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Electoral District: Hill; Flinders (formerly Traeger)

Submission:

See below

Submission Attachments

Email - Gail Barton - COC Submission to Members.pdf



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9 April 2026

Queensland Redistribution Commission
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Dear Commissioners

SUBMISSION ON THE PROPOSED REDISTRIBUTION OF MALANDA, MILLAA MILLAA AND RAVENSHOE INTO THE STATE SEAT OF FLINDERS

The Malanda Chamber of Commerce supports and represents local businesses by promoting economic growth, encouraging collaboration and hosting community and business events that help to create a strong and active business community in the region (**the Chamber**). The Chamber welcomes the opportunity to make a submission in the Queensland Redistribution Commission's (**the Commission**) consultation process.

This submission will set out the Chamber's objection to the Commission's proposal to abolish the electoral district of Hill and transfer Malanda, Millaa Millaa, Ravenshoe and surrounding Southern Tablelands communities into the proposed seat of Flinders (**the redistribution**). The redistribution would divide the Tablelands Regional Council (**TRC**) local government area between two state electorates, Mulgrave and Flinders, contrary to the clearly expressed position of TRC, its Mayor and CEO, and the broader local community.

The Chamber supports TRC's consistent recommendation that the entire TRC area be incorporated within Mulgrave. This approach aligns with the principles of the *Electoral Act 1992* (Qld) (**the Act**), particularly the requirement to consider community of interests, communication and travel links, physical geography, and existing administrative boundaries, alongside population quotas.

Flexibility provisions of the Commission

The Chamber appreciates the framework the Commission is bound by, namely section 45 of the Act, which provides for enrolled elector quotas subject to the geographical size of the seat. However, the Act also prescribes a range of additional matters that must be considered by the Commission in proposed redistributions, including the:

1. extent to which there is a **community of economic, social**, regional or other interests within each proposed electoral district;
2. **ways of communication and travel** within each proposed electoral district;
3. **physical features** of each proposed electoral district;
4. boundaries of existing electoral districts; and
5. demographic trends in the State
(**emphasis added**).

The Commission may also consider the boundaries of local government areas in relation to determining community of interest. The Commission is given broad discretion in the way these criteria are weighed and applied.

Solving a numerical issue by adding population numbers from affected TRC communities, where the communities have almost no commonality with others in the proposed district of Flinders, will make fair representation more difficult for all involved. It also creates serious inefficiencies for our representation at both State and Local Government levels. The redistribution proposal demonstrates an administrative decision that, in our opinion, has not genuinely considered the disruption to our community of Malanda and the other southern Tablelands townships and areas impacted by the proposed change.

Local government councils in regional Queensland are widely recognised for severely stretched budgets as their rate-paying bases are small and finances increasingly stretched by steady population growth and rapidly increasing repair and maintenance costs due to aging infrastructure and regular damage from severe weather events. This is certainly the case for TRC and splitting the TRC region into two state electorates clearly increases inefficiencies, requiring communities to engage and lobby two state Members of Parliament (and their offices) for funding support and specific large project grants to maintain the standard quality of life and services provided.

The redistribution is not simply a matter of lines on a map and population numbers in each district; it is about community interest and the daily lives of the more than 8,000 people who call the Southern Tablelands home. At the 2021 census population figures for the Southern Tablelands totalled 7,837 and considering recent growth estimates we expect the 2026 census will confirm a population that now exceeds 8,650 and may well exceed 9,000.

Acknowledging community of interests

The redistribution fails to consider the strong economic, social, and regional connections between the Southern Tablelands and Cairns and the broader Far North Queensland coastal region. The Malanda and Millaa Millaa communities work with and rely on the Cairns region for healthcare, education, transport, trade, and tourism. In contrast, the redistribution would align these wet-tropics communities with geographically distant and economically distinct dry-tropics and mining-based regions in North-West Queensland, with which they share little commonality.

The communities of Malanda, Millaa Millaa, Ravenshoe (and communities to their west) which are proposed to fall within Flinders, do not share strong community interests as local governments which would fall within Flinders i.e., Mount Isa, Burke, Doomadgee, Charters Towers, Mornington, Cloncurry, McKinlay, Croydon, Etheridge, Richmond and Flinders.

Malanda, Millaa Millaa and Ravenshoe look east, over the Gillies and Kuranda Ranges, to Cairns. This is where our communities take their children for specialist medical care, regularly access interstate and international travel hubs and send their young adults for university and TAFE training, where they trade their produce and welcome their visitors. The districts of Cairns and Mulgrave are not just neighbours; they share our community's interests and are a critical part of our economic supply chain. Our local community feels harshly and unfairly considered in the proposed redistribution.

Geographically, Malanda, Millaa Millaa and Ravenshoe are wet-tropics areas with environmental, regulatory, planning and development synchronicities and obligations with Mulgrave. In contrast, Flinders is a dry-tropics area with little commonality between our environments. Road and infrastructure assets in wet-tropics areas require very different maintenance and improvement schedules to those in the dry-tropics, as do the natural disaster and weather events between the regions.

As documented by the TRC, the strength of the Atherton Tablelands connections is borne out in the numbers. In 2023/24, the Tablelands area generated a Gross Regional Product of \$1.45 billion. Agriculture alone employs 16.3% of the TRC regional workforce, over five times the Queensland average, and depends on Cairns for freight, logistics and market access. The Tablelands has very significant dairy, horticulture (avocado, macadamia, mango, blueberry), cropping (potatoes, peanuts, maize), sugar cane and coffee enterprises that are not viable with environmental and soil type changes as one moves north and west from the Tablelands.

