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9 July 2020

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
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RE: Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Ensuring Fair Representation of the Northern Territory) Bill 2020

Dear Committee Secretary,

The Northern Territory Chamber of Commerce submits the following information in support of the Bill introduced by Senators McCarthy and Farrell, legislating for the Northern Territory to have a minimum of two seats contested at a general election for the House of Representatives.

We assert that a mathematical calculation by the Australian Electoral Commission does not equitably represent the value of the Northern Territory to the Nation, nor result in fair representation to all Territorians. There is more to representational equity than a population-based formula. With a geographical size of 1.4 million square kilometres or 17% of Australia's land mass, plus the offshore jurisdictions of Christmas and Cocos Keeling Islands, the Northern Territory has a footprint larger than South Australia and a greater total land mass than New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania combined. In addition, the Northern Territory GDP, per capita, is twice that of other jurisdictions.

It is important to note that the Northern Territory population of 245,500 includes 30% of Australia's indigenous first people, who predominately reside in remote communities, many of which are only accessible by unsealed roads that are impassable during the Territory wet season.

In our opinion, any reduction in current levels of representation is a potential travesty of representational equity. As a direct result of the loss of focus on the unique economic, social and geographic attributes of the NT, we could realistically expect a significant detrimental impact on outcomes for all Territorians, and especially for Indigenous Australians at a time when positive outcomes are most needed to Close the Gap.

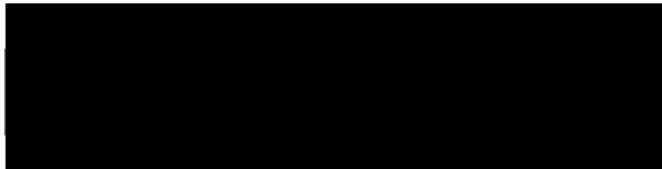
It is unrealistic to expect that a single representative, which also limits multiple party representation, could be responsible for such a diverse electorate that in so many aspects is unique within this nation. The Northern Territory is culturally significant and strategically important with respect to proximity to Asia and national security, hosts significant onshore gas reserves, has high potential for renewable energy and the best place in the world to catch a Barramundi.

When compared to Tasmania, which has 5 lower house seats in a geographically compact area and relatively homogenous society, the Northern Territory would argue that we are underrepresented, even at the current level, and that additional representation would allow greater development opportunities for a region that should be considered Australia's most significant opportunity for growth.

The Chamber of Commerce NT will continue to make the case, through the JSCem inquiry, for two or more Territory lower house seats to be guaranteed by legislation and attend the public hearings of the JSCem in Darwin.

In closing, the Chamber of Commerce NT thanks all Territory Members for their tireless advocacy for Territorians and thank those Members that supported the motion to introduce the Bill.

Yours sincerely,



Greg Ireland
Chief Executive Officer
Chamber of Commerce NT

Karen Sheldon AM
President Chamber of Commerce NT