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Submission:

Cairns Regional Council objects to the Queensland Redistribution Commission's 2026 electoral boundary proposal due to its adverse impacts on Far North Queensland representation. The proposal includes abolishing the electorate of Hill and expanding Mulgrave into the Atherton Tablelands, reducing its alignment with the Cairns Local Government Area. Council argues there is no enrolment-based justification for these changes, as northern electorates already sit within required quota thresholds. The removal of Hill would reduce regional representation while additional seats are created in southeast Queensland, further skewing parliamentary balance toward metropolitan areas. The proposed boundaries would also fragment established communities of interest, weakening connections between residents, services and governance structures. Council recommends retaining the electorate of Hill and realigning Mulgrave's southern and western boundaries with the Cairns LGA to ensure cohesive representation, stronger regional advocacy, and better alignment with community, economic and service relationships across Far North Queensland.

Submission Attachments

Cairns Regional Council submission to the Queensland Redistribution Commission review 2026.pdf

Proposal for the Redistribution of the State's Electoral Districts

Cairns Regional Council Objection

25 March 2026



Executive summary

Far North Queensland is one of the most geographically vast and economically significant regions in Queensland. This submission raises objections to the Proposal for the Redistribution of the State's Electoral Districts released in March 2026 (the Proposal). The submission objects to the impacts of the Proposal on Far North Queensland, particularly the realignment of the Mulgrave electorate boundaries and the proposed abolition of the electorate of Hill.

The proposed realignment of the Mulgrave electorate shifts its focus further away from the Cairns Local Government Area toward a larger portion of the Atherton Tablelands. This change would reduce the electorate's alignment with the Cairns Local Government footprint and its core community of interest.

In addition, the Proposal would see the current electorate of Hill abolished with electors absorbed by surrounding electorates, including Mulgrave, Hinchinbrook and Flinders. This change would reduce electoral representation across Far North Queensland.

The proposed changes outlined above would create significant fragmentation between communities of interest and electoral boundaries. Such fragmentation has the potential to adversely impact effective community representation and engagement.

Accordingly, this submission recommends that the Queensland Redistribution Commission (QRC) revise the proposed configuration of the Mulgrave electorate boundaries and retain the Hill electorate to better reflect alignment of communities of interest and existing local government boundaries, while also maintaining the existing level of political representation from Far North Queensland in the Queensland Government.

Recommendations

1. Adjust the proposed southern and western boundaries of the Mulgrave electorate to directly align with the Cairns Local Government Area boundaries.
2. Retain the electorate of Hill.

It is noted that the second recommendation is mutually exclusive from the first, i.e. should the abolition of Hill proceed (despite Cairns Regional Council objecting to it), the proposed western and southern boundaries of Mulgrave should still be revised to directly align with the boundaries of the Cairns LGA to ensure aligned and effective representation of connected communities of interest centred within the Cairns region.

Minor adjustments have also been proposed for the Barron River and Cairns electorates. Cairns Regional Council does not object to these proposed changes.

Introduction

The Queensland Redistribution Commission (QRC) is required under the *Electoral Act 1992* to periodically review electoral boundaries to ensure that each electorate contains a similar number of electors and reflects community interests.

The current redistribution process has been triggered as more than seven and a half years have passed since the previous redistribution was finalised in 2017.

In undertaking this process, the QRC considered a range of factors including:

- communities of interest
- demographic trends
- communication and travel patterns
- physical features
- existing boundaries.

While achieving enrolment equality is essential, it is also important that the resulting electorates provide coherent representation for communities and reflect established regional identities.

As part of the review process, the QRC undertook community consultation in 2025. The QRC is now seeking submissions of objection to the Proposal for the Redistribution of the State's Electoral Districts released in March 2026 (the Proposal).

Cairns Regional Council's objection to the Proposal is based on significant changes proposed in Far North Queensland, most notably the increased misalignment between the electoral boundaries for the seat of Mulgrave and the Cairns Regional Council Local Government Area and the proposed abolition of the electorate of Hill and the redistribution of its territory among neighbouring electorates.

Reduced representation for Far North Queensland

The proposed redistribution recommends abolishing the electorate of Hill, with its area redistributed among neighbouring electorates including Mulgrave, Hinchinbrook and Flinders.

