

PUBLIC

THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY RESTORATION BILL MET IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, HOBART ON FRIDAY, 13 SEPTEMBER 2019

MARGARET ANNE (PEG) PUTT, WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

CHAIR (Ms O'Connor) - Just before you begin giving your evidence I would like to ask whether you received and read the guide sent to you by the committee secretary?

Ms PUTT - Yes, I did.

CHAIR - Of course you did. You also know then that I have to reiterate some important aspects of that document. A committee hearing is a proceeding in parliament. This means it receives the protection of parliamentary privilege this is an important legal protection that allows individuals giving evidence to a parliamentary committee to speak with complete freedom without the fear of being sued or questioned in any court or place out of parliament. It applies to ensure that parliament receives the very best information when conducting its enquiries. It is important to be aware that this protection is not accorded to you if statements that may be defamatory or repeated or referred to you by you outside the confines of the parliamentary proceedings.

This is a public hearing it is being broadcast today. Members of the public and journalists may be present and this means your evidence may be reported. It is important that should wish all or part of your evidence to be heard in private you must make this request and give an explanation prior to giving the relevant evidence. Is that all good?

Ms PUTT - Yes.

CHAIR - Thank you, Peg. As you aware, we are examining the House of Assembly Restoration Bill 2018. We have had a range of witnesses come before us, including former members of parliament, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and union representatives. This is possibly the final day of the hearings and we are asking our witnesses to make an opening statement on the principles of the bill.

Ms PUTT - It would probably be no surprise to the committee that I do support the restoration of the House of Assembly to 35 members in five seven-member electorates.

First of all, I would like to address the functions of parliament. They were best outlined in the Ogilvie Report in 1984 under three broad headings: Adequate Representation of the People, Provision of Effective Government, and Proper Operation of Parliamentary Processes.

All of these things have been damaged by the cut to numbers. As the Ogilvie Report said - and we have seen since - the reduction in numbers, they said any significant reduction and of course that happened, affects the capacity to form a strong Cabinet capable of fulfilling the complex and demanding functions required of it. In fact, we have had a cut to the number of ministers as well which exacerbates that situation. In the period since 1998, government has been becoming more complex and requiring a lot more of ministers. Yet we are in a situation where we have had a reduced number of ministers trying to carry an increased load into the teeth of that increasing

PUBLIC

complexity as well. The comparison we need to make is with ministries in other states that have to fulfil the same functions, not simply with the fact that we might have a smaller population here. It is about the functions that have to be fulfilled by government and by parliament.

They also observed, and we have seen, that the backbench would be greatly reduced. That is a very important problem. It is not just a problem for government; it is also a problem for opposition and that has also been outlined in these reports.

I might just segue and say, government had three reports before it when it made this cut to numbers, all of which said, do not do it - the Beaumont commission, the Ogilvie Report and the Morling Inquiry - and did it. I fear that you are going to end up with three reports before you are saying, 'do increase' and it will not happen. There is a lesson there about ignoring that advice.

This business of the backbench is very important. Of course, I was in parliament before and after the change. I saw it happen and, in fact, I had some of it rebound on me in the sense that people no longer had the sort of access to their representatives that they used to have and bitterly resented it. They would go looking elsewhere. Since I was that sort of member of parliament, who sort of stuck out a bit as being different, a lot of people came to me. It was overwhelming the way people would say, 'I used to be able to ring up and go to see the minister about this stuff. There used to be backbenchers that I could go and see and I'd be able to find the right one and now they're just not there.'

That's really important for people, being represented, but it's also really important for the parliament, being in touch with how the people are feeling, not getting ambushed by things. Understanding what's going on out in the ground and bringing it back to the decision-makers in the party, in the parliament, and bringing it back to the parliament. The loss of that, I think, has been really quite significant.

The parliamentary committee system would be adversely affected. I don't think there's any doubt that has occurred. Committees might still exist in name, but they're not functioning the way they used to, and they're not carrying the load they used to.

This was really important. We actually had, off and on, each parliament, a working arrangements of parliament committee, or a reform of parliament committee, that examined the way parliament worked. We were going through a series of changes to actually broaden the work of the committee system, to elaborate a system of pre-legislation committee so that proposed legislation, if it was going to be all tricky or controversial, would go through a committee for consideration in the same way that this matter is. So that the issues could get thrashed, but so could the way that legislation tried to deal with those issues.

