

PARLIAMENTARY REFORM - DOWNSIZING PARLIAMENT

On Monday 13 July 1998 the Tasmanian Liberal Premier Hon. A.M. (Tony) Rundle announced that the Parliament would meet for a special sitting on Wednesday 22 July 1998 to reduce the size of the Tasmanian Parliament. This reduction would result in a Legislative Council of 15 members rather than 19, and a House of Assembly of 25 members rather than 35.

Following the passage of the *Parliamentary Reform Bill 1998* (31/1998) in the Legislative Council on Thursday 23 July an election was held on Saturday 29 August 1998 at which 25 House of Assembly members were elected.

Brief History of Downsizing Parliament

- In 1983 Liberal Premier Robin Gray established an advisory committee, which reported in 1984. The Ogilvie Report¹ recommended against any reduction in the size of the Tasmanian Parliament.
- In November 1993 Liberal Premier Ray Groom introduced a pair of linked measures: a reduction in the House of Assembly from 35 to 30 members and a 40% salary increase for the remaining MPs. These issues were 'untied' during the parliamentary process and only the 40% pay rise was passed into law.
- In March 1994 Liberal Premier Ray Groom established a board of inquiry into the size of the Tasmanian Parliament which reported in June 1994. The Morling Report² recommended against any reduction in the size of the Tasmanian Parliament. However Morling did suggest that if a reduction became an 'imperative' then reducing the Parliament from 54 to 44 members was possible. The proposed model was a single Chamber comprising 7 Members from each of 4 Hare-Clark multi-member seats and 16 Members from single-member seats.
- In October 1995 ALP Leader of the Opposition Michael Field introduced a bill to reduce the Parliament to 40 - electing 5 in each of the five Assembly seats and 15 MLCs. This bill lapsed.
- In April 1997, in a document entitled *Directions*, Liberal Premier Tony Rundle proposed a referendum to effect the reduction in the size of Parliament from 54 to 44 Members, using the model proposed by Morling. The proposed referendum failed.
- Several attempts were made during mid to late 1997 and early 1998 to reduce the size of the Parliament. These included a recommendation of the 1997 Nixon Report³ for a 27-member Parliament comprising 9 MPs elected from three seats. However these proposals bogged down because the Liberal Government's 44-seat model was not compatible with the 40-seat ALP model. The Legislative Council did not support the 44-seat model and resolved in October 1997 that there should be 25 MHAs and no fewer than 15 MLCs.

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This table and the notes below it set out some of the consequences of these changes.

	ASSEMBLY 1956-98	ASSEMBLY from July 1998	COUNCIL 1949-98	COUNCIL from July 1999
Size of Parliament	35	25	19	15
Term of MPs	4 years (max [#])	4 years (max [#])	6 years (fixed [#])	6 years (fixed [#])
Election rotation	See Term of MPs above	See Term of MPs above	3 ^{##} (4 in every sixth year)	2 or 3 in alternate years ^{^##}
Seats per electorate	7 in 5	5 in 5	1 in 19	1 in 15
Average enrolment	63,639	63,639	16,755 ^{**}	21,750 ^{**}
Average population for each Member*	13,480	18,872	24,832	31,453
Valid vote	At least 7	At least 5	All	All
Quota to be elected	12.5%	16.7%	50% +1	50% +1
Average quota	7,955	9,824	NA	NA
Quorum ⁺⁺	14	10	9	7
Cabinet [maximum] ^{^^}	10	8	See notes ⁺	See notes ⁺

Notes

- # MLCs have fixed six-year terms because the Council may never be dissolved. Transitional arrangements were made to reduce the 19 MLCs to 15. MHAs have a maximum term of four years, but the Premier may seek a dissolution at any time.
- ## Annual elections held first Saturday in May.
- ^ EG: 1999=2, 2000=3, 2001=2, 2002=3, 2004=2, 2005=3.
- * Electorates enrolments cannot vary by more than 10% from average.
- ** Based on population of 471,800 at Dec. 1997.
- ++ Number of MPs needed to conduct business and make decisions.
- ^^ If Cabinet has a Cabinet Secretary the maximum number is reduced by one.
- + No restrictions exist upon the number of MLCs in Cabinet.

Report of the Advisory Committee on the Proposed Reduction in the Number of Members Elected to Both Houses of the Tasmanian Parliament to the Premier the Honourable Robin Trevor Gray, MHA [Hobart]: Government Printer, 1984.

Report of the Board of Inquiry into the Size and Constitution of the Tasmanian Parliament. Hobart, Tas.: Board of Inquiry, 1994.

The Nixon Report: Tasmania into the 21st Century / Report to the Prime Minister of Australia and the Premier of Tasmania. Hobart, Tas: Commonwealth State Inquiry into the Tasmanian Economy, 1997.

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