The electorate of Hill was created during the 2017 redistribution and is centred on the Atherton Tablelands, incorporating communities across the Tablelands region as well as parts of Cairns, Cassowary Coast and Mareeba local government areas.

Under the Electoral Act 1992, the Queensland Redistribution Commission must ensure each electoral district remains within plus or minus 10 per cent of the average enrolment quota. The Commission must also consider factors such as economic, social and regional communities of interest. These legislated criteria are intended to maintain fair representation while recognising logical communities of interest across the state.

Council has considered both the enrolment quota requirements and the broader economic and social links between communities in northern Queensland. Table 1 below summarises current and projected electoral enrolments for the existing northern Queensland electorates (as classified by QRC) and the two Large Districts (as classified by QRC) – Cook and Traeger – with connections to this region, and compares them with the statutory quota thresholds.

The analysis groups electorates based on their primary economic and social connection to either the Cairns or the Townsville/Mackay regional centres. The electorates of Hill and Cook are included within the Cairns-connected grouping due to their strong economic, social and service linkages with the Cairns region, particularly in relation to health, education, employment and transport. In contrast, electorates such as Hinchinbrook and Traeger have stronger connections with the Townsville region.

Table 1: Analysis of electoral and projected enrolment numbers versus legislated quotas

BASED ON EXISTING ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES FOR: NORTHERN QUEENSLAND ELECTORATES PLUS COOK AND TRAEGER						
Electorate	Enrolment 22/09/2025 Note 1	Projected Enrolment 30/06/2032 Note 1	2025 Quota 22/09/2025	2032 Quota 30/06/2032	% Above/(Below) Variation to Quota	
					22/09/2025	30/06/2032
					Above or Below 10% variance to quota in red	
<i>NQ and northern large electorates most connected to Cairns</i>						
Mulgrave	40,133	45,921	40,188	44,679	-0.14%	2.78% }
Cairns	39,397	43,229	40,188	44,679	-1.97%	-3.25% }
Barron River	41,999	44,984	40,188	44,679	4.51%	0.68% }
Cook	40,802	43,372	40,188	44,679	1.53%	-2.93% }
Hill	42,144	44,497	40,188	44,679	4.87%	-0.41% }
Total	204,475	222,003				
Average enrolment	40,895	44,401	40,188	44,679	1.76%	-0.62% Regional average aligns with the quota
<i>NQ and northern large electorates most connected to Townsville or Mackay</i>						
Hinchinbrook	39,644	47,547	40,188	44,679	-1.35%	6.42%
Mackay	40,465	42,481	40,188	44,679	0.69%	-4.92%
Whitsunday	39,337	45,309	40,188	44,679	-2.12%	1.41%
Burdekin	36,887	39,570	40,188	44,679	-8.21%	-11.43%
Mundingburra	35,148	37,854	40,188	44,679	-12.54%	-15.28%
Townsville	37,845	39,614	40,188	44,679	-5.83%	-11.34%
Thuringowa	38,861	39,624	40,188	44,679	-3.30%	-11.31%
Traeger	36,105	36,916	40,188	44,679	-10.16%	-17.38%
	304,292	328,915				
Average enrolment	38,037	41,114	40,188	44,679	-5.35%	-7.98%
Note 1: See individual electorate analysis per Appendix 3 of Proposal for the Redistribution of the State's Electoral Districts March 2026						

Source: QRC Proposal for the Redistribution of the State's Electoral Districts (Appendix 3)

Key observations include:

- All northern Queensland electorates connected with Cairns (including Mulgrave and Hill) are well within the maximum acceptable deviations (+ or – 10%) of the quota thresholds both on current and projected enrolments – none are more than 5% above or below.
- On a combined average basis, the Cairns-connected electorates collectively sit almost exactly in line with the legislated quotas on both current and projected enrolment levels
- The electorate of Hill itself is currently slightly above the quota and is forecast to sit almost exactly on the quota by 2032 (-0.41 per cent). As such there is no enrolment-based legislative requirement or rationale to reallocate a portion of the existing Hill electorate to Mulgrave, abolish the electorate of Hill entirely, or reduce the number of electorates representing communities connected with the Cairns region.