CHAIR - Is that a bit like the New Zealand model?

Ms PUTT - Yes, it was based from the New Zealand model which, of course, had come into place because they no longer had an upper house. But at the same time it was felt there was this situation where legislation would arrive on the floor of the House. It was the first time often that many members had seen it and you might have two days to look at it.

Ms HADDAD - - It happens all the time at the moment.

PUBLIC

Ms PUTT - Then you're debating it and you don't get a proper, thorough consideration of it that way, especially if there are tricky or unforeseen aspects. Trying to do amendments on the run is only marginally satisfactory. A government often won't accept those and sends it up to the upper House. I will get to the upper House in a moment because I think there has been a knock-on effect in relation to the way the upper House is functioning that has happened as a result to the cut to numbers in the House of Assembly and the lack of really effective committee exploration and scrutiny of issues.

The other thing that doesn't so much come forward now through committees is, if a member or some members have a particular issue, something burning with them that they brought to parliament that they really wanted to act on, even thinking about being elected, then you could get up a committee to consider that, to work it through and to educate other members of parliament about it and have it happen. I'm really happy that that's what I managed to do on genetically modified crops. I started from a minority of one for that and, in the end, we got every single member of a Joint House Committee agreeing to it. It was hard work, but it was a really important issue for Tasmania that was unforeseen. There are many, many cases where that might happen and we really lack that.

The thing that also flows, in my view, from this falling away of the capacity to operate the committee system simply because you don't have people to do it, and they haven't got the time and the brain space to deal with all this stuff, is that we have lost a lot of civility out of the parliament.

Ms HICKEY - Really?

Ms PUTT - It was much more balanced in the sense that we spent more time with each other working through issues and working through the mechanics of how to make things happen outside of that Chamber where it becomes adversarial and a theatre. I know it's not always like that, you know, but it seems to me that the adversarial pointscore nature of parliament that you see in question time and in the motions that follow now dominates the way politics happens in the House and around the parliament. Whereas previously, with the committee system functioning properly, we had actually developed a set of working relationships that went above and beyond that in quite a far-reaching way. I see that falling away and it really affects the civility of parliament, and that other really important work of finding commonalities and ways to move things forward. I'm not saying it's dead, but it's not as alive as it was.

The ability of the opposition to fulfil its functions would be diminished. It's really important to make that point that it's not just that you've got ministers struggling under massive loads, which means that they're not as fully across things in their portfolios as they could be, but are more reliant on advice out of departments. So you have ministers who almost become a puppet of the department rather than being in charge. That is a serious situation because we need the ability in a parliament, in a government, to figure out whether the advice they're getting is any good, and to have a bit of getup and go about that.

Similarly in opposition, you see now the opposition party will have to put people straight into shadow portfolios and everybody has to have a portfolio and it's got to be even more massive because there are smaller numbers.

Ms HADDAD - Also, people go straight into ministries in government, which is a huge challenge.

PUBLIC

Ms PUTT - That's right, it's a massive challenge. It actually takes time to learn how to be a member of parliament and what all the different aspects of the job are and how to do them effectively. It's important that members have that time so that they can learn the ropes and find their place, and find how they ought to function within the parliament. To be just thrown straight into something like a ministry or shadow ministry without that time also means you're not getting that development of the new and fresh ideas that should come through for legislation and for directions for Tasmania. It really quashes a lot of that. We've lost that whole quality of what parliament can do. It's just snowed under with this massive quantity of tasks and not enough people to do them effectively and properly.

There are other issues in relation to representativeness as well. When the parliament was cut to 25, we cut two members out of each electorate, so it went to five-member electorates as opposed to seven-member electorates. That reduced the proportion of the vote needed to get elected: 12.5 per cent was the quota for seven-member electorates; and now it's 16.7 per cent. The 12.5 per cent was set very advisedly. The Morling Inquiry report goes into this, that that is the point at which you can obtain the best replication of the views that exist in the community into the parliament. The Hare-Clark system operating in Tasmania has been lauded around the world, when it had those seven-member electorates, for doing exactly that. Sure, it means things are a little more complicated and we have to deal with how do you marry up the different expectations across the community, but that is the point. That's what the job is. It's not winner takes all. It's doing things for the population of Tasmania in the way that best suits their wishes. If that's a bit more complicated by having more different views in the parliament, that's actually good. That's not really a problem as long as we're dedicated, thinking individuals who try to work it through. That representativeness was cut down when you went up to 16.7 per cent.

