Submission S39

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SUBMISSION TO ROUND 1 OF THE FEDERAL REDISTRIBUTION IN QUEENSLAND

Equitable representation for regional, rural and remote Queensland

Submitted by Noah Quinlan

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1. Overview and purpose

This submission is made for the first round of the 2026 federal redistribution of Queensland. It draws on the recent Queensland state electoral redistribution as a case study and makes recommendations about regional representation, geographic serviceability and how competing boundary options should be assessed.

I ask the Redistribution Committee for Queensland to take particular care that boundary changes do not place a disproportionate share of the adjustment burden on North, Central and Western Queensland while the state's urban population growth is accommodated primarily through compact and accessible metropolitan divisions. This is not a request to deny growing South-East Queensland its population-based share of representation, nor to preserve any electorate regardless of enrolment. It is a request that the Committee assess regional and remote communities as fully as the law permits, and explain the practical consequences of difficult trade-offs.

My main recommendation is that the Committee use a transparent, graduated geographic and remoteness assessment when comparing legally feasible alternatives. I also recommend that the Commonwealth examine longer-term legislative reform options if the present federal framework does not adequately recognise the serviceability burden of large and remote divisions.

This is a statewide submission rather than a complete set of proposed boundary maps. Where the later consultation stages provide concrete proposed boundaries, the same principles can be applied to specific communities, travel routes and alternative configurations.

2. Comments on the electorate of Dickson

As an elector of Dickson, I would like to comment on the question of changes to this electorate. Namewise, I am not aware of any need to change it and have not personally heard of any proposed alternatives at the time of writing. As for boundaries, I am aware that some changes may be necessary in order to keep it within the projected quota. My sole/primary place of residence is in the rural locality of Ocean View, which is set to be moved from the state electorate of Glass House to the electorate of Pine Rivers effective after the 2028 state election. During its time as part of Glass House, Ocean View has formed part of the southern tip of the electorate. Once the upcoming electoral boundary changes take effect, Ocean View will form part of the northern tip of Pine Rivers as it does with the federal seat of Dickson. Where it was once electorally separate from nearby areas such as Dayboro at the state-level yet unified at the local and federal level, they will be within the same electorate at all levels. In this current redistribution of federal electorates, I would recommend (as a matter of personal preference/taste) keeping Ocean View in Dickson and that other possibilities be examined.

The AEC's published data project Dickson's enrolment at 124,841 electors as at 27 August 2028, 5.8% below the projected quota and 3,047 electors below the lower edge of the ±3.5% projected range (127,888). This helps explain why some boundary adjustment may be necessary, but it does not determine which locality should be moved or establish that any particular alternative is objectively preferable. [2]

3. The federal statutory framework

The present redistribution is governed by the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918. Queensland is entitled to 30 members of the House of Representatives, so the Redistribution Committee must propose 30 federal divisions. The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) has set Queensland's redistribution quota at 127,259 electors as at 28 July 2026, and the projected quota for 27 August 2028 at 132,526 electors. The projected quota range is 127,888 to 137,164 electors per division. These numerical requirements are central to the process and limit the options available to the Committee. [1–3]

Subject to the Act's enrolment requirements, the Committee must give due consideration to the community of interests within each proposed division, including economic, social and regional interests; the means of communication and travel within the division; and the physical features and area of the division. Existing divisional boundaries must also be considered, but are legally subordinate to the other listed community, travel and geographic factors. [3]

I recognise that the Committee cannot unilaterally change Queensland's entitlement to federal seats, disregard the statutory enrolment ranges, or create a guaranteed allocation of federal divisions for North, Central or Western Queensland. The recommendations below are therefore directed first to the Committee's choices between legally feasible boundary options, and second to possible reforms for consideration by the Commonwealth Parliament.

Enrolment equality and geographic serviceability need not be treated as mutually exclusive objectives. Where several configurations satisfy the statutory rules, the Committee should assess whether one better preserves regional communities, reduces unnecessary travel burdens and keeps populations connected to the towns and service centres with which they have established relationships.

