



The Federal Redistribution 2006  
**QUEENSLAND**



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**Comment Number 37 on Objections**

**Mr John R Pyke**

**3 pages**

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 Redistribution Committee for Queensland  
 GPO Box 2590  
 BRISBANE QLD 4001

### Queensland Redistribution 2006 – Further Comment on Objections and the Proper Approach to a Redistribution

Dear Committee members,

I have already lodged an objection to the boundaries of Petrie, and commented on the Liberal Party's "general objection" including some remarks, in response to their objection, about the priority of criteria for deciding boundaries under section 66 of your Act. On thinking more about the consequences of a proper reading of s 66, and reading some of the objections to the strange new division of Wright, I have some more general comments about the application of the criteria, especially to the west of the Great Dividing Range.

For at least 30 years, I have noticed that the electoral map of Queensland has more strange shapes on it than that of any other State. Originally I submitted an objection only to Petrie, but I also agree with other objectors that the proposed new Wright is odd. It is also true, as someone remarked in a newspaper – I am not sure if this was mentioned in any formal objections – that it is hard to see what community of interest there is in an electorate (Kennedy) that runs from Mt Isa to the suburbs of Cairns. Until 1998, when "existing boundaries" was a criterion of equal weight with some of the others, it may have been the case that once an odd boundary was introduced it necessarily became fossilised, but "existing boundaries", as I reminded you in my earlier comment, is now the lowest-weighted of the express criteria and fossil boundaries can be swept aside. When the number of electorates for the State has just been increased, and the rate of population increase is quite uneven across the State, I suggest you have an opportunity to do a more thorough-going, but in the end much more rational, redistribution than has been done for some time.

I repeat here my remarks about the overall order of priorities of the criteria for drawing boundaries in a redistribution:

- first, the 10% range at the date of determination ("*in no case shall the quota be departed from to a greater extent...*");
- secondly, the 3.5% range at the projection date (para (a));
- thirdly, the criteria in sub-paras (b)(i), (ii) and (iv) – community of interest, communication, and physical features;
- fourthly, the boundaries of existing divisions;
- and *if* there is room after all that to apply an even-greater-equality criterion, do that too – because, *subject to everything else*, "the quota shall be the basis".

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And of course for each division all of these criteria are subject to the need to end up with 29 divisions *each* of which satisfies the criteria – so the average of all of the “margins of allowance” must be zero.

### *Community of Interest*

As you are probably perfectly aware, all parties' submissions on community of interest are suspect - in fact they work out what they think will advantage them & justify their proposal by community of interest arguments. Except where there are natural barriers (eg, ranges, forests, wide unbridged rivers) community of interest is generally inversely proportional to distance. In the city most places have a good deal of community of interest with places that are 5 or 10 km away, whether to the north *or* south *or* east *or* west. In the outback, the same applies except that the distance may be 100km or even more. A place at the extreme end of a long thin electorate will have less community of interest with the other end of the electorate than it will with the place just over the border in the adjacent electorate. So this criterion should generally favour squarish/roundish (ie, geometrically “regular”) electorates.

However, there is one significant barrier in Queensland – the Great Divide. People west of the divide generally have little community of interest with coastal people. It is therefore paradoxical that a feature of Queensland distributions has been divisions that spread across the Divide and include both coastal and arid-inland areas. Kennedy is one such division that has existed for some time - it is hard to see what the community of interest between the gulf country, the Atherton tableland and the “cyclone coast” is. I can only presume that its creation in the first place represented a triumph of an unstated criterion – that no division should extend over too many square kilometers, and Kennedy was kept from spreading too far south by adding the population centres on the coast. Its continuation in something like its previous form seems to represent an inversion of the priorities – it is there, so let it stay there despite the divergence of interests. As well, you are now proposing to add Wright which will also be a fairly narrow strip running from the coast inland – and not even following the railway closely.

### *Time to start again*

As noted above, the consequence of the increase in number of divisions for Queensland is necessarily a fairly great disruption of the existing boundaries in at least a part of Queensland. I suggest that you should take advantage of this necessary disruption and do a bit more disruption to get rid of some of the fossilised remains of distributions past, and do a redistribution that really satisfies the statutory criteria. I suggest that in outline the procedure should be as follows:

1. Start at Cape York and work your way down both coasts until you have a quota. This would produce the existing division of Leichhardt, or something very like it – no disruption there!

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2. Then start from the southern shore of the Gulf and count electors as you come south *between the western border and the Great Divide* until you have a quota. This would give you a new Kennedy, minus the Tableland and coast plus the western end of the proposed Wright and the northern part of Maranoa. This would indeed have a lot of square kilometers but it would probably be no longer in the north-south direction than it presently is in the east-west direction, *and* it would also have a lot of community of interest, and a natural centre in Longreach or Winton. (And if the new member, be it Mr Katter or a National Party person, wants to ask the Remuneration Tribunal for an allowance to charter a plane, and to provide an 1800 number for electors to call, I undertake to argue in support of him or her.)

3. Then work your way down the coast, incorporating the eastern end of Kennedy into a coastal electorate with which they actually have some community of interest, and as you come further south including the eastern end of Wright back into a coastal division. This would certainly cause disruption to existing boundaries (and may mean Townsville may have to be split between divisions, as are most major cities), but you might in the end be able to put Wide Bay back into the division of Wide Bay. Somewhere along here I expect you would find a division that was so different from any existing division that it would be the one you could give a new name to (but *not* Wright – if a division is some day to be named after Judith Wright it should include the University of Queensland or Mount Tamborine).

4. At the same time, work east from the remnant of Maranoa and up from the New South Wales border until everything meets around the Sunshine Coast. I expect the divisions on the Gold Coast and in southern Brisbane would need little change, but you could do a good deal to rationalise the strange boundaries running from the north of Brisbane to the Sunshine Coast, on which I commented in my original objection.

I suspect all of the political parties will hate aspects of this – a series of major changes will mean that their mailing lists and maps for letter-boxers will have to be adjusted, and sitting members will lose the dubious advantages of incumbency. But whether you please the parties is not one of the criteria, and I remind you again that 'existing boundaries' is weighted *lower* than community of interest or natural geographic features. If you take section 66 seriously, you will do something along the lines of my above suggestions. Once done, adjustments in subsequent redistributions may not need to be so dramatic – after the earthquake, the landscape may only need to creep gradually.

Sincerely,



John R Pyke  
Lecturer in Law

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