Then there's the matter of stability. This got mixed up with representativeness a bit when the debate happened. Really, it was all about getting rid of the Greens because the Greens had the balance of power a few times and the major parties didn't like it. They wanted to be totally in control. Interestingly, setting the quota at 16.7 per cent was just a bit more than the record Greens vote. It was sort of a bit of a no-brainer that this would get rid of the Greens; and therefore, it was thought that would lead to stability, which is actually a completely separate issue. The Greens obviously were able to build up their vote again and that hasn't worked for keeping them out of the parliament anyway. The Morling Report also said that the more you reduce the numbers, the more likely it is that you will have hung parliaments and instability, so going down to 25 members made it more likely to have hung parliaments than when you had 35 members, and a bigger buffer that would be elected for a prospective government party.

Ms HICKEY - Can I just ask on that point, around the world you've seen an emergence of a smaller minority parties and you are also seeing more independents. We now have another situation where we have another independent. Do you think that is a trend that is likely to continue?

Ms PUTT - Yes, I think so. I have been spending a lot of time in Europe working. I deal with policy at the Brussels level but also in parliaments of the different countries. For them, it is just perfectly normal to have a spread of views and a range of different parties represented in the parliament and to have to negotiate an accommodation between not just two but often three or four to form government. That's not regarded as a problem.

Ms HICKEY - No, that is what I found too.

PUBLIC

Ms PUTT - It's just that is what you've got to do. You have been elected on a platform, and so has everybody else, and now you begin to make accommodation so that you do begin to reflect the broad variety of views in the community. And if it stops working for some reason over a particular policy, they sort of tend to reshuffle who is allied with whom for the next two or three years or whatever it is, not throw their hands up in the air and say 'we can't get it all our own way, we are going to an election'. People expect parliamentarians to stick with it and work with it and find accommodations. They understand that there will be a modification of any particular party's platform in light of the views that have been brought in from the community - because it's the community that's meant to drive this, not political parties.

That's a big part of what our issue is here: who are we actually representing, what views are we actually representing here and how do we best do that? I don't think it's going away. I think we are seeing that splintering because, for some reason, people feel let down, probably by a party that they've always voted for, and they will go for something else. Also, perhaps they never felt that they were entirely represented by a particular party and there is an individual or a minor party that pops up, a smaller party that might represent them.

At the same time, I have to say I'm quite critical as some of these entities don't seem to have policy platforms and it would be good idea if they did. It would great if we actually taught civics in school and people knew about things like how parliaments work and to look for a policy platform, and that might prompt it. We actually need to educate the community in relation to this as well. That we do not have civics education at school is just appalling, really.

Mrs RYLAH - It's an elective but it's not a compulsory subject.

Ms PUTT - Yes. There are two more things I wanted to mention. One is that there was a committee inquiring into ethics which reported - I cannot remember when -

CHAIR - In 2009.

Ms PUTT - Yes, in 2009, and they made the finding that it was important to increase the numbers in parliament in order to ensure good governance as a bulwark against corruption.

Ms HADDAD - Was that a parliamentary thing?

CHAIR - I think it was the 2009 joint House inquiry that led to establishment of the Integrity Commission.

Ms PUTT - Yes, that's right and it also did say an increase in numbers in the House of Assembly was another important thing that needed to happen.

The last thing I want to come to is the knock-on effect on parliament that I've noticed happened as a result of the cut to numbers, the incapacity of the House of Assembly committee system to work as effectively as it could, and the inability therefore to go through all those policy matters and how you formulate them into legislation.