4. Why the state redistribution is a relevant case study

The Queensland Redistribution Commission completed its state-level redistribution in June 2026. Under the final determination, the state electorates of Hill and Stretton will be abolished after the 2028 state election, while Springfield and Caboolture will be created and voted for at said election. The state Parliament will retain at 93 seats. The practical geographic result is a net reduction of one electorate in North Queensland and a net increase of one in South-East Queensland. This is a descriptive account of the final boundary outcome, rather than an allegation that the Commission acted unlawfully or for partisan reasons. [6, 13]

Hill's abolition divided its communities between neighbouring electorates. ABC News reported concerns from residents about the effects on their access to a local member, including one resident whose trip to an electorate office could increase from around 15 minutes to potentially more than 11 hours. The ABC also reported that the new Flinders district would exceed 400,000 square kilometres. At the same time, the article quoted a political scientist who considered the changes to reflect population shifts rather than gerrymandering. Both points matter: population change is a legitimate reason to review boundaries, but the practical consequences of the resulting division of communities deserve close attention too. [13]

I supported the public campaign opposing Hill's abolition, including by signing the petition organised by state MPs Robert Katter and Shane Knuth. The campaign's petition gathered a combined 6,466 paper and electronic signatures. The petitions and the subsequent ministerial response are useful evidence of the concerns raised by residents and councils, although petition signatures alone should not be treated as a survey of all Queensland voters. [7–9, 14]

My ongoing Queensland Parliament e-petition 4647-26, "Review the Electoral Act 1992 and the Electoral Redistribution Process," also raises concerns about the relationship between strict enrolment rules, effective representation and the integrity of established communities. I refer to it as contextual material, not as a substitute for the federal statutory framework. I should note that this petition is set to close on the 28th of January 2027 and be presented to the Queensland Parliament on the next scheduled sitting day. [10]

ABC News's 1 March 2025 article included a map of Queensland's state electoral boundaries before the 2026 redistribution. The map helps illustrate how a small number of extensive rural and regional electorates cover much of the state's land area, while a far higher number of electorates are concentrated in more densely populated areas. This is a description of state—not federal—electorates. [11]

The distribution depicted in the ABC News map indicates that four very large state electorates—Traeger (scheduled to become Flinders under the state redistribution), Warrego, Cook and Gregory—together with approximately nine medium-to-large electorates cover a substantial portion of Queensland's landmass. The remaining 80 electorates occupy a smaller share of the land area, although they contain more densely concentrated populations. These geographically extensive districts also encompass important parts of Queensland's primary industries, including agriculture and mining. Geographic extent is not itself a measure of democratic weight, but it helps indicate the distances and variety of communities an MP may need to reach. [11]

4.1. The scale of regional electorates

The same ABC News article made the scale easier to appreciate by comparing the area of the state electorate of Traeger with Poland and the area of Gregory with Italy. Gregory and Traeger are individually larger than Poland and Italy, respectively. These comparisons are illustrative: they do not imply that the electorates and countries are comparable in population, political structure or community needs. Both examples concern state electorates, not federal divisions, and are included here only to convey geographic scale. [11]

4.2. The state-level large-district mechanism

Queensland's state electoral law offers a relevant example of geography being recognised expressly in an enrolment formula. For state districts of at least 100,000 square kilometres, the "additional large district number" is calculated by adding a number equal to 2 per cent of the district's area (in square kilometres) to its actual enrolment to produce a weighted enrolment figure. This mechanism is part of the state system and does not govern federal redistributions. [5, 20]

The state mechanism does not establish that a corresponding federal formula would necessarily be lawful or desirable. It does, however, show that the legislature can acknowledge the unusually high representation burden associated with extensive rural and remote districts. I recommend that the Commonwealth examine this experience when considering whether federal law needs a more explicit way to account for geographic serviceability.

I also acknowledge the countervailing principle: any geographic mechanism must be carefully designed so that it does not create arbitrary differences in the weight of votes or give a region a fixed entitlement detached from population and the constitutional/statutory framework. The immediate recommendation here is therefore an assessment tool for comparing legally feasible boundaries; a binding weighting or changed quota would require legislative consideration.

