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# The Push For 'North Queensland' -- Is Australia Getting A New State?



By Josh Butler



GEORGE CHRISTENSEN/FACEBOOK

Queensland politicians are pushing for the northern part of the Sunshine State to break off into its own, separate state.

Others say a Northern Australia state -- comprising the top parts of Queensland, Northern Territory and Western Australia -- would be more appropriate. Is Australia about to get a seventh state?

## **WHAT'S GOING ON?**

Australia has a proud history of proposing new states, or seceding from the Australian federation entirely; just check out [this surprisingly long and detailed Wikipedia page](#). A

recent push by politicians in the northern parts of Queensland has added one more to the list.

Pollies including Katter's Australian Party members Shane Knuth and Robbie Katter, and controversial ex-Labor MP Rob Pyne, have put their weight behind a push for North Queensland to become a state in its own right, breaking away from Queensland. Criticisms of the current system say that political powers focus too much on the southern parts of the state, ignoring and taking advantage of the north.

They say it is hard to expect the state's parliament and decision-makers in Brisbane to focus on the northern parts of Queensland, when the state's capital is 2700 km away from its northernmost point. Geographically, the distance from Brisbane to Sydney -- 900 km -- is one-third of the distance of Brisbane to Queensland's northern tip.

Since the push [came to light in the Courier Mail on Sunday](#), Queensland politicians have weighed in on the debate. Federal Member for Cairns, Warren Entsch, wants to see northern Queensland combined with the Northern Territory and Western Australia for a new "Northern Australia" state.

"What I think is inevitable -- but a long way away because of parochialism -- is looking at voting for a northern Australia state," he said, [the Courier Mail reports](#).

"If they combine north Queensland with the Northern Territory and the northern part of Western Australia, there would be some smarts in that. There are similar climates and similar challenges."

Federal Member for Dawson, George Christensen, wants to see Queensland split into North and South Queensland. He'd split the two states with a horizontal line, just north of Rockhampton, saying a North Queensland state "could be the best in country" based on its agricultural and tourism credentials.

## **CAN THEY DO THAT?**

Technically, yes. [Chapter VI of the Australian Constitution](#) sets out the conditions for "new states," stating that:

The Parliament may admit to the Commonwealth or establish new States, and may upon such admission or establishment make or impose such terms and conditions, including the extent of representation in either House of the Parliament, as it thinks fit.

Specifically, the Constitution states any new state would have to be agreed to by the parliament of the existing state affected by the new state, as well as the majority of voters of the state; presumably, that would require a plebiscite or referendum for the people of Queensland.

The North Queensland proposal already has a major federal backer in Northern Australia Minister Senator Matt Canavan. He [told the Courier Mail](#) that "I personally support new states being created as a way of driving the development of our country and especially of Queensland.

"Queensland is a big state to be ruled from just one corner in Brisbane."

So yes; it could happen.

### **HOW WOULD IT WORK?**

In forming a new state, obviously borders are important. The different proposals each have different border lines, and any such transferal of land, property, homes, farms, crops, roads or other infrastructure from one state to another renegade state would be hotly debated and contested.

Katter Australia Party founder, federal MP Bob Katter, said the Tropic of Capricorn could be an easy, straight boundary to set for a new North Queensland state. He wants a referendum within the next year and a half to let citizens vote on the proposals.

"Absolutely. Within the next 18 months, I think we can most certainly get a referendum up," he [said](#).

Again, any new state would need to be approved by state parliament and actually politically created by the federal parliament. For example, Queensland parliament would need to approve the change, then Canberra would formally make the state "exist" in a political sense.

Presumably, North Queensland or Northern Australia would get its own state parliament, set of state laws, and representation in federal parliament just like any other state. As for a state leader, Canavan jokingly suggested North Queensland Cowboys NRL captain Johnathan Thurston would make a good premier.

### **HAS THIS EVER HAPPENED BEFORE**

Kind of, but not for a long time. Australia's states and territories have changed a lot since colonisation in 1788; from one large colony to a few, then closer to what we know today. The closest thing to what is being proposed now happened in 1927 when the Northern Territory was split into North Australia and Central Australia. The split was reversed and the states reunified just four years later. Watch this handy video to track how things have changed:

## Territorial History of Australia



### **SO, WHAT NEXT?**

Probably nothing, for a long while. There have been a lot of proposals for new states over the years. This one might be added to the pile of proposals that fell flat, or the politicians could shepherd it into a viable proposal to gain public approval. Only time will tell, so don't go ripping up your maps of Australia in anticipation of a new one just yet.



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