What we have seen is the Legislative Council move from being a house of review to a House that dwells on policy and does that quite systematically through committees, as well as in the House. That is because nature abhors a vacuum. The Legislative Council has changed its role significantly in response to the change in the House of Assembly. This needs to be borne in mind, because they

PUBLIC

do not get elected across the whole state on policy matters. Yet that is what they are doing. So, we have ended up with a system where, sure, somebody's trying to do this policy stuff, but are they the appropriate body? Especially, when you consider the manner in which they are elected.

CHAIR - Thanks, Peg. We have had Treasury and Finance prepare some costings for us on what it would cost to restore the numbers. The initial costing was a bit over \$7 million a year and then we asked them to present and the costings came back at about \$6 million a year. When the Chamber of Commerce and Industry's Michael Bailey came in and we talked to him about the costings he said that is an investment in good governance and democracy. What is your response to arguments that we cannot afford to restore the numbers at this time?

Ms PUTT - The matter of cost is basically irrelevant. It is about investment in democracy. Comparatively speaking, with the state budget, it is not a massive cost at all. Democracy should never be linked to the cost of the price of doing it.

In the Ogilvie Report, they said -(tbc)

A measure of popular support for the policy does not of itself justify a reduction. Support for the policy to the extent that it is based on the public attitude to levels of salaries, allowances, privileges and superannuation entitlements of parliamentarians does not itself justify a reduction when all other relevant factors are taken into account.

Clearly, the converse is true when we are talking about building it up. It is a matter of investment. It is a matter of your values and what you see as value. Your values in relation to democracy and value in terms of dollar value. How do you price a properly functioning parliament, a better representation, a way of bringing through from the community a bunch of stuff that is just getting stalled at the moment? And more adequately, representing people in a timely manner, because the time is another really important part.

Or I could put it this way: it is a matter of cost and costs. Cost to Tasmanian democracy and government, versus the costs in dollar terms of doing it properly. It is a dead-end of an argument but, unfortunately, a really big populist argument. The linking of the politicians' 40 per cent pay rise to the cut in numbers was devastating politically, but it was really one of the most obnoxious things I have ever seen in terms of selling a policy to the people. To start with, it was years after the 40 per cent pay rise. People think it was a quid pro quo. It was not. As an ex-Greens member of parliament, it was particularly galling because we actually voted against that pay rise and did not take it for ourselves personally. We used it to employ staff for the rest of that term. Yet we were the ones who were penalised by the cut to the numbers. It is a red rag to a bull to discuss that with me.

CHAIR - No such thing as fairness in politics, Peg

Ms PUTT - No.

Mrs PETRUSMA - Peg, thank you so much for what you have had to say this morning. I agree with you in regard to the functions of ministers. We are expected to know as much as our mainland counterparts, but there are quite a lot more of them and you could be on six different MINCOs, and everyone is in awe that there are only nine of you. What do you think is the ideal number of ministers for Tasmania?

PUBLIC

Ms PUTT - We need to at least go back and restore the extra ministers so we have 10. Again, these reports said that was the absolute minimum number of ministers. I am not sure, with the increasing complexity of issues before parliaments now, whether we need more. It is possible, but I am not close enough now to the operations of government to be able to say something informed about this. It is about being able to have those ministers, a Cabinet Secretary, a Speaker and a Chair of Committees, all those positions and still have a backbench of about six and preferably more.

Mrs PETRUSMA - Your other comment about the adversarial nature of politics. I have to admit, I am really enjoying the committee system, because by nature I like to work with all parties. A highlight of my time has actually been working with Ms O'Connor and former premier Lara Giddings in regards to, for example, let us restart the conversation around family violence. I have to say that has probably been the best part of being a member of parliament - being able to work across parties and why I am enjoying the committee system, getting to know people better again. Alone we achieve so little, together we achieve so much.

How do we get this out to the general population you can still be a member of a party, but work together? The media expects and encourage us too to be at each other. How do you change this whole narrative the general population and media get that sometimes it is alright for us to all agree and say some things have to be above party politics for the good of the people?

Ms PUTT - That is a very important point. It is a difficult, because we are reported by the media and they love conflict. They will strive for conflict. In fact, you can do an interview and say something really reasonable and somehow some phrase will get picked out that sounds adversarial and away you go.

CHAIR - Or you say something really reasonable and do not get reported.