5. The scale of Queensland's federal divisions and the electorate-to-elector comparison

The current federal divisions of Kennedy and Maranoa illustrate the scale of rural and remote representation. AEC profiles list Kennedy at approximately 567,377 square kilometres and Maranoa at approximately 729,897 square kilometres under their current boundaries. Both are among Australia's largest federal divisions, although the current redistribution may alter their boundaries and area. [15, 16]

Queensland has 93 state electoral districts and is entitled to 30 federal divisions. That is a seat-count ratio of 93 to 30, or about 3.1 state districts for every federal division. At the level of statewide averages, this means a federal electorate corresponds to approximately three state-electorate enrolments. This is a scale comparison, not a claim that every federal MP represents exactly 3.1 times the number of electors or has exactly 3.1 times the workload: the two parliaments have different functions, and enrolment in individual districts varies within each system's legal limits. Even with that qualification, the comparison helps illustrate why geographic serviceability can be especially demanding at the federal level. [1, 5]

A federal division covering hundreds of thousands of square kilometres may include multiple regional hubs and communities whose travel connections, service centres, industries and priorities differ substantially. It is therefore appropriate to consider the practical distances between those communities when drawing boundaries, alongside enrolment and community-of-interest criteria.

6. Existing Commonwealth support for large electorates

Commonwealth arrangements already recognise that electorate size affects the provision of parliamentary offices. Department of Finance guidance states that a House of Representatives member representing a division smaller than 25,000 square kilometres is provided with one electorate office; a division from 25,000 to 350,000 square kilometres may have up to two; and a division larger than 350,000 square kilometres may have up to three. The number of offices is determined by the Minister, so the thresholds do not mean that the maximum number is an unconditional entitlement in every case. [17]

On their current boundaries, Kennedy and Maranoa exceed the 350,000-square-kilometre threshold. That is a concrete recognition of geographic scale in the Commonwealth's administrative arrangements. Federal support also includes an electorate support budget for travel by electorate employees and for relief employees. [17, 18]

These arrangements can help MPs conduct outreach and keep offices accessible, but they do not automatically resolve every geographic difficulty. The presence of an additional office does not ensure that all communities are equally accessible, and staff or travel support cannot by itself preserve an established community of interest if boundary changes divide it. Resourcing and boundary design should therefore be treated as complementary measures, not substitutes for one another.

7. Proposal: a graduated spatial and remoteness assessment

I recommend that the Committee consider using a transparent geographic "serviceability profile" when comparing legally feasible boundary options. The purpose would not be to reweight individual voters according to where they live. It would be to make the practical burdens associated with alternative boundary configurations visible and comparable, and to support the statutory assessment of travel, communication, physical features and area.

The profile could draw on the following indicators:

- Geographic area and settlement pattern: total land area, distribution of population, number and spacing of population centres, and whether the division contains one dominant centre or several dispersed communities.
- Remoteness and access to services: the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Remoteness Areas classification and ARIA+ data, used as an input rather than a determinative rule. [4]
- Practical travel burden: road travel distances and times between significant communities and relevant regional service centres; barriers created by limited transport links, seasonal road conditions or dependence on air, ferry or other connections where relevant.
- Community and economic connections: local government boundaries, regional service networks, transport corridors, shared labour markets and established economic, social and cultural relationships.
- Access to the representative: the distance and realistic travel time from dispersed communities to the principal electorate office or nearest regular outreach point, and the extent to which the proposed boundaries would lengthen existing journeys.

The Committee could use the indicators to classify the overall serviceability burden on a graduated scale, supported by transparent data and brief explanatory notes. The same method should be applied consistently to regional, rural, remote and urban alternatives. It should not operate as a rigid square-kilometre threshold or replace the Committee's judgment. It should instead help explain why a compact division or a division with dispersed population centres may be preferable where both satisfy the statutory enrolment requirements.

A simple area-only formula would be insufficient: a large division with one accessible population corridor may present different challenges from a similarly sized division containing several disconnected communities. A composite assessment based on geography, remoteness, travel time and community connection would better reflect real-world serviceability.