While redistributions are necessary to accommodate population change, the removal of Hill should also be considered in the broader context of representation within the Queensland Parliament.

Far North Queensland already faces challenges in ensuring the priorities of the region are heard within a Parliament that is increasingly dominated by southeast Queensland representation. The proposed redistribution risks worsening this imbalance.

The proposal also includes the creation of two additional electorates in southeast Queensland - Caboolture (formerly Glass House) and Springfield (formerly Jordan) - reflecting strong population growth across the Brisbane metropolitan region and surrounding areas.

While it is appropriate that electoral boundaries respond to population growth, the creation of additional electorates in southeast Queensland inevitably increases the concentration of parliamentary representation in the southeast of the state. At the same time, the proposed abolition of the electorate of Hill removes a dedicated seat representing communities in Far North Queensland.

The combined effect of these changes is a further shift in the balance of representation within the Queensland Parliament toward southeast Queensland.

This means that while southeast Queensland gains additional representation through new electorates, Far North Queensland would lose one of its existing parliamentary voices - reducing the relative influence of regional communities within the Queensland Parliament.

For regional communities such as Far North Queensland, strong representation in Parliament is critical to ensure regional priorities are elevated in political decision-making. Far North Queensland faces distinct policy challenges that differ significantly from those of metropolitan areas, including infrastructure delivery across vast distances and equal access to services.

Effective advocacy for these issues relies on having strong and clearly focused representation within Parliament. When regional representation is reduced or absorbed into larger electorates, there is a risk that the unique priorities of these communities receive less attention.

The issue is not just the number of electorates, but the balance of representation in the Queensland Parliament. As population growth continues to concentrate in southeast Queensland, the proportion of Members representing metropolitan communities continues to increase.

Maintaining strong regional representation within the Queensland Parliament is essential to ensuring that the interests of Far North Queensland communities continue to be heard and considered in state decision-making.

Misalignment of Mulgrave electorate to Local Government Boundary

The proposed redistribution significantly alters the configuration of the Mulgrave electorate by extending it further into the Atherton Tablelands so that it would encompass quite discrete and distinct communities (those communities in the Cairns region and a number based on the Atherton Tablelands) separated physically by the Great Dividing Range. In addition, the Proposal segregates a number of Atherton Tablelands communities closely connected to each other, between multiple electorates.

Cairns Regional Council's request is that the southern and western boundaries of the Mulgrave electorate be adjusted to directly align with the Cairns Regional Council Local Government Area.

The Mulgrave electorate is currently associated with the southern Cairns region and surrounding coastal communities. Aligning state electoral boundaries with local government

boundaries can help maintain coherent representation and simplify engagement between residents, councils and Members of Parliament. Strong engagement between Council and the local Members of Parliament is critical to progressing regional priorities and advocating effectively for the needs of residents. Clear alignment between the Mulgrave electorate boundaries and the Cairns Local Government Area supports effective collaboration, communication and representation for the community.

Under the proposed redistribution, Mulgrave would incorporate a larger share of inland communities within the Atherton Tablelands (as a result of the proposed abolition of Hill) and a reduced portion of the Southern Cairns region due to the current northern boundary of the Hinchinbrook electorate being moved further north. The Proposal would see iconic physical landmarks (such as Walsh's Pyramid and the Mulgrave River) historically connected with the Mulgrave electorate and its communities of interest, being encompassed within the Hinchinbrook electorate.

For communities such as Babinda, which sits within the Cairns Regional Council Local Government Area, alignment between state electoral and local government boundaries is particularly important and the current misalignment creates practical problems. Babinda functions as a key service and disaster management hub for the southern Cairns corridor during natural disasters. In these situations, the township relies heavily on connections with Cairns, where the primary health, education and social service centres for the region are located. Babinda is also supported through the Cairns Local Disaster Management Group (LDMG), in which the local State Member typically participates as an observer to help coordinate response and recovery activities. Boundary alignment between State and local government can also support funding program alignment more broadly where funding programs are deployed based on geographical boundaries.

