

## **House Of Assembly Restoration Bill Select Committee**

### **A Public Personal Submission by Tony Ibbott**

#### **1. A Historical Perspective**

Established in 1856, the first House had members to represent 24 electorates – Hobart had 5, Launceston had 3, and the other 22 electorates had 1 each ( a total of 30).

In 1906 the old electoral system was abolished and the State was divided into 5 equally represented multi-member electorates corresponding to the state's five federal electorates, each returning six members based on the Hare-Clark proportional representation system (a total of 30).

The first 29 years of the House were relatively stable in numbers with 30 members in 1856, raised to 32 in 1870.

The latter years of the 19th century were a time of rapid social, political , and economic change, and in that context numbers fluctuated to 36 in 1885, 37 in 1893, and 35 in 1900 in efforts to have an effective House capable of managing the turbulent conditions of the day, before being reduced to 30 again in 1906.

That number proved problematical again as we approached the turbulence of the late 1950's and 1960's and in an attempt to achieve a working majority was again raised to 35 in 1959.

Of the 163 year history of the House of Assembly, for 142 years there has been equal to or more than 30 members, and for 81 years there have been equal to or more than 35 members.

It must be noted that these historical numbers existed in an era with a smaller population, a simpler society with a slower rate of change, and less complex machinery of Government. All these things require additional human capacity and capability in the House o Assembly, notwithstanding the advances in technological support.

## **2. Today - A Complex Society**

If we are to design the future and improve the quality of life, according to Russel Ackoff (Re-designing the future, Wiley, 1973) we must determine how the state of affairs differs from earlier societies. According to eminent British philosopher Sir Geoffrey Vickers ( in Ackoff, 1973), "The rate of change increases at an accelerating speed, with a corresponding acceleration in the rate at which further responses can be made; and this brings us nearer to the threshold beyond which control is lost."

In the context of accelerating change, Ackoff says, "Technological change has produced more wealth and affluence, more consumption, more education, more communication, and more travel in the last century than was produced in all preceding centuries. This has changed society in fundamental ways, and produced (all kinds of) crises. Society does not yet know how to respond rapidly and effectively to these crises and it may not learn to do so in time. Therefore, there is an urgent need to change our society in ways that increase its ability to learn and adapt." This is also true of Parliament.

In addition, according to Ackoff, the time in which "majority rule" only was an accepted justification of our voting system has passed. As Lord Wilfred Brown prominent British industrialist and student of management points out:

'the simple rule of "the greatest good for the greatest happiness of the greatest number" ...entails the imposition of change by the majority on the minority. We are now more concerned with the rights of minorities...It is not therefore only that people subject to authority want change but also that even when majorities have "democratically" agreed on change, minorities are increasingly ill content to tolerates such changes.

Minorities are often "ill content" in part because they do not have adequate representation in critical decision making bodies.' Hence Civil Tasmanian Society would benefit from a larger and more diverse representation in the House of Assembly. This would lead to a more competent, confident, and capable House of 35 members better equipped to tackle the social issues of modern society with somewhat greater acceptance, if not agreement.

### **3. Inadequacies of a smaller House**

According to Wayne Crawford, former Political Columnist with the Mercury Newspaper, the urgency in Tasmania, “is for the parties to live up to the commitments they have made, but subsequently deferred, to reverse the most flawed decision made by the otherwise quite successful Rundle Government – which reduced the size of State Parliament to the point that there is no longer the critical mass necessary to provide a cabinet, opposition, backbench or parliamentary committee system of sufficient breadth and depth to cope with the complexities of 21<sup>st</sup> Century government in a highly competitive federation.”

The number and quality of the talent pool available from which to appoint Cabinet Ministers would increase in a 35 seat House of Assembly. In addition , performing Cabinet Ministers could be promoted and non performing Ministers relegated to the backbench.

The importance of opposition members being elected to the House and gaining experience in how the House operates cannot be underestimated, especially when there is a change of Government. In the meantime , opposition members are an important conduit from the community to the Parliament and vice versa. A 35 seat House would improve this situation.

At present there is an almost absence of Backbenchers as a conduit from the Government to the community and vice versa, insufficient Backbenchers to fulfil House Committee responsibilities, and monitor Government performance and keep Ministers accountable, hence the need for more capacity. Personally I found working with Backbench Committees in the former 35 seat house one of the most practical and valuable experiences.

One of the other things not mentioned above is the replacement of 10 accountable elected representatives in a 25 seat House with “numerous” unaccountable and unelected ‘minders’ the numbers, names and salaries of which are not transparent to the general public, and the total cost of which is also not transparent, and should be. The outcome of this is that Ministers are shielded from hearing what they don’t want to hear and should hear from their stakeholders. 35 accountable members would be preferable.

#### **4. A path to the Future**

Tasmania has been held back in the past by numerous conflicts and disagreements, and often with good reason as there were legitimate value differences. As often as not the test of time has proven the minority view to have been a wise perspective.

In this case however, the evidence is not against the Restoration Bill 2018. In fact the Party Leaders have already made an agreement that it is the right thing to do to increase the size of the House of Assembly. What is required is for the Leaders to agree the 35 seats and proceed with the Legislation as quickly as possible, and move on to the next priority issue of concern to the community. The longer we dither, the more people will complain!

I would argue for 35 seats as that is comprised of 5 electorates of 7 seats , aligns State and Federal electorates enabling elected representatives to work together to align Federal and State resources to be achieved, appoint Cabinet positions, and fill House and Backbencher Committee.

#### **5. Call to Action**

In progressing the Select Committee on House of Assembly Restoration Bill 2018 I would urge Select Committee Members and the Party Leaders to adopt the Harvard Principled Negotiation principles as the basis for moving forward. These have been developed in a 30 year Action Research program at Harvard. In simple terms these are:

- (1) Separate the people from the problem
- (2) Focus on interests –not positions
- (3) Invent options for mutual gain
- (4) Insist on using objective criteria

This is an opportunity to put things right . I would be more than happy to meet with the Committee to clarify or expand on any aspect of this Submission.

Tony Ibbott