Details of your submission

Please provide additional information and supporting documentation as attachments.

I am writing to strongly oppose the proposed electoral boundary change for Lord Howe Island.

The underlying premise for the proposed change is incorrect and should not be considered or promoted as the justification for a change that would significantly and negatively impact upon the Lord Howe Island community.

Firstly, QantasLink is not the only service provider of airline travel to Lord Howe Island. Eastern Air Services provide regular scheduled flights between Lord Howe Island and Port Macquarie and can be chartered in a more cost-effective way that Qantas fares to Sydney. Notably, Qantas have decreased their services to the Island over time. They do not provide a seasonal flight to between the Island and Port Macquarie and have dropped the Brisbane to Lord Howe Island route as well. Notably, service levels and quality dropped substantially during the pandemic whilst Eastern Air Services provide a crucial connection for Island residents throughout that period of closure and isolation. We were able to receive our medications, food and essentials during that difficult time from Port Macquarie via Eastern Air. This was crucial at the time when supermarkets imposed item limits which prevented us getting what we need, and Qantas cut flights to one per week. The staff there are responsive and caring, and they advocate for us. They will pick up items for us like medications if we need them and ensure they get to us. No one in Sydney or at Qantas will show that level of service or care. Australia Post provided an unreliable service through the pandemic and we became even more reliant on the Port Macquarie links.

Secondly, the idea that residents of Lord Howe Island would fly from the Island just to meet with their state member is unfounded. We are a community of people who have become accustomed to remote living. If we travel off the Island it is to complete a long list of essential visits, meetings, appointments and purchases. Flights between Lord Howe Island and Sydney are frequently cancelled due to weather, so we must by virtue of that add several days to our travel plans simply to ensure we can meet our commitments. It is unrealistic to make such a significant change based upon the idea that a resident would fly off for one meeting. Flights between the Island and Sydney can cost up to $890 one way during peak periods, and so for that financial investment, we make the trip worthwhile by ticking off a lot of things we need to do. On our last visit to Sydney for a week my family and I squeezed four dentist appointments, an orthodontist appointment, optometrist visits, shopping trips for children's shoes and clothes in with seeing family and friends. It is not economically viable for us to undertake a trip for one issue or matter.

Furthermore, post-pandemic the world has changed. We do not need to fly to gain access to our local Member of Parliament. Meetings over the phone or via email (our usual forms of corresponding) are now commonplace and we have the added benefit now of web-based meetings becoming normalised. Therefore, because flights are now less a part of how we connect with other people, it makes sense to consider the relationships that support our remote and isolated community in considering electoral boundaries. Freight from Port Macquarie kept this community going during the pandemic. That relationship has been crucial to our survival and our mental health, because we knew people in Port Macquarie were making sure we remained connected. Education and law enforcement ties are with Port Macquarie area. Whilst we are supported by South-Eastern health, many of us seek referrals and appointments with Port Macquarie health providers because we can actually get an appointment and they care enough about us to extend their working day just to squeeze us in. They know the limits on our time and they make us a priority. I have tried to get this same level of understanding and compassion from Sydney-based providers and it is uncommon. Certainly, and relevent to this submission, the local Member of Parliament for Port Macquarie understands the time and cost impacts of flying off the Island and have historically made themselves available to Island residents via phone, email or web-based meetings.

In closing, this small community is regional in nature and needs representation and links with people who understand regional and isolated living. We also need links with community members and Members of Parliament who understand regional life. I am a Sydney native and have lived in metropolitan Sydney on and off over 40 years. That experience coupled with the last two years living with my young family on Lord Howe Island makes it abundantly clear to me that the voice of the Lord Howe Island constituents would be lost in the myriad of Sydney metropolitan issues, drama and people. Port Macquarie remains the best fit in my opinion, and I would strongly advocate for Lord Howe Island to remain within the Port Macquarie electorate.