

Submission to the Review into the Size of the ACT Legislative Assembly

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This submission considers an appropriate size for the Assembly by comparing it with the number of members in other Australian state and territory parliaments.

Page 11 of the expert reference group's discussion paper on the Review states (with my dot points added)

A further very important consideration is to make a judgement about the number of Members that would be sufficient to provide

- *for adequate and fair representation of the ACT community and*
- *for a workable legislature, capable of adequate scrutiny of the executive.*

The Expert Reference Group is particularly keen to receive public submissions addressing this consideration.

The size of the Assembly is therefore informed by the above two components. It can be reasonably argued that the first, representation, should generally be in proportion to the number of enrolled voters (or overall population) in the state or territory. The second size component, a workable legislature, is not directly related (in any linear way) to the number of enrolled voters in a state or territory. There would nevertheless be some interaction between the two components in contributing to the size of a parliament.

In comparing the number of representatives in other jurisdictions, the following assumptions, and the reasons for the assumptions, are listed below:

- Federal members are excluded, as they are irrelevant to the functions and powers of the Assembly,
- State upper house members are excluded, as the ACT does not have an upper house,
- Local government councillors are excluded, as the ACT does not have a separate local government structure, and
- As a result, the basis of comparison is the number of members of lower houses (or single houses) in the various jurisdictions.

As the ACT Government is directly responsible for functions that other states and territories have devolved to local government, some assumptions and adjustments are made for local government functions in the ACT.

No information is available for the ACT, however in 2010-11, local government expenditure in the rest of Australia was some 15.35 per cent of state government

expenditure (excluding grant expenses to local government). It is clear that local government responsibilities are far less than state territory responsibilities¹.

Most local government councillor positions are part time.

As a result of both these two local government factors, relatively small budgets and fewer responsibilities, and part-time councillors, comparisons of the size