8. Recommendations to the Redistribution Committee

I respectfully recommend that the Committee:

1. Apply the statutory criteria substantively. Alongside enrolment equality, give meaningful consideration to economic, social and regional community interests; communication and travel; and the physical features and area of each proposed division, as required by section 66 of the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918. [3]
2. Assess the statewide pattern of change. Consider whether the cumulative effects of boundary changes place a disproportionate share of geographic disruption or increased travel burden on North, Central and Western Queensland while population growth in South-East Queensland is accommodated through compact, accessible divisions. This request does not seek to reduce South-East Queensland's population-based representation or guarantee a fixed number of regional seats.
3. Use a graduated spatial and remoteness profile where practicable. Consider area, population distribution, remoteness, practical travel times, transport constraints and community connections when comparing alternatives that satisfy the statutory enrolment requirements.
4. Avoid unnecessary fragmentation of regional communities. Where the enrolment rules allow a choice, prefer boundaries that preserve established relationships between towns and their regional service centres, and avoid attaching communities to a division whose practical centre of representation is unusually distant or poorly connected.
5. Explain difficult trade-offs. Where the Committee considers that projected enrolment requirements require a geographically challenging outcome, explain the constraint and why the chosen configuration is considered preferable to feasible alternatives.
6. Consider existing member-support arrangements without relying on them as a complete answer. Recognise that Commonwealth office and staff support can alleviate some burdens, but should not be assumed to eliminate problems caused by excessive distance or avoidable division of communities.
7. Recommend future review if necessary. If the current federal framework does not allow geographic burdens to be adequately recognised, recommend that the Commonwealth Parliament examine options such as a graduated

area allowance, remoteness assessment or other evidence-based mechanism. Any such measure should be evaluated for its compatibility with electoral equality and should require appropriate legislative authority.

8. Apply the principles consistently and impartially. Use the same evidentiary approach for every part of Queensland and avoid favouring an incumbent, political party or region irrespective of statutory criteria.

9. Applying these principles through the consultation process

At this stage of the redistribution process, I ask the Committee to treat this submission as a statewide recommendation about methodology and regional serviceability. I recognise that suggestions which propose specific boundaries can be more directly assessed against projected enrolment data. My submission is intended to complement, rather than replace, map-based suggestions and the Committee's detailed boundary analysis.

When the Committee publishes its proposed redistribution, I recommend that submitters and the Committee revisit the same questions against the actual draft boundaries: which communities have been divided? How have practical travel distances changed? Are regional towns still connected to their customary service centres? And were less disruptive alternatives considered? The later objection and comment stages should be used to provide place-specific evidence about any concrete effects, rather than relying only on general objections to population growth or change.

In its published reasons, the Committee should, where appropriate, identify the geographic or community trade-offs that materially influenced its decisions. A consistent, evidence-based explanation would help the public understand how the statutory criteria have been balanced, even where not every community's preferred outcome can be achieved.

10. Conclusion

Queensland's geographic diversity presents a substantial challenge for electoral redistribution. The demands of representing a compact urban division differ from those of representing a geographically expansive electorate containing dispersed communities, long travel routes and several regional centres. Kennedy and Maranoa exemplify the scale of some current federal divisions, while Queensland's recent state redistribution provides a practical case study of the concerns that can arise when existing community relationships and access to a representative change substantially.

I recognise that enrolment equality is a foundational requirement and that population growth must be reflected in the distribution of federal electorates. My submission does not ask the Committee to disregard those requirements or to guarantee seats to particular regions. It asks that, where the law permits a choice between feasible options, geographic serviceability and community interests genuinely inform that choice, and that the cumulative implications for rural, regional and remote Queensland be assessed alongside the effects in South-East Queensland.

A transparent, graduated spatial and remoteness assessment would help make the relevant differences visible without assuming that area alone should determine representation. If experience from the present redistribution shows that the federal framework cannot sufficiently recognise these differences, that is a matter for future consideration by the Commonwealth Parliament. I respectfully ask the Committee to consider these recommendations in preparing Queensland's federal electoral boundaries.

Thank you for considering this submission.

