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Name: Kevin Harding
Submission Topic: Electorate Boundaries
Electoral District: Hill

Submission:

See below

Submission Attachments

Email - Kevin Harding - Queensland Redistribution Commission
Submission_Hill_9 April 2026.pdf

Dr K J Harding

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Queensland Redistribution Commission
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Dear Commissioners,

RE: OBJECTION TO THE PROPOSED REDISTRIBUTION OF MALANDA, MILLAA, MILLAA AND RAVENSHOE IN THE TABLELANDS REGIONAL COUNCIL AREA TO STATE SEAT OF FLINDERS

Background:

I write to you as an active and community minded member of Malanda/Topaz that currently is part of the Hill electorate. I am

- A resident of Topaz (part of the Malanda community) since August 2012
- A semi-retired Forestry Consultant (sole trader with turnover < \$20,000 p.a.)
- An honorary member of the Malanda Chamber of Commerce
- Member of Malanda Landcare, TREAT, The Steering Committee for the North Queensland Forestry Hub, Tree Kangaroo and Mammal Group, Friends of the Atherton Arboretum Inc. (President).
- Married with family (Daughter, Partner and 2 grandchildren) who also live in Topaz
- Regular visitor to the Tablelands since 1982 in my Forestry research career with the Queensland Government.

Details of my objections:

I write to express my objections to Malanda's proposed incorporation into the new State seat of Flinders with the proposed abolition of the current State seat of Hill.

I note that the Tablelands Regional Council (TRC) has also strongly opposed the Proposed Redistribution of the States Electoral Districts as the local government area of TRC is divided between two State districts: Mulgrave and the newly proposed Flinders (formerly Traeger) districts.

I agree with 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 placed within Mulgrave, not divided between Mulgrave and Flinders. The TRC made this suggestion to the Queensland Redistribution Commission (QRC) in September 2025 during the initial consultation period. It has now reinforced this view in a recent submission to the QRC objecting to the proposed splitting of the TRC regional area into the 2 state seats of Mulgrave and Flinders.

Flexibility provisions provided to the QRC:

I appreciate that the QRC is bound by principles enshrined in legislation with key mandatory criterion to be met so that all electorates must comply with the legislated quota set out under section 45 of the Electoral Act. However, **the Electoral Act also prescribes a range of additional matters that must also be considered by the Commission in undertaking the redistribution.** The matters to be considered under section 46 of the Electoral Act include:

(Note: Bold font applied to indicate my emphasis).

- **economic, social, regional or other community of interest factors;**
- **ways of communication and travel within electoral districts;**
- **physical features of electoral districts;**
- **boundaries of existing electoral districts; and**
- **demographic trends in the State, with a view to ensuring electoral districts remain within quota.**

The Commission may also consider the boundaries of local government areas in relation to determining community of economic, social, regional or other interests within the local government area. The Commission is given broad discretion in the way these criteria are to be 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. This suggests a simplified administrative decision that in my opinion has not appropriately prioritised the long-term and on-going disruptions to our community of Malanda and the other southern Tablelands townships and areas impacted by the proposed changes.

Most local government councils in Queensland are widely recognised as having severely stretched budgets as their rate-paying bases are small and finances are being increasingly stretched by steady population growth and rapidly increasing repair and maintenance costs due to damage from severe weather events. This is certainly the case for TRC and splitting the TRC region into two State electorates clearly increases inefficiencies and costs due to the need to lobby two state members of Parliament for funding support and specific large project grants to maintain the quality of life and Council assets for regional citizens. As a TRC ratepayer and active community member, I object to extra impositions being placed on the Council to deliver the essential day-to-day services that I and our local community expect; splitting the Council areas into two State seats adds an extra layer of complexity to operations and creates inefficiencies.

This redistribution is not simply a matter of lines on a map and ensuring sufficient population numbers in each district; it is about community interest alignment 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 7837. With a modest growth estimate of 2% p.a. since 2021 we expect that the 2026 will confirm a population that now exceeds 8650 and may well exceed 9,000. In my time living in the Malanda area (nearly 14 years) I have observed significant population growth and pressures on Community assets; e.g. both the Malanda State School and Malanda State High School have grown in enrolments from around 70% of their capacity to full capacity of around 500 enrolments at each. The latter growth has revitalised the area that suffered greatly reduced economic activity in the early 2000's after Federal Government Dairy Industry de-regulation. It has attracted a lot of young families (including one of my own daughters and her family of 4) to the area. This has positively changed the demographics from what was previously an aging and population with a retirement focus to a more balanced and younger age spread.

