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Submission:

Palm Island has long-standing and substantial social, cultural, economic, and service-based connections with the City of Townsville. These connections underpin the community's participation in education, health, employment, and regional governance. Moving Palm Island into the Hinchinbrook electorate would disrupt these community-of-interest ties, as residents rely heavily on Townsville for essential services, including:

- Hospital and specialist medical care;
- Education pathways;
- Employment and training opportunities; and
- Government and non-government agency services that are based in Townsville.

By contrast, Palm Island has limited social or economic interaction with the Hinchinbrook district. Hinchinbrook's population centres including Ingham and surrounding rural localities, differ markedly in demographic composition, service provision, and regional focus.

Palm Island residents are actively engaged with health initiatives based in Townsville, including programs such as the *First 1,000 Days Social and Emotional Wellbeing Program* and services provided by the Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Health Service (TAIHS). TAIHS delivers culturally appropriate, primary and preventive health care, chronic disease management, mental health support, and youth and family programs specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. These programs rely on strong links with Townsville hospitals, clinics, and broader health infrastructure to ensure continuity of care, particularly for residents who require specialist or emergency services. The reliance on TAIHS and Townsville-based health initiatives demonstrates that Palm Island's social, health, and service interests are intrinsically tied to Townsville, rather than the Hinchinbrook electorate.

The Local Thriving Communities reform is a Queensland Government initiative designed to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities by ensuring that government services, decision-making, and resource allocation align with local needs and social linkages. The reform emphasises community-led solutions, culturally appropriate service delivery, and integration of programs across health, education, and social services. This principle directly supports the argument that Palm Island should remain within the Townsville electorate: the community's health, education, and social services are closely linked to Townsville, not Hinchinbrook, and moving the community would disrupt these established service and social connections, undermining effective representation and access to culturally appropriate programs.

Representation and Accessibility

The *Electoral Act 1992* emphasises the importance of effective representation,

including practical accessibility to the Member of Parliament. Townsville-based representation ensures proximity to the administrative and service centres that Palm Islanders regularly access.

If Palm Island were moved to the Hinchinbrook electorate, the community's capacity to engage directly with their elected representative would be significantly reduced, given:

- the physical separation — Palm Island's regular ferry and air services operate to and from Townsville, whereas transport links to Lucinda (in the Hinchinbrook electorate) are limited;
- the logistical barriers to travel to Hinchinbrook; and
- the absence of any local constituency office presence in the Palm Island–Townsville service corridor.

In effect, representation from a Hinchinbrook-based MP would be geographically and practically disconnected from Palm Island residents' daily realities.

Cultural Continuity and Indigenous Representation

Palm Island's population is overwhelmingly Aboriginal, with deep cultural and historical ties to the Townsville region. Maintaining Palm Island within the Townsville electorate supports ongoing partnerships between Aboriginal communities and urban service providers, which have been built over decades to address intergenerational disadvantage.

Relocating the community to a predominantly rural electorate focussed on agribusiness with limited Indigenous population and infrastructure would risk diluting the community's voice and reducing cultural understanding within its new representation base.

An example of the contrast in community priorities can be seen in the 2024 Queensland election for the Hinchinbrook electorate. The candidates focused largely on roads, services, agriculture, water security, infrastructure, and environmental protection – reflecting the region's rural and economic interests. A recent incident involving a local Member of Parliament highlights how disconnected these priorities can be from the realities faced by residents of Palm Island. Earlier this year, a Hinchinbrook MP shared photos on social media showing themselves and friends drinking alcohol on a boat trip to one of the outer islands in the Palm Island group, with the location publicly tagged. The MP later stated they were unaware that the smaller outer islands were included in the Alcohol Management Plan. This incident stresses how far removed the issues and perspectives of the Hinchinbrook electorate are from the lived experiences and governance challenges of the Palm Island community.

CONCLUSION

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities should, where practicable, be located within electorates that reflect their service and social linkages, rather than strictly geographic proximity. Keeping Palm Island in the Townsville electorate is consistent with this principle and avoids fragmenting regional representation of this Aboriginal community.