



Malay Association of Christmas Island's Submission to the JSCEM Inquiry on the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Ensuring Fair Representation of the Northern Territory) Bill 2020

8th July 2020

The Malay Association of Christmas Island represents the Malay people of the Australian Non-Self Governing Territory of Christmas Island in the Indian Ocean. Christmas Island is part of the Lingiari Division of the Northern Territory for federal elections. The Malay people are the largest community group on Christmas Island in terms of numbers and we have been part of the Island since the beginning; when the British commenced mining, we were brought onto the Island for labour in the fields and marine work on the water. We are committed to principles of equality for all Islanders, development for the Island for all Islanders and the continuation of Malay cultural practices and customs to our children.

The Malays have seen many changes on Christmas Island in our 120 years. Each progress to equality was hard fought and won by Islanders of all colours. There were overt practices of discrimination practiced by the British and continued by the Australian Government after it took over the island in 1958. Parts of our Island we were not allowed to go because we are Malay. Restaurants off limit to us because we are Malay. A specific school under resourced compared to the 'Aussie School' we had to go to because we were Malay. But things got better in the 80s and 90s slowly and we consider ourselves proud Australians today as society became integrated and divisions of the past taken down.

Taken down, but not forgotten.

We remember what it was like because it was not long ago. The MACI considers this reversion of the two seats of the NT to be amalgamated into one to be a step back towards those times. Unequivocally we consider it to be a step back in terms of fairness. We are against this change as it reduces the power of our votes by half.

We understand that the AEC implements an impartial mathematical formula to calculate numbers of persons in each electorate. We do not consider this to be adequate. The AEC documents that Solomon and Lingiari will be around 140,000 in number in a single electorate. The average is closer to 110,000 nationwide for an electorate.

How is this equitable? For the sake of falling short a few thousand, we are to go this way?

The amount of challenges that the Northern Territory and the Indian Ocean Territories of Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Island have in terms of overcoming economic, social and remoteness problems is considerable. The committee would be familiar with the atrocious statistics for community well-being, quality of life, education outcomes and so on for the

Northern Territory. While we do not suffer the similar statistics on Christmas Island, we understand that reduced numbers of political representation in the Northern Territory cannot possibly improve those statistics for our indigenous counterparts in the NT.

We cannot make things better as a nation by reducing the voice for those most in need.

This should be the basis for elected representation in Australia, and not solely a mathematical formula.

As Christmas Islanders who have suffered under underrepresentation and outright discrimination in our recent history, we cannot abide by this ruling as we cannot see how it can improve outcomes for us on Christmas Island or our fellow voters in the Lingiari Electorate.

We demand that two seats for the NT be legislated for to maintain the current system.

Yours sincerely

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Azmi Yon.

Azmi Yon

President of the Malay Association of Christmas Island