

From: [Gregory Electorate Office](#)
To: [Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee](#)
Subject: Submission Re Electoral Redistribution Commission and Another Act Amendment Bill 2015
Date: Thursday, 13 August 2015 4:44:52 PM

The Research Director,
Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee,
Parliament House,
George Street,
Brisbane Qld 4000.

August 13, 2015.

**SUBMISSION RE Electoral (Redistribution Commission) and Another Act
Amendment Bill 2015**

I write in support of the Bill. I respectfully draw the Committee's attention to two key objectives of the Bill:

- *The implementation of a recommendation by the Electoral and Administrative Review Commission that the independent Redistribution Commission has the ability to determine the number of electoral districts in the Legislative Assembly, subject to a maximum increase of up to five additional electoral districts, so that the total seats in the Assembly would, at the Commission's discretion, be between 89 and 94*

And

- *To provide Queenslanders with more equitable access to representation in the Parliament by legislating for the Redistribution Commission to have the capacity, at its discretion, to amend the additional "large district" number, currently set at 2 per cent, up to 4 per cent.*

The achievement of these two objectives is vital to ensuring that Queenslanders have, and perceive that they receive, fair representation in the Queensland Legislative Assembly. That this currently is not the case cannot be disputed.

Like all members of the Queensland Legislative Assembly, my responsibilities to my constituents are two-fold: to know their needs of the State Government and to represent these needs in parliament and, secondly, to assist them in dealing with State Government legislation, services and departments in their daily lives.

For many members, there are very few departments and services that impact on their constituents. They may have three or four schools in their electorate, but they might not have any transport facilities or hospitals. They may never have dealings with departments such as Mines or Lands or Water. They can drive across their electorates in minutes or hours.

The seat of Gregory covers some 330,000 square kilometres – larger than Victoria and Tasmania combined. As the Member, I deal with 8 local governments, four separate health and hospital boards administering 20 hospitals and outpatients clinics. Gregory covers two different districts within the Department of Transport and Main Roads with two key rail routes, the southern east-west line and the central east-west line incorporating the key Blackwater-Bluff coal freight hub, as well as thousands of kilometres of state roads vital to Queensland's freight task and to bringing a large portion of Queensland's products to market and port.

I represent constituents employed by, dealing with or utilising 57 schools, 26 police stations and 25 ambulance stations. Of course a seat like Gregory involves representing the front-line public servants on issues such as state government employee housing as well as the many constituents who engage with these state government agencies as customers. Every one of the State Government departments has daily relevance to Gregory's people, even Fisheries.

From the time available to me to meet with my constituents and to represent their issues, I must deduct the time spent travelling between the 39 different settlements, only two of which are connected by a commercial air flight.

When EARC recommended the implementation of a system based on a single population quota of electors to members, it allowed for a particular concession to be applied in seats over 100,000 square kilometres. Further to this, the five large electorates were granted a second electorate office and one extra officer to staff it. Gregory is one of those seats.

While the population concession and the second office are of assistance in ensuring better access for constituents, the access of constituents to members is still in no way comparable to that of city electorates which can be driven across in minutes, or even regional electorates which can be crossed in a single return trip.

Some have tried to argue in the public discourse about these matters that advances in communications and digital technology have ameliorated the disadvantage. This is simply untrue. It is exactly these very large electorates where constituents struggle with physically poor internet and telephone coverage, few transportation options apart from private vehicles and challenging roads and distances. All the obstacles to fair representation that existed in 1990 essentially remain.

What has changed are the boundaries, which have been rearranged and expanded as more and more seats have been pushed to the coastal areas of Queensland, especially in the South East corner. The reason for this is that number of seats has not increased since 1986, while the population has virtually doubled. The population quota system then dictates that the larger electorates expand their boundaries to provide for smaller electorates in the more densely settled parts of the State.

This was never EARC's intention. In November 1990, EARC recommended that an independent electoral authority review the number of members of parliament every seven years. The intention was to keep pace with population growth. By not implementing this recommendation, we have condemned rural and remote Queenslanders to lesser representation than other Queenslanders. At the same time, we are happy for them to pay the same taxes and charges as their more privileged cousins while they enjoy lesser benefits.

The issue is exacerbated because the continual expansion of the large seats under the quota system largely ignores the natural geographical boundaries of Queensland's districts and the very real, human cultural boundaries created by these geographical differences. I believe this is dangerous because it undermines people's sense of being part of a community of common interests, which is so vital to the functioning of our democracy.

The loss of representation has been further exacerbated by the forced amalgamations of councils in 2007 which repeated all of the insults in microcosm. The experience becomes one of having an administration imposed upon one's daily life with no understanding and even less care for the consequences that might be created by inappropriate administrative decisions.

The only way to overcome this situation is to increase the total number of seats so that the five large electorates are not further reduced in number and expanded in size. This Bill would achieve that outcome in a way which is not politically partisan. Rather, it vests the decision in an independent body which can review the number of members – up to a maximum of 94 – in the best interests of all Queenslanders and of Queensland democracy.

Yours Sincerely,

Lachlan Millar, MP

Member for Gregory

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