The tourism sector contributed \$275 million to the Atherton Tablelands in 2025, marketed

as a unique “reef to rainforest” experience in partnership with Cairns and Port Douglas. By contrast, mining accounts for less than one percent of registered businesses in our region, underscoring how little connection exists with Traeger’s current economy, which will be similar to the proposed state seat of Flinders. Marketing tourism experiences and maintaining economically viable supply chains are very different tasks for local and state government representatives in the Atherton Tablelands compared to the North-West of Queensland. Transferring wet-tropics towns into Flinders risks a serious watering down of the economic activity that supports these important Far North Queensland population centres.

The Chamber also emphasises its strong social and community ties with communities to our east, in Mulgrave. Almost 88% of the TRC workforce live and work locally, and those who commute outward overwhelmingly travel to Cairns or Mareeba. This economically significant workforce flow goes both ways: Cairns residents also travel up the ranges to work in many industries e.g., schools, hospitals and farms.

Our young people pursue training and study at James Cook University and TAFE in Cairns, while families regularly rely on its hospitals for specialist care that simply cannot be accessed locally. These connections are the daily, practical, and enduring rhythms of ordinary life in the Tablelands.

The TRC, and our very active Chamber, have long-standing and strong participation in, and support, the Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils, Tourism Tropical North Queensland, Advance Cairns, and peak Far North Queensland (**FNQ**) advocacy groups such as FNQ Growers. Our Tablelands communities have inherent links to State FNQ District Offices/Directors based out of Cairns including those for critical infrastructure and supply chain matters such as roads, energy, planning, traffic, trade and agriculture.

Mulgrave borders our TRC region and shares our travel routes, planning frameworks, priorities, and everyday connections. It is the natural fit for the Tablelands and, if Hill must be abolished in this proposed redistribution, the Chamber strongly supports the TRC position that all of the TRC local government area is encompassed by Mulgrave.

For the reasons detailed above, the Chamber submits that our TRC should be transferred in its entirety to Mulgrave. This would preserve our communities of interest, ensure fair and practical representation, and keep the Tablelands aligned with the centres with which we already share a deep and long-standing connection.

The Chamber submits that the proposed redistribution prioritises numerical quotas over practical representation and long-standing community cohesion. It urges the Commission to adopt a more flexible, regionally responsive approach and to include the entirety of the

TRC within Mulgrave, thereby preserving long-standing community connections and fair representation for Southern Tablelands residents.

Fair and Practical Representation

Critically, the redistribution will significantly reduce effective representation. Travel time from Malanda to the proposed electorate centre of Mount Isa would increase from approximately 20 minutes to over 11 hours, limiting access to elected representatives and undermining democratic and community engagement. The current wet season highlights these difficulties as road access to Mount Isa has not been possible for multiple periods of time due to flooding and cyclonic storm events.

The State Member for Hill summarised in his submission to the Commission, the proposal to abolish Hill and split the TRC region into Mulgrave and Flinders is deeply flawed. The redistribution would significantly reduce fair and effective representation for the people of Northern Queensland. The Member for Hill notes that the TRC has voiced strong objections to the proposal, noting the destructive impact it would have on local communities. Local public support for the redistribution to our knowledge is non-existent as our community expects community representation to remain central to and be transparently apparent in redistribution decisions.

The Chamber supports the Member for Hill's position that redistribution in Northern Queensland requires flexibility and prioritisation of practical and fair representation that cannot be assessed by quotas alone. Our expectation is that the Commission prioritise the consideration of the sheer distances, remoteness, travel difficulties, and logistics involved in servicing electorates across Northern Queensland.

Unlike urban and inner-city electorates, elected representatives in Northern Queensland cover thousands of kilometres, multiple distinct communities, and vast geographic and economic diversity. Decisions should reflect these realities rather than apply criteria largely formulated to achieve balanced representation in metropolitan areas. Even with the proposed redistribution reducing the size of Flinders to 395,770 km² this is nearly ten times the physical size of most metropolitan electorates. Representing these very large State electorates is already very onerous on the elected representatives and this burden would increase with the inclusion of new areas within the electorate that do not share communities of interest.

We trust the Commission and the Queensland Parliament understand that moving our State representation from Atherton (the current seat of Hill) to Mount Isa (in Flinders) makes regular face-to-face contact with our State Member of Parliament hugely difficult.

We appreciate the rationale provided by the Commission for their proposed electoral boundary changes, but we do not recognise any other community that is equally impacted by these proposals as Malanda and our adjacent Southern Tablelands centres, if the redistribution is adopted.

The position of the TRC

We note that the TRC strongly opposes the redistribution, as the local government area of TRC would be divided between two State districts, Mulgrave and the proposed Flinders (formerly Traeger) districts.

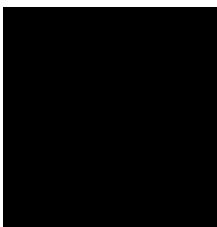
The Chamber supports the publicly stated views of our Mayor, Rod Marti and TRC CEO, Dr Nikola Stepanov, that the community's interests are best served if the whole of the TRC local government area is within Mulgrave, not divided between Mulgrave and Flinders.

The TRC put this position to the Commission in September 2025 during the initial consultation period. It has now reinforced this view in a recent submission to the Commission objecting to the proposed splitting of the TRC regional area into two state seats, Mulgrave and Flinders.

On behalf of our broad Malanda community and our 78 Chamber business members, we respectfully request your genuine consideration of our submission. The negative impacts the redistribution would have on our community are real and demonstrates the need for the Commission to consider alternatives.

We would welcome the opportunity to further assist the Commission's work. Should you require any further information, please contact me.

Yours faithfully,



Gail Barton

President

Malanda Chamber of Commerce

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