Under the proposed configuration, Babinda would remain within an electorate (Hinchinbrook) centred further south. This presents practical challenges during disaster events. The township is regularly cut off from communities to the south due to flooding along the Bruce Highway. When this occurs, access from the south becomes extremely limited, meaning the local Member representing that electorate may be unable to reach Babinda when communities most need direct engagement, support and representation.

Council has undertaken a high-level analysis of available population estimates and applied reasonable assumptions regarding electoral enrolments to test the impact of including Babinda and surrounding Cairns LGA communities within Mulgrave. Based on this analysis, realigning the Mulgrave western and southern boundary to directly align with Cairns LGA boundaries would result in approximately 2,300 enrolments shifting from Hill to Mulgrave. This change would still enable both Hill and Mulgrave to remain within legislated quota thresholds (current and forecast). This modest adjustment (gain for Mulgrave) would be partly offset by the proposed redistribution of some areas currently within the northern part of Mulgrave to Cairns. As a result, aligning the southern and western boundary of Mulgrave with the Cairns Regional Council LGA boundary would maintain compliance with the legislated enrolment thresholds while better reflecting the community of interest between Babinda and Cairns, particularly in relation to disaster management coordination, access to health and education services, funding program deployment and local government engagement.

As acknowledged by then member for Hinchinbrook and now Mayor of Townsville City Council, Nick Dametto in his submission to the QRC, the electorate of Hinchinbrook is most closely connected to Townsville. Moving its electoral boundary further north risks diluting that connection whilst the proposed western and southern boundary changes for Mulgrave dilute that electorate's connection to communities within the Cairns LGA.

These proposed changes create several challenges:

- It divides communities that interact primarily with Cairns for employment, services and transport.
- It separates areas that share common urban planning, economic and infrastructure issues.
- It weakens the alignment between state electoral representation and local government. This alignment is important as it is the foundation for collaboration between state and local government which is critical to achieving positive outcomes 'on the ground' for local communities.

The proposed realignment also splits the Tablelands Regional Council (TRC) local government area between the electorates of Mulgrave and Traeger. As stated earlier, Cairns Regional Council supports Tablelands Regional Council's position that the electorate of Hill should be retained to maintain appropriate representation across Far North Queensland. Council also notes that incorporating the entirety of the TRC local government area within Mulgrave would likely result in an electorate that exceeds acceptable enrolment quota thresholds.

Cairns is the major service centre for the broader Far North Queensland region and many surrounding communities rely on the city for employment, education, health and transport connections. Electoral boundaries that align with this functional region would better reflect the experience of residents and the natural communities of interest across the Cairns region.

Other matters

Minor adjustments have also been proposed for the electorates of Barron River and Cairns. The proposed changes to Barron River would better align the electorate with existing Local Government boundaries within the Cairns Local Government Area. Alignment between electoral and local government boundaries helps strengthen the connection between communities, their elected representatives, and the local issues that shape the region. For this reason, Cairns Regional Council does not object to the proposed adjustments to the Barron River and Cairns electorates.

Conclusion

The proposed redistribution of the State's Electoral Districts introduces significant changes to electoral representation in Far North Queensland, particularly through the proposed abolition of the Hill electorate and the realignment of the Mulgrave electorate boundaries.

While redistributions are necessary to maintain enrolment equality, they must also preserve effective regional representation and reflect established communities of interest.

Analysis of both current and projected enrolment data demonstrates that the Far North Queensland electorates connected with Cairns (including Mulgrave and Hill) are within the legislated quota thresholds under the Electoral Act 1992. As a result, there is no enrolment-based legislative requirement to extend the Mulgrave electorate boundaries into the Atherton Tablelands, abolish the electorate of Hill, or reduce the number of electorates representing communities connected with the Cairns region more broadly.

The reconfiguration of Mulgrave would weaken its alignment with the Cairns Local Government Area and the communities it has traditionally represented. In addition, the proposed abolition of Hill would further fragment communities on the Atherton Tablelands between electorates and reduce Far North Queensland's representation in the Queensland Parliament at a time when additional electorates are being created in southeast Queensland.

For these reasons, Cairns Regional Council recommends that the Queensland Redistribution Commission:

1. Adjust the proposed southern and western boundaries of the Mulgrave electorate to directly align with the Cairns Local Government Area boundaries.
2. Retain the electorate of Hill.