Ms PUTT - Yes, that too. There really needs to be some sort of tacit agreement to start talking to the public about cooperation and collaboration as a way forward. Which is a really tricky thing to do when you have different political parties, but it is actually mature behaviour. Maybe it needs to be put in that slightly judgmental way that there is a call for more maturity in parliament. That will resonate with people. We know when people bring school groups in and they see what goes on in question time they are just devastated. They spend all this time teaching children to behave civilly, to collaborate and cooperate in class and then they come in to see that. It is just shocking.

Ms HADDAD - It is understandable. I visited a school recently with a high proportion of kids in pretty violent families and they do not bring the kids to parliament anymore, because in the words of the principal she really prioritises calmness in school. It is a very calm and quiet school because she said that is often the only place kids have somewhere calm and peaceful to go, and they miss school in the school holidays. They have kids in tears on the last day of school before the holidays because school is a safe place for them. She said they do not bring them to parliament anymore. It is too aggressive and upsetting for the kids to see the way people behave. It is a shame they only see question time because that is still the worst bit.

Ms PUTT - That is right. It is actually important as politicians to start pushing the message out we need to do a lot of work together for the good of Tasmania and we are okay about that, and we are big enough to be able to have some different points of view that put us into different political parties, but to still come together to collaborate where we can. This is actually a model for our

PUBLIC

society. It is what everybody needs to be able to do. You cannot have one party or one person trying to push that out. You have to really build some sort of ongoing conversation about it.

CHAIR - Especially in this century.

Ms PUTT - Maybe it is even, you know, maybe you launch a friends of collaboration group and you say to the media, we want to talk about working together so they understand that there is an agenda there about doing things in a different way. Maybe someone will cotton onto it because it is about deciding to do it yourselves but it is also about finding a way to communicate it out.

When I was in parliament we had a cross-party caucus of women, basically, because we did not even have sex discrimination legislation, let alone anti-discrimination legislation when I was first in the parliament. We worked across the political parties for that in a really collaborative way. We would meet together for lunch and work on it. I do not know whether something like that can get carried forward but that was one way we dealt with it in relation to issues that were particularly of significance to woman.

CHAIR - And then we go the Anti-Discrimination Act 1998.

Ms PUTT - Yes.

Ms HADDAD - I have been wanting to ask you this question, but you touched on it before and you described it as a red rag to a bull. That is not why I am asking it. I just want to say that up front to apologise, but because you were there through that whole period and you were re-elected after the reduction in parliament, I was only in second year at university so I remember the images on the news of you with the camping chair in the parliament. I was only young and I was not as engaged in politics as I am now.

The question I wanted to ask you was specifically about that linking of the arguments at the time with the 40 per cent pay increase. I was only young and it is not clear memories for me about how those two things got conflated in that debate. I am interested in your views on that, having gone through it, even though you did touch on them before. Is there anything you can describe about how that all came to be and how it was reported in the media, how the public responded, whether the people saw them as two separate issues; something happened to fuse them together. I am interested in your experience.

Ms PUTT - The issue of whether or not to reduce the numbers of the House of Assembly and, in fact, abolish the Legislative Council or all these things had been on for quite a long time. There is the Beaumont Commission in 1982, and the Ogilvie Report in 1984, that basically looked at the configuration of parliament and said, no do not do it. The Ogilvie Report was to Robin Gray and he just backed off and said, okay we will not do it.

It was not until the Morling Inquiry, which was 1994, that these issues were starting to become linked because the politicians' pay rise happened, I think, in 1993, it may have been 1994, but it was not long after I was elected. I remember it because it was one of the first things that happened. Suddenly, there was this bill introduced and sort of slammed through almost the minute it was introduced. It was one of those suspend standing orders and rush it through the parliament for a 40 per cent pay rise.

PUBLIC

The Greens did not know it was coming so we were absolutely astonished. The next thing we knew it was through the House and then it all blew up because it was a 40 per cent pay rise, which had been because politicians had not accepted pay rises for quite a long time. There was this idea that politicians get paid too much and people do not have enough money out in the community. Therefore, politicians should not be seen to be feathering their own nest; they should be governing for the people and putting up with it.

