland communities function.

The proposal appears to create an electorate stretching across an extremely large and complex coastal corridor, effectively sitting between Townsville and Cairns. Although this may solve a numerical issue on paper, it risks producing an electorate that is too broad, too diverse and too fragmented to represent effectively. Communities in this part of North Queensland do not simply exist as a continuous line on a map. They rely on major regional hubs, particularly Townsville and Cairns, for employment, health services, education, government services, commercial activity and transport connections. Those links are not incidental; they are central to daily life and to the way these communities identify themselves. An electorate structure that leaves these communities "in between" those centres weakens those natural alignments rather than reflecting them.

A major concern is that the proposal dilutes community of interest. The Commission has said that community of interest includes economic, social, regional and other factors, and that localities should be united within the same district to the extent practicable.

The problem here is that the proposed Hinchinbrook electorate appears to group together communities that may share a coastline but do not necessarily share the same dominant service catchments, regional identity or practical day-to-day focus. In reality, many communities in this corridor orient either north or south depending on where they access services and maintain stronger economic and social ties. If these communities are bundled into one enlarged electorate, their natural connections risk being overridden by an arbitrary boundary solution driven mainly by enrolment.

That is a bad outcome for representation. Good representation is not just

about whether an MP can point to a map and say all communities are included. It is about whether residents feel that their electorate reflects how they live, where they travel, where they receive services and which regional centres shape their lives. Where an electorate becomes too large and too stretched, there is a real risk that smaller communities are no longer represented as part of a coherent district, but instead become peripheral parts of a long, difficult-to-manage seat.

The proposal also raises serious concerns in relation to communication and travel. The Commission has expressly said it must consider ways of communication and travel within electoral districts and, where possible, aim for all parts of a district to be accessible from within the district.

That principle matters greatly in regional Queensland. A geographically enlarged Hinchinbrook electorate would place a significant burden on effective representation simply because of the distance between communities and the practical challenges of servicing such a broad area. Even where a highway connects towns, that does not mean the electorate is manageable in any real community sense. Long travel distances, competing regional priorities and dispersed population centres make it harder for any Member of Parliament to maintain a visible, accessible and responsive presence across the whole district.

That problem is not theoretical. It affects constituents directly. The larger and more stretched the electorate becomes, the harder it is for residents in smaller communities to have regular access to their elected representative. Local issues risk being overshadowed by the larger or louder population centres within the seat. Constituents may be technically represented, but in practice feel remote from decision-making and advocacy. That is exactly the kind of outcome a redistribution should avoid.

There is also a broader regional representation concern. The report recognises that many submissions raised concerns about diminished representation in regional electorates, and that the Commission was conscious of the difficulties involved in servicing large and diverse areas and constituencies.

Those concerns are especially important in North Queensland, where distance, decentralisation and service dependency on regional hubs are far more pronounced than in metropolitan areas. Enlarging Hinchinbrook may help balance enrolment figures, but it risks doing so at the expense of meaningful representation. When regional electorates become too large or too mixed in character, the result is not stronger democracy. It is weaker local advocacy and less effective connection between residents and Parliament.

Another problem is that the proposal risks creating an electorate without a clear regional focus. Communities that rely on Townsville and communities that rely on Cairns do not cease to have those loyalties and service patterns simply because a redistribution places them together. Instead, they may end up in an electorate that does not properly reflect either sphere of influence. In practical terms, that means communities can become politically stranded,

connected administratively to one electorate but socially and economically tied elsewhere. That is not a sound basis for drawing boundaries.

It is also concerning that such an approach may create ongoing instability. The Commission has said demographic trends must be considered with a view to avoiding the need for another redistribution being triggered early.

If a district is constructed in a way that already stretches its internal coherence, then future growth, service demand and shifting regional pressures may only make those weaknesses more obvious over time. An electorate that works only because the arithmetic currently fits is not necessarily an electorate that will work well in practice.

In short, my objection is that the proposed Hinchinbrook electorate may satisfy enrolment requirements, but it does not adequately satisfy the equally important principles of community of interest, accessibility, travel practicality and effective regional representation. It creates the risk of an electorate that is too large, too stretched and too disconnected from the way North Queensland communities actually function. It would leave many communities caught between major regional centres, without a clear sense that the electorate reflects their real economic and social relationships.

For those reasons, I urge the Commission to reconsider the proposed Hinchinbrook boundaries and adopt an alternative configuration that better reflects the natural service catchments, regional affiliations and practical representational needs of the communities concerned.