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Electoral District: Traeger
Related Submissions:

Submission:

See below

Submission Attachments

2509 QRC Electoral Boundaries Redistribution Submission.docx

Burke Shire Council thanks the Queensland Redistribution Commission for the opportunity to comment on its proposal for the redistribution of the State's electoral districts.

We concur that, with the changing demographics within the State, it is timely to revisit electoral district boundaries. Whilst acknowledging that it is outside the legislated scope and purpose of the Queensland Redistribution Commission, Council feels it would be remiss not to state its firm belief that population even with a 2% variation of the total electorate area, is not, and cannot, be the singular, appropriate determinant for electoral boundaries in the State's extensive remote areas. This methodology creates areas on parity by population but with significant disparity in the ability of the elected member to appropriately service that area and their constituents. Put in simple terms, the methodology creates electorate equality but not equity leaving remote residents inadequately represented and with insufficient voice.

Whilst the footprint of an electorate is currently not a consideration when determining boundaries, it needs to be acknowledged the extensive size of the remote electorates make it exceptionally difficult for elected members to effectively engage and garner the opinions of their constituents, ascertain and maintain knowledge as to the relevance of issues in the electorate and represent those effectively in parliament. Conversely, it also makes it difficult for the elected member to effectively convey back to their electorate information and messaging from the Queensland Government. The power of representation to and from parliament, fundamental to our system of government, is radically decreased.

If subjected to the "BBQ Test" - that is, on average, how many, functions enabling constituent engagement could an MP attend over the course of a weekend- it is glaringly obvious that in comparison to a urban MP, rural/remote MPs meaningful engagement is markedly less. The numbers would clearly reveal the inability of the latter to realistically engage with any regularity with their constituents, despite having approximately the same number of constituents. Council also firmly believes consideration must be given to work/life balance of elected members and the impact of protracted absences from home necessary to carry out their duties has on the elected member and their family. Extensive electorate size potentially has significant ramifications for personal and professional sustainability and thus the attraction and retention of candidates/elected members of the highest calibre.

Given the current projections for population decline (compounded by the impending closure of several significant mining operations within the North West), Council is concerned that the Traeger footprint will be increased to capture the population parameters required currently in the Act. This risks further decreasing the accessibility to, and serviceability of, political representation. Council urges the Commission to give appropriate consideration to this when determining Traeger's political footprint going forward.

Council firmly believes remote areas would be better distributed/serviced if electorates were aligned along common East-West Boundaries. The East-West polarity reflects connectedness between road infrastructure and, frequently, commonalities in issues, challenges and regional development priorities and opportunities. Cook, due to its geography, cannot accurately reflect East-West polarity but does contain areas with similar interests linked by a predominant transport corridor. The remote electorates of Gregory and Warrego reflect this East-West polarity and the joining of areas with similar interests along a common transit corridor. This East-West polarity is also noted by the Commission as existing in other electorates such as those on the Gold Coast.

However, the massive Traeger electorate does not exhibit a clear East-West focus as it drifts North to the Gulf waters and along a significant portion of the Savannah Way towards Cairns. This drift impacts the effectiveness and efficiency of the role of the MP. The inclusion of Charters Towers into this electorate has seen an increased pull on the elected MP to service two major centres at the electorate's East West extremities. This has markedly reduced both the capacity of the elected member to service areas North and South of the Flinders Highway which links Mount Isa and Charters Towers and the ability of constituents residing beyond this bitumen divide to engage with their elected member.

The Flinders Highway provides the East-West polarity effectively demonstrated by the Shires of Warrego and Gregory. As Shire boundaries are the foundation for electorate boundaries, the Shires of Mount Isa, Cloncurry, McKInlay, Richmond, Flinders and the newly included portion of Charters Towers reflect the East-West polarity successfully utilised in the Gregory/Warrego electorates. Council believes these Shires would be best placed geographically, economically and socially to form the basis of the Traeger electorate.

Council proposed, in its submission to the 2017 Redistribution Review, that the Gulf Shires of Doomadgee, Mornington, Burke, Carpentaria (excluding the portion contained in Cook), Croydon and Etheridge would be better served by becoming a part of the newly formed electorate of Hill. Given its experience as part of the expanded Trager electorate for the past eight years, it is still of that view. Council understands the addition of these Shires may alter population quotas for Hill thus requiring redistribution of some of its communities. Potentially, the coastal communities currently in Hill could be absorbed into coastal electorates, improving their viability going forward.

This electoral redistribution would follow the East-West polarity afforded by the Savannah Way and a link to the farming communities located in Hill. Whilst an argument could be made that there are stronger links to the South of these Local Government areas, socially, communally and historically, similar strength of linkage occurs East to West.