It had got to a point where it actually was such a low remuneration that it was really difficult. I mean, it seemed big to me because I had come from a really low income. So it seemed like a massive increase to me, I might say. It was after that that they got linked. It was really Jim Bacon who linked them, he ran the '40 per cent, Never Forget' campaign out of the Trades and Labour Council. Then, on coming into parliament, he linked it with the need to reduce numbers, which was all about trying to get rid of the Greens.

The interesting thing was that the huge push at that time to reduce the numbers was actually coming from the business and industry council. Jim Bacon linked the two and then the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Council pushed it and managed to peel off a couple of members at the Liberal Party to cross the Floor and at that point Tony Rundle capitulated.

CHAIR - It is interesting, because the Chamber of Commerce and Industry has completely reversed its position, if that was the position in 1998?

Ms PUTT - Yes, that is why I brought it up because they have changed their position. You have seen people who were MPs at the time who say this was a terrible mistake.

CHAIR - Yes, across parties.

Ms PUTT - David Llewellyn said it really clearly. I see Michael Polley came and talked about it, but it has happened across parties.

CHAIR - Yes, and both Houses.

Ms PUTT - Yes. I know David Llewellyn did on radio, because I was on the same show at the time, admit it was cloaked in all this saving money and dealing with stability. It was basically to get rid of the Greens as far as he saw it and had been a mistake.

CHAIR - He stated that in parliament also.

Mrs RYLAH - Thank you, Peg. It has been really insightful so thank you for your evidence. We have not had any evidence on a question about the role of Estimates committees. They are very adversarial, as we know. I am really interested in your comments about the collaboration, the role of the backbench to work through a whole lot of issues across parties to share and drive change. I do not know when Estimates came in. Have you any insight? Can you give me any background please, Peg?

Ms PUTT - Yes. Estimates committees were a Greens' initiative for the budgetary Estimates. So were GBE Estimates; they came in at two different times. The Estimates committee was one of the things we negotiated to happen during a balance of power period, so I guess it was 1996 with the Rundle Government. Before, the only scrutiny of the budget was in parliament. A minister stood up and you had 30 minutes, or whatever it was. The minister did not know the answers and

PUBLIC

you never got to the bottom of anything. We got the Estimates committees. For the first couple of years they worked properly. They actually just excavated information. Of course, some of it was stunning and newsworthy. A lot of it was really understanding properly what was in the budget. I have to say, my approach to Estimates always was sure, we use the first hour to try to get a story out and then let us just try to properly understand how this budget is working.

At that time, because the ministers were not really across all the ins and outs of this, the department officials did answer most of the questions, and they answered them on the face value of the question, rather than trying to deal with the politics and all the rest.

CHAIR - Or protect the minister?

Ms PUTT - Or protect the minister, yes. Unfortunately, that rapidly changed once the media got onto the idea this was a really good place to go for a story. Then ministers found it embarrassing things were being discovered about stuff going on with allocations in their portfolio they had not actually been across. Obviously, that is embarrassing, but it is also important. You can react by being defensive or by saying, great, let us have a bit more of this and we will all really know what is happening and we can put the public service on their mettle, which is how I would have wanted to go.

I do not know how you fix it now. It has become a sort of a charade rather than getting to the substance of what is going on in the budget. My pet thing, which I actually picked up from Rupert Hamer, was we also needed to examine the government businesses. This was a bit of a move going on in the Liberal Party, nationally. I took a look and thought, you are right, and started pressing that here. Eventually, we also got GBE Estimates to begin to look at what was going on in the GBEs. That was really important because obviously a lot of the money of government is actually being allocated and spent there. Just looking at the other parts of the budget without looking at the GBEs wasn't good enough. But again, it turned into the same sort of stonewalling over the years. I wish I could tell you I had a magic solution for how to make people be reasonable and do what the job is meant to be.

Mrs RYLAH - It is a really non-collaborative space now.

Ms PUTT - Part of it has to be training, doesn't it? It has to be training for members of parliament about what this is about, but it also has to be training for some of the bureaucrats about what this is about. 'What are we trying to do here and how do we operate?' We need induction courses for media like anything because they don't get any. As you know, you get young stringers sent down from the media who have absolutely no clue. They are reporting things; they are looking for conflict but they don't have any history of what has gone on and they don't understand how parliament functions. They don't understand the value of some of these institutional arrangements.

