

DRAFT SECOND READING SPEECH

HON JEREMY ROCKLIFF MP
PREMIER OF TASMANIA

Expansion of House of Assembly Bill 2022

** check Hansard for delivery**

Mr Speaker, I move that the Bill now be read a second time.

Today is an important day for Tasmania, for our future and for the future of this House. The significance of today is greater than this moment. It is for generations to come.

In October 1856, Tasmania became an independent self-governing colony, adopting our Westminster system of responsible government. Our House of Assembly's first elections were called in October 1856 and, on 2 December, just over three weeks before Christmas, this House of Assembly met for the very first time. Then we numbered 30 members, Mr Speaker. Thirty members to represent fewer than 82,000 people across 24 electorates.

By the time we had federated as a nation, the Tasmanian Parliament had settled on 35 members in this House of Assembly. In 1906 there was further reform when Tasmania's current electoral system was established. It is that system we retain today. We became a State of five electorates, with each electorate equally represented by seven members in this House. Over the course of the twentieth century, the House periodically fluctuated between 30 and 35 members.

In 1998, Mr Speaker, the House of Assembly was reduced from 35 to 25 seats. For almost 150 years before that moment, the House of Assembly had never fallen below 30 seats. Since 1998, that is, for almost a quarter of a century, Tasmanians have been represented by fewer members than ever before.

Before 1998, many reports and commentators warned of the dangers of reducing the size of the House of Assembly; that a smaller House would have difficulty in adequately discharging its functions as the House of government.

In 1998 we were an island community of approximately 475,000 people. Since then, we have continued to grow, Mr Speaker. Today we are a population of around 570,000

people; a people who need representation from all sides of this Chamber to meet the challenges we face.

On the 25 May 2022, I announced this Government's commitment to restoring the House of Assembly from 25 to 35 seats, which will come into effect at the next state election. Today I make good on that promise.

Mr Speaker, as soon as I announced the Government's commitment, I sought the advice Electoral Commissioner, Andrew Hawkey. The Expansion of House of Assembly Bill has been informed by the report of the Electoral Commissioner.

I sought that advice underpinned by two key principles: 35 seats and maintaining the Hare-Clarke system. Mr Hawkey examined two options for reform – retaining five electorates and increasing each to seven members and revising Tasmania's electoral boundaries from five electorates to seven with five members in each electorate. The Commissioner also considered the impact on quotas, related costs and 'communities of interest'. I raised this second matter with him because I was mindful of community discussion on the issue.

The Government has considered that advice closely and resolved to proceed with the most timely and cost-effective measure – restoring the House of Assembly to an appropriate level of proportional representation and retaining our current five electorates.

There were a number of considerations in this decision, including:

- electorates should reflect communities of interest and moving to seven electorates would necessarily entail splitting Hobart, and
- the very real likelihood of confusion in having different electorates for state and Federal elections.

The fundamental core of this reform is not new. There has been no shortage of examination and commentary on the impact and outcomes of the events of 1998. As recently as 2019, the tripartite Parliamentary Committee Inquiry into a proposed House of Assembly Restoration Bill invited public submissions and held public hearings. In its 2020 report the Committee unanimously recommended that the House be restored to its former size.

The Committee found that the reduction in the number of members in 1998 eroded the fundamental purpose of the Hare-Clark system, which is to achieve fair and proportional representation. So too, the Committee found the diversity of interests within the Tasmanian community would be better represented in a restored House of Assembly.

Mr Speaker, the Committee's recommendations are as relevant and true today as they were two years ago.

The Government seeks to restore this House to its former size so that we can better equip the Parliament to drive a broader agenda – an agenda of positive social change and greater proportional representation for all Tasmanians. We need a House, that through its representation of seven members per electorate, delivers scope and space for a broad range of views to be represented.

I am also acutely aware Mr Speaker, that this overdue reform does not come without impost on our budget. In 2019, when there was previous agreement to move forward on restoring the House, the Department of Treasury and Finance provided costings on the proposal. I note, given inflationary pressures, that the costs may be more than initially proposed. These are costs we must bear. The Department of Treasury and Finance, in conjunction with the Department of Premier and Cabinet, will work on revising those costings following the Bill's passage through Parliament.

Prior to 1998, Tasmanians had always been represented by no fewer than 30 members in the House of Assembly. We must restore this House to deliver for the Tasmanian people, not just for the members gathered here today, or the government I lead, but for our future. It is overdue. The demands on government today are greater than ever. We understand that the world is a more complex place than it was in 1998 and we strive to face its challenges and complexities; not turn away from them.

Mr Speaker, may I take this moment to acknowledge my colleagues across the Chamber for their support in this matter. I am grateful for the tripartite support this announcement has received.

This support was reflected through the public consultation on the Bill. While only six submissions were received, all were in support of increasing the House of Assembly from 25 to 35.

We have also taken the opportunity in the Bill to strengthen transparency by including a provision requiring the appointment of a Minister or Secretary to Cabinet to be gazetted so that information is publicly available.

I also acknowledge that I am not the first Member of this House, or the first Premier, to seek to put right the decision that was made in 1998. The reduction to the House of Assembly has long been recognised as a decision that adversely affected Tasmania. In the

past, several former members of this House came to agreements to resolve this. Together, I hope we can do just that.

Mr Speaker, I would also like to acknowledge former members of this House who carried out their parliamentary functions and delivered effective representation, and the personal impact that can have. We have seen that impact on several former parliamentarians and Ministers. Their tenacity has been remarkable.

We are a small island State, Mr Speaker – an island state known for its extraordinary beauty. Yet despite our size, we must still deliver the same services that Australians in other states and territories receive and we must be well equipped to do so.

In light of that, the Bill also increases the number of Ministers to no more than 11, one more than the pre-1998 provisions. This will future-proof the capacity of future governments to manage the ever-increasing complexities, pace and workload that comes with ministerial responsibility. It will help to support and protect ministers from burn-out so Tasmania does not lose people of experience.

We must deliver education, hospitals and health care. We must conserve and protect the environment. We must reconcile and acknowledge our past, and plan for our collective future. We must provide roads and public transport. We must deliver public works. We must support industries that we depend on. We must provide and support community services. We must protect and serve our people. We must develop social policies for an inclusive Tasmania, for a state of kindness. We must protect our most vulnerable. We must nurture our community. We must plan for our future, with vision and with heart.

To do that, we need more voices, more hands, more people – and greater and proper proportional representation for all Tasmanians. We must restore this House of Assembly to its former size. It is long overdue.

Mr Speaker, I commend the Bill to the House.