The following factors were considered in reaching this recommendation:

- Regionally, the Gulf Shires utilise the Tablelands/Cairns region as the default centre for freight, goods/services, public transport. Fresh food supplies from the salad bowl of the Atherton Tablelands are delivered regularly to communities along the Savannah Way.
- All Shires utilise this region for a variety of professional support services eg legal, state development, regional development organisations with some Shires basing core services on the East Coast in complement to those in their community. Other organisations with their roots in the Gulf also have satellite support on the Far Northern coast. The majority of the Shires are members of organisations/businesses with links to the FNQ region including, but not limited to, tourism organisations, natural resource management, agribusiness.
- Gulf Savannah Development (GSD) a regional development body in the Southern Gulf began life over thirty years ago to unite and develop the region, while at the same time developing strong links and support with similar organisations on the East Coast and Atherton Tablelands. These links and support continue today as evidenced by memberships (reciprocal and actual) and delivery of small business support along the Savannah Way: evidence of another strong East-West alignment.
- Socially, there are strong ties with the Atherton Tablelands and Far North Queensland communities. Many residents of Gulf Shires head East for shopping, holidays etc. rather than heading South.

- Economically mining, tourism, extensive beef cattle grazing, fishing prevail throughout the proposed redistribution footprint. Strong supply links with the Far North coast both in terms of trading of product and where goods/services essential to these industries are purchased. Several cattle producers have property interests on the Tablelands area. With growing investment into diversification of agricultural activity in areas traditionally used for beef cattle grazing, strong and supportive connections are being forged between businesses that service these forms of production as well as between established and emerging farmers. There are strong links between the Gulf and East Coast fisheries. Tourism, an important and growing industry in the Gulf region, is intrinsically linked to the Savannah Way route beginning on the Far North Queensland Coast and connecting with the Northern Territory border and beyond. Existing and emerging mineral and mining developments exist throughout the Gulf Shires and into the Tablelands region creating another unifying link. These economic industries are served and supported by several communities all along the East West road network and are firmly entrenched into their individual and collective identity and purpose: another unifying linkage that strengthens the inclusion into the electorate of Hill.
- The Port of Karumba located in Carpentaria Shire is another important linkage East and West, potentially facilitating an effective and efficient opportunity for the distribution of mining and agricultural products sourced along the Savannah Way into Asia. There is currently a business case study underway regarding the use of Karumba Port for just such purposes.
- Transport logistics, freight services for the majority of Gulf Shires originate from Cairns via the Savannah Way rather than Townsville. Mail for the majority of the Shires also originates from this same direction. A bus service runs to/from the East Coast to Carpentaria Shire with no road based public transport linking the Gulf Shires to the NW Region. Flights for some Gulf Shires originate from both Cairns and Mt Isa however, arguably, a significant amount of travel is towards the coast rather than inland.

With regards to naming of electorates, Council would suggest the name MacDonald. John Graham MacDonald was born in 1834 in NSW. A man of many careers, he was ambitious and forward looking and these characteristics later had a huge impact on the Gulf country. Whilst still young, he saw the opportunities the North offered and set off to explore those far flung places, determined to play a role in realising their potential. He took up large tracts of country along, amongst others, the Burdekin, Lynd and Einasleigh Rivers including Carpentaria Downs (located in Etheridge Shire) which at the time was the largest Northern holding and a stepping stone for further exploration North and West by MacDonald and others. He set up a partnership with Robert Towns (the founder of Townsville) and others, of which he was the managing partner, to further their joint ambitions to develop and progress business opportunities they could see in the North. The allure and excitement of exploration and potential business opportunities then drove MacDonald further West into what is now the Shire of Burke. Trekking through dry and scrubby country he must have been pleased to reach the palm and paperbarked lined Gregory and Albert Rivers, which he proceeded to explore in depth. He set up a depot at where these two met the Nicholson and began developing a pastoral portfolio on the Savannah grasslands recognising the promise these plains offered to those with vision and grit. He envisioned a flourishing port along the Albert delivering goods and supplies to Asia and world markets – quite forward thinking for his time – which became a reality in 1865 leading to the establishment of Burketown. The harshness and unfamiliarity of the region and its climate caused his vision splendid to falter but his legacy lives on in the continuance of those pastoral enterprises and the township of Burketown established over 150 years ago. A pivot in careers saw

him enter public service in 1872, becoming firstly a Gold Commissioner at Gilberton in the Etheridge Gold Fields before serving as a Police Magistrate throughout regional Queensland and finally Brisbane until his retirement in 1905. He passed away in 1918 aged 84, a remarkable man, an entrepreneur and adventurer who made a remarkable contribution to this State.

In closing Council wishes to reiterate its proposal that, by and large, the Gulf Local Government Areas of Burke, Mornington, Doomadgee, Carpentaria (excluding the portion in Cook), Croydon and Etheridge are best served by inclusion in an Electorate that follows an East-West polarity aligned with the Savannah Way. The Gulf Local Government areas of Burke, Doomadgee, Mornington, Carpentaria, Croydon and Etheridge have that vital connection with the Tablelands and Far North Coast via the Savannah Way and have a strong, cohesive social, economic, administrative and service delivery linkage with the communities within the Hill electorate rather with those along the Flinders Highway in the Traeger electorate.