I will always remember a media conference when the whole issue was about 'Should we abolish the Legislative Council or not?', which is where the head of steam was going, I might add, before it got turned around and turned into 'Actually, we will cut the House of Assembly'. Originally it was going to be, 'We'll abolish the Legislative Council', which is why the free conferences to resolve difficulties between the Houses were abolished and that hasn't been fixed, so that's another problem.

I did a whole media conference about the values of a bicameral system over a unicameral system. The media asked questions and all the rest of it, it was quite a long conference. They were still asking questions after three-quarters of an hour, it was amazing. Then everybody cleared out

PUBLIC

of the room and this one journalist stayed behind. She came up to me and she said, 'What's bicameral?' - and this was the chief political reporter for a major outlet. We definitely need a bit of training there. I don't blame them; they have not had the opportunity to know that stuff. It would enrich their understanding of what's going on as well as enriching the reporting and enriching the parliament should they know that.

CHAIR - Peg, we have had the representatives from the Aboriginal communities come before the committee and advocate for representation and seats allocated to Aboriginal Tasmanians. One proposition is that those seats be in the lower House. Then, Julian Amos, former Labor member, came before the committee last time we sat and proposed that those two seats could be in the upper House, which, in his view, would be more appropriate because it is that House of review, not the House of government as such. What are your thoughts on the need to have Aboriginal representation?

Ms PUTT - I've always been a supporter of having Aboriginal representation, expressly Aboriginal representation in the parliament. I actually proposed during a State of the State address as leader at one point that there should be two dedicated seats for the Aboriginal population. That was after I had spent some time in New Zealand and had spent quite a lot of time speaking with people about the then system operating in New Zealand and the representation of Maori. I have to say my family has a long history in relation to representation of Maori. My family predecessors were the legal advisers to the Maori on the Waitangi Treaty, so it is a big deal for me.

I think there should be Aboriginal seats; I'm not quite sure how you achieve it. I have that belief that we need to represent this culture, this community and these views, and to do it very purposefully in the parliament, not just to say somebody is of Aboriginal descent and they are in the parliament so that's okay. That's not what this is about. We do need to do it, but how you fit that into a Hare-Clark system boggles my mind. Maybe that idea of Julian Amos's that you do it in the upper House has some merit. However, you do want the Aboriginal representatives able to contribute properly to decision-making and be counted in those decisions, not simply reviewing decisions coming from somewhere else. Therefore, a policy input is needed and you need to insert that in the lower House.

At the time I raised it, this was floating a way-out idea because you have to start bringing ideas into parliament and I hadn't resolved how it would occur. I confess I have not really worked it through since then.

CHAIR - Mr Amos's model would have been like a Senate election, so two state-wide seats elected to the upper House, which may step outside that Hare-Clark difficulty in the lower House.

Ms PUTT - That is right. I think it was the Morling Inquiry that recommended the reform should be made to the mode of election of the Legislative Council so they were elected on a state-wide electorate under Hare-Clark, with six-year terms and elections three years apart and not necessarily concurrent with the House of Assembly. In which case you might be able to insert something in there.

Ms DOW - Thanks, Peg, for your contribution today and my apologies for not being there face-to-face. My question relates to a proposal put to the committee regarding changing electoral boundaries and with the view to having greater representation localised in electorates. This would put forward to the creation of seven electorates of five members. I wonder if you have a view on this?

PUBLIC

Ms PUTT - I do not support this because it goes to keeping the proportion of the vote higher to be elected. You do not tackle the representativeness of the parliament properly if you do it that way. You may have a slightly more local member, but you do not have the same restoration of representativeness of the parliament with five-member electorates.

From my experience, when we had seven-member electorates you would have someone fairly local for your area. Within an electorate you would have people who were located in different parts of the electorate, who would basically divvy up responsibility - often within a party - for the different parts of the electorate. You would have that local representation. You would almost know the pothole they were talking about.

Ms DOW - Thank you. The other question is in relation to the instability of parliament. I wonder whether there are other factors other than the reduction of numbers in the lower House that, in your observation, have contributed to this? Or if you wanted to add anything further?

