




Speech By  
**Lachlan Millar**

**MEMBER FOR GREGORY**

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**ELECTORAL (REDISTRIBUTION COMMISSION) AND ANOTHER ACT  
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (9.16 pm): I rise to speak in support of this bill. I know everyone in this House works extremely hard in their electorate. This is not about people not working hard or not working hard enough. Everybody in this House works hard for their constituents. This is about geography and distance. Like all members of the Queensland Legislative Assembly, my responsibilities to my constituents are twofold: to know their needs and to represent their needs in parliament; and to assist them in dealing with the state government legislation, services and departments in their daily lives.

For some members, there are very few departments or services that impact on their constituents. They may have three or four schools in their electorate, but they may have a hospital as well. They may never have dealings with departments such as mines, land or water. They can drive across their electorates in 10 or 15 minutes or even an hour. The seat of Gregory covers 327,000 square kilometres—larger than Victoria and Tasmania combined.

As the member, I deal with eight local governments, four separate health and hospital boards administering 20 hospitals and outpatient clinics. Gregory covers two different districts within the Department of Transport and Main Roads, and 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 proportion of Queensland products to market and port.

I represent 57 schools, 26 police stations and 25 ambulance stations. A seat like Gregory involves representing front-line public servants on issues such as state government employee public 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 communities, only two of which are connected by a commercial air flight. To give the House an example, it is not unusual for a constituent to travel from Jundah to meet with me in my office in Longreach or Bauhinia to my office in Emerald, both of which are roughly a 500-kilometre round trip or five hours in a vehicle. Could you imagine asking a constituent in Brisbane to travel to Dalby or to Kingaroy to see their local member?

I had the pleasure of opening the Quilpie show, and it is no show without their favourite son and former member for Gregory, Vaughan Johnson. I took off from my home town of Emerald at 3.30 in the morning, picked up Vaughan in Longreach at about 9 am after having a cup of coffee and a yarn. I hit the road to Jundah to catch up with the mayor and the locals at Barcoo shire for lunch and made it to Quilpie by about six o'clock that night to open the show the next morning. That is a typical trip for a member in a big seat. The members behind me—the members for Mount Isa, Dalrymple, Cook and Warrego—experience that on a weekly basis.

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 for constituents to its members is still in no way comparable to that of city electorates which can be driven across in 15 or 20 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 communication and digital technology have corrected that disadvantage. This is simply untrue. It is exactly these very large electorates where constituents struggle physically with poor internet and telephone coverage, few transport options apart from private vehicles and a lot of dirt roads and distances.

All of 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 the number of seats has not increased since 1986 while the population has virtually doubled. The population quota system then dictates that the larger electorates would expand their boundaries to provide for smaller electorates in the more densely settled parts of the state. I do not think this was ever 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, I believe we have condemned rural and remote Queensland to lesser representation than other Queenslanders. At the same time, we are happy for regional and rural Queenslanders to pay their taxes and charges like every other Queenslanders 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 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 council in 2007 which repeated all the insults. 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. The 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 Queenslanders and of Queensland democracy.