I strongly encourage the QRC to exercise the flexible provisions that Sections 45 and 46 of the Electoral Act provided for them to consider the negative impacts on our community of the proposed changes and respond accordingly.

No shared Community of Interest with communities in Flinders:

The TRC communities of Malanda, Millaa Millaa, Ravenshoe and TRC communities to their west, which are proposed to fall within Flinders, do not share the same community interests as local governments which will fall within Flinders such as Mount Isa, Burke, Doomadgee, Charters Towers, Mornington, Cloncurry, McKinlay, Croydon, Etheridge, Richmond and Flinders. They look east, over the Gillies and Kuranda Ranges, to Cairns. That is where they take their children for specialist medical care, where they regularly access an interstate and

international airport for travel, where they send their young adults for university, where they trade their produce and welcome their visitors. The districts of Cairns and Mulgrave are not just our near neighbours; they share our community's interests and are our economic lifeline. Our local community feels very harshly and unfairly treated by these proposed changes.

Geographically, Malanda, Millaa Millaa and Ravenshoe are wet-tropics areas with natural environment, 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 built environment assets in wet-tropics areas require very different maintenance and improvement schedules to those in the dry-tropics.

As documented by the TRC, the strength of these 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. Tourism contributed \$275 million last year to the Atherton Tablelands, 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 economic profile, which will be similar to the proposed state district of Flinders. Marketing tourism experiences and maintaining economically viable supply chains are very different tasks for local and state government representatives in the current regions of the Atherton Tablelands compared to the North-West Queensland areas. Transferring these wet-tropics towns into Flinders risks a serious watering down of the economic activity that supports these important Far North Queensland population centres.

The Malanda Chamber of Commerce has also emphasised that our social and community ties with communities to our East in Mulgrave are very strong. 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, from schools to 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 delivered locally. These connections are the daily, practical, and enduring rhythms of ordinary life in the Tablelands. Effective representation should reflect those rhythms and those strong, existing community interest alignments.

The TRC, and our very active Malanda Chamber of Commerce, have long-established and strong ties that our community already shares with Mulgrave. These include active support and participation in the TRC memberships of the Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils, Tourism Tropical North Queensland, Advance Cairns, and TRC's involvement with peak Far North Queensland ('FNQ') advocacy groups such as FNQ Growers. Beyond that, 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, planning, traffic issues, trade and agricultural matters.

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

For the reasons detailed above, I submit that our TRC LGA 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.

Fair and Practical Representation:

As the current State member for Hill summarised in his submission to the QRC, the proposal to abolish Hill and split the TRC region into Mulgrave and Flinders is deeply flawed. If adopted this proposed redistribution would significantly reduce fair and effective representation for the people of Northern Queensland. The Hon. Shane Knuth notes that the Tablelands Regional Council has voiced strong objections to the proposal, noting the destructive impact it would have on local communities. Local public support for the proposed redistribution is non-existent as our community expects community representation to remain central to, and be transparently apparent in, redistribution decisions. 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.

I also support the Hon. Shane Knuth'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 QRC should prioritise the consideration of the sheer distances, remoteness, travel difficulties, and logistics involved in servicing electorates across Northern Queensland. Unlike compact urban electorates, MPs in Northern Queensland cover thousands of kilometres, multiple distinct communities, and vast geographic and economic diversity. Decisions should reflect these realities rather than applying criteria largely formulated to achieve balanced representation in metropolitan areas.

I trust that the Commissioners and the Queensland Parliament understand that moving our State representation from Atherton (in the current seat of Hill) to Mount Isa in Flinders makes regular face-to-face contact with our State Member of Parliament hugely difficult. For our Malanda community it increases our travel time to the electorate office from less than 20 minutes (~ 20 kms) to more than 11 hours (~ 1,100 kms). I appreciate the rationale/s provided by the QRC Commissioners for their proposed electoral boundary changes. However, I suggest

that there is not another community that is so highly impacted by these proposals as Malanda and our adjacent Southern Tablelands centres if these proposed changes are adopted. Consequently, our community feels very harshly and unfairly treated by these proposed changes and it is hard not to feel like a 2nd-class citizen in this process due to the severity of the impact on the quality of our local representation.

Conclusion:

I trust that these very serious concerns, raised in both this submission and other submissions opposing the splitting of the Tablelands Regional Council townships into two very different State seats , are appropriately addressed in the final redistribution recommendations and decisions of the Queensland Redistribution Commission and the Queensland Parliament. I strongly but respectfully ask for your consideration of the very negative impacts on our community that the proposed redistribution will deliver and prioritise a better solution for the redistribution.

Yours faithfully,

Dr Kevin J Harding, BSc(Forestry), PhD, Fellow Forestry Australia, GAICD