Ms PUTT - The only other thing that really contributed to is the mindset of winner takes all, as opposed to the maturity of being able to reach the combination of views. I really enjoyed it when we had that balance-of-power parliament without any arrangement with the Liberals, apart from we said we would guarantee supply unless they did something really dastardly. Because, on the floor of the House, we worked out an accommodation between the parties for every piece of legislation. Sure, it was quite a bit of work. We all had to work hard to understand issues we had never understood before and then talk to each other about how to make the amendments. We would often have the second reading debate and then adjourn before we went into committee and talk about, or might start in committee, and talk about amendments and discuss in the backrooms how can we best match these up. We would do it. Then we would come back into the House and continue the debate to a point where we had amendments all sides agreed upon.

That was amazing. It was really mature, it was great. People developed ways of working together that persisted a little bit into the next parliament, but then have slowly withered away. It is about being prepared. A government has to stop thinking, 'We get up in the morning, we call the shots and everything goes how we said it would because we have the numbers and everybody else can get out of the way'.

CHAIR - Welcome to our world.

Ms HADDAD - Can I ask one more question? I keep turning back to the media impact and their expectations on politics. Jacque made some really good points about this when she asked her question earlier. There is now an expectation in the media that if the government shows any compromise they have lost. This has added to the adversarial nature. Then it is a self-perpetuating cycle: governments must power through with their agenda because if they show any sign of compromise we will jump on them as an opposition to say they are unstable and out of control, and the media will. It is all self-perpetuating. What are your observations about the different approach of the media now to when you were in parliament in terms of looking just for the conflict and being very suspicious of all movements of all politicians. I feel this is how the media now operate.

Ms PUTT - It was interesting because we had a balance-of-power period following on from the Democrats holding the balance of power in the Senate. At that time, Cheryl Kernot actually used to make it an art form - I used to call it doing the Feral Cheryl. She used to make an art form of going out and saying here are the issues. On the one hand this, on the other hand that, we have

PUBLIC

to work out do we support this idea or do we support that idea, or is there a way through the middle. What ended up happening was that the media paid attention. When we found ourselves in the balance of power we would do a similar thing. We would hold a public conversation about what things we were considering, whether to support something or not, and the media became interested in the conversation, rather than simply who has won or lost.

It was more complicated and became really interesting. You could turn it into a big drama and go out on day one and say, 'I am not familiar with this. I need to go away and have look at it'. They would report that I had said I do not know anything. Then you would have media ringing up asking, 'Well, what do you think?', and I would say, 'I will come and explain to you what the issues are that we are considering'. They would turn up and say, 'Oh right, there is this and there is that'. Then they would ask the other parties what they thought about those things, and eventually we would come to a decision. The decision-making became the drama and thing to follow. We had to really manicure it to make it go that way.

CHAIR - But it is also an important part of engaging in a public policy debate. We do not have policy debates very often now. We take positions and therefore do not invite the people we represent into the conversation about policy development.

Ms PUTT - That is right. The other thing, building on what you said, is we also have all this name calling and stuff about character - they are a so and so and what have you - as opposed to the point of view they are representing and nuances. This has happened generally in politics in Australia over the period, but has been exasperated here in the parliament by this emphasis on the arrival of this adversarial nature because of the less collaborative work being done around the place and less discussion open and publicly on policy. You are right, this is where we need to pull it back to.

CHAIR - Thank you, Peg, that is great. You cannot leave the table yet. We have to swear you out. As I advised at the commencement of your evidence, what you have said to us here today is protected by parliamentary privilege, once you leave the table you need to be aware the privilege is not attached to comments you may make to anyone including the media even if you are only repeating what you have said to us. Are you comfortable with that?

Ms PUTT - Yes indeed, thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you so much, Peg that was great, it was clear as a bell, we are working on it, I have not given up hope yet even though it is a very difficult political space at the moment.

Ms PUTT - Yes, it is very hard. I understand, I am not giving evidence now but the only thing is to try to have a conversation with the people about it by addressing the deficiencies they see.

CHAIR - And they feel.

Ms PUTT - Politics is happening at the moment. People really do not like the way it is at the moment.

CHAIR - They are really disheartened, at a time when they are really looking for leadership too and collaboration. Thank you, have a good day.

THE WITNESS WITHDREW.