References and further reading

[1] Australian Electoral Commission, "Queensland federal redistribution" (current process page). https://www.aec.gov.au/redistributions/2025/qld/index.html

[2] Australian Electoral Commission, "Redistribution and projected enrolment quotas for Queensland" (quota and projection data; updated 16 September 2026). https://www.aec.gov.au/redistributions/2025/qld/quota.html

[3] Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 (Cth), ss 63A, 65–66 and related redistribution provisions, current compilation. https://www.legislation.gov.au/C1918A00027/latest/text

[4] Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian Statistical Geography Standard, Edition 3: Remoteness Areas / ARIA+. https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/standards/australian-statistical-geography-standard-asgs/edition-3-july-2021-june-2026/remoteness-structure/remoteness-areas

[5] Electoral Commission of Queensland / Queensland Redistribution Commission, "Enrolment statistics" (93 state districts; average enrolment; large-district number). https://redistribution.ecq.qld.gov.au/current-enrolment-and-boundaries/enrolment-statistics

[6] Queensland Redistribution Commission, "Final electoral redistribution" (June 2026), including final report and district maps. https://redistribution.ecq.qld.gov.au/redistribution-reports/final-electoral-redistribution

[7] Queensland Parliament, E-Petition 4460-26, "Opposing the proposed abolishment of the North Queensland electorate of Hill". https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/Work-of-the-Assembly/Petitions/petition-details/4460-26

[8] Queensland Parliament, Paper Petition 4509-26, "Opposing the proposed abolishment of the North Queensland electorate of Hill". https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/Work-of-the-Assembly/Petitions/petition-details/4509-26

[9] Hon. Deb Frecklington MP, Ministerial response to Queensland Parliament petitions 4460-26 and 4509-26, tabled paper dated 12 May 2026. https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/Work-of-the-Assembly/Tabled-Papers/docs/5826t0736/5826t736.pdf

[10] Queensland Parliament, E-Petition 4647-26, "Review the Electoral Act 1992 and the Electoral Redistribution Process". https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/Work-of-the-Assembly/Petitions/petition-details/4647-26

[11] Jack McKay, ABC News, "Queensland MP Robbie Katter calls for more politicians ahead of electoral boundary review", 1 March 2025. Cited for its reporting and descriptions of the scale and distribution of Queensland state electorates; no ABC graphics are reproduced in this submission. https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-03-01/queensland-electoral-boundaries-politicians/104993552

[12] Jack McKay, ABC News, "Why an electoral boundary review may have major impacts for Queensland voters and politicians", 19 July 2025. https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-07-19/qld-electoral-boundary-review-hanging-over-politicians-heads/105547730

[13] Sharnie Kim and Meghan Dansie, ABC News, "Anger in Far North Queensland after Hill electorate abolished in redistribution", 30 June 2026. https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-06-30/anger-fnq-hill-electorate-redistribution/106861544

[14] Katter's Australian Party, "North Queensland sold out: LNP's betrayal costs the North a parliamentary seat", media release, 29 June 2026. This is a partisan statement of the party's position and is cited as such, not as an independent finding. https://kattersaustralianparty.org.au/media-release/north-queensland-sold-out-lnps-betrayal-costs-the-north-a-parliamentary-seat/

[15] Australian Electoral Commission, "Profile of the electoral division of Kennedy (Qld)" (current boundary profile as at 18 June 2025). https://www.aec.gov.au/profiles/qld/kennedy.htm

[16] Australian Electoral Commission, "Profile of the electoral division of Maranoa (Qld)" (current boundary profile as at 18 June 2025). https://www.aec.gov.au/profiles/qld/maranoa.htm

[17] Department of Finance, Ministerial and Parliamentary Services, "Office types and office resources" (electorate office arrangements based on electorate size). https://maps.finance.gov.au/offices-resources-and-budgets/office-management-property/office-types-and-office-resources

[18] Department of Finance, Ministerial and Parliamentary Services, "Electorate support budget" (electorate employee travel and relief employees). https://maps.finance.gov.au/pay-and-employment/mops-act-employment/recruitment-and-establishing-positions/electorate-support-budget

[19] Katter's Australian Party, "LNP's push to abolish Hill an outrageous attack on North Queensland representation", media release. https://kattersaustralianparty.org.au/media-release/lnps-push-to-abolish-hill-an-outrageous-attack-on-north-queensland-representation/

[20] Queensland Electoral Act 1992, including provisions for the additional large district number for electoral districts of at least 100,000 km². https://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-1992-028

Source note: The Commonwealth Electoral Act and AEC material govern the current federal redistribution. Queensland state petitions, the state redistribution report and media reports are included as contextual evidence. The ABC News article is cited for its reporting and geographic descriptions; its graphics are not reproduced. Statements from Katter's Australian Party are attributed to the party and should not be read as independent findings.