

There should be no change to the number of Members of the House of Assembly until an exhaustive examination of all possible means of improving governance in Tasmania has been completed.

Notwithstanding that any change in the number of members of the House of Assembly can be achieved by amendments to Legislation, as servants of the citizens of Tasmania, it should not be up to politicians alone to decide whether or not there should be more of them.

Any decision to increase numbers must be accepted by voters, with the option of not agreeing being put to the electorate – i.e. even if all members of parliament agree that an increase is necessary, there must be an option for the electorate to disagree with the proposition.

Any proposition put to the electorate proposing an increase in the number of politicians must provide detailed information of what alternatives were examined, the pros and cons of each, and why an increase in numbers is considered to be necessary. Not only must any increase in politicians be argued, but also any consequential increase in departmental and support staff must be included.

The exhaustive examination must include:

- Whether some other means of governance can achieve improvements, such as outsourcing some roles and responsibilities under close contract to other parties or bodies, corporations or individuals with the necessary expertise. (e.g. TT Line, Aurora, Tasports, TasWater, Tasmanian Aboriginal Legal Service etc etc). This would remove the expectation that Ministers must be responsible for the minutiae of day to day management of government departments and remove the need for a Minister to respond to attention seeking questions on matters he or she could have no means of foreseeing or controlling. Under this arrangement, the relevant contractor would be responsible to respond to any queries or criticisms. This should free up time inside and outside of Parliament and allow the Premier and Ministers to get on with their portfolios and not be obliged to waste time responding to frivolous, vexatious or irrelevant matters. The public at large would respect arrangements such as this – seeing politicians working efficiently at their tasks rather than seeing them as vying to be the most theatrical, the most indignant, the most offended or the most compassionate.
- Whether members of parliament must be required to devote their time exclusively for the benefit of Tasmanians, and not spend on extraneous matters – i.e. matters within the decision making responsibilities of governments other than Tasmania.
- Whether politicians asking questions in Parliament or making statements outside Parliament, should be obliged to provide a workable solution to any problems they have raised, and whether, if they were in Government, they would implement the solution they have suggested. If they have no solutions, they must be required to say so. Both the questions or statements should be retained on the public record able to be easily and readily accessible by voters at least until the next election. This should mean that politicians can contribute to the best outcomes for Tasmania, rather than just grandstanding.
- Whether there should be a mechanism for electors to challenge statements by candidates and politicians that are unfounded, exaggerated or untrue. Candidates for election must put up a bond that can be forfeited if they deliberately make such statements. For example, political parties should put up a bond or bank guarantee of say \$50,000 and individuals say \$10,000 when an election is called. In addition, members of Parliament should not make statements in Parliament or outside that they know omit facts that would negate or contradict their statements, or that they can not reasonably prove, or are gross exaggerations of the matters purported to be the subject of the statements. There must be penalties for those who make unfounded or exaggerated statements – in the same way that laws created by Parliament penalise businesses for untruthful advertising or bad governance. If an elector wishes to

challenge an untrue statement made by a politician or a candidate, a “tribunal” (e.g. an existing legal or quasi legal body with these additional responsibilities) can debit the bonds according to the magnitude of the infringement. All amounts forfeited would go to charity, not the claimant. Under this arrangement, it should not take too long for it to dawn on candidates and politicians that they must behave truthfully, or otherwise explain that they have justification for not being able to answer. These bonds would not be in jeopardy from claims from the Press whose objective is often to just generate headlines or alarm.

Even though the Government of the day must be able to be held accountable for its actions by the Opposition, these suggestions should make that task easier by making more time available for reasoned and sensible questions and solutions, that Ministers must be obliged to respond to either verbally or in writing and within a pre-determined time frame.

Although there should be no bar for any qualified citizen to stand for Parliament regardless of their personality and background, once elected, they must perform their duties in an exemplary manner, entirely for the benefit of Tasmanians and there should be no leeway for financial or behavioural transgressions. Their performance, their statements, actions and contributions must be recorded and readily available to voters.

If all these suggestions are implemented, including a comprehensive examination of how things might be done better, there should be more than sufficient time for all members of Parliament to do their jobs effectively and efficiently. These suggestions might be a long way from the normal workings of a Westminster system of government, but they are still within it, and can only improve the efficiency of government. The spirit of the new standards of conduct and behaviour should be in legislation that all politicians must acknowledge at every parliamentary session. Some of the matters raised above could be introduced by incorporating them into parliamentary procedures or orders.

This is a good opportunity to have a comprehensive look at how government in Tasmania can be improved and how it can be achieved. If these ideals are implemented, there is no doubt that citizens could be convinced that politicians might be paid more than they currently are. At the moment, voters can only look at the performance of too many parliamentarians with exasperation – having more of them will not remedy that situation.

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