

Stephanie Hesford

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To: Stephanie Hesford
Subject: submission on restoring size of the House of Assembly

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I write as a former High School teacher who covered Civics in the school curriculum and used to bring students to Question Time as well as to visit the offices of MPs so they could understand how our Parliament functions and be adequately briefed on how to vote once they turned 18.

The size of the House of Assembly has varied considerably since it was founded over 160 years ago and has certainly been larger than its current size. It is now widely accepted that the Parliament was reduced to its current size in order to get rid of the Greens from the Lower House, thus returning to the previous arrangement whereby the Liberals and the ALP simply took it in turns to occupy the Government benches.

The problem with the current arrangement of 25 members is that it prevents good government simply because the government never has enough members to draw on to form an adequate ministry, so relies heavily on consultants, while Ministers are overloaded and cannot adequately cope with all their portfolios. Despite the line that reducing the size of the Parliament would save money, it actually costs more when you factor in payment for the extra consultants.

The advantage of 7 members per electorate rather than 5 is that it makes for more democratic representation in the parliament, reflecting the preference of the voters, although it also means it is more likely to result in a Coalition as no one party will get a clear majority so one of the two major parties would need to negotiate with smaller parties or independents to form a government. This means a more healthy democracy in the long run as legislation can then be properly debated beforehand rather than just waved through using the government majority based on one party. This is quite the norm in most European democracies and makes for healthier debate.

The only objection to restoring the size of the House is sadly the ignorance of voters who unfortunately do not have any faith in politicians in general, consider them lazy and overpaid, and are not prepared to foot the cost, despite the fact that they would save money in the long run. Any move to restore the size of the House requires a public campaign to explain the need for such a move to voters, which would in addition be a healthy exercise in understanding how our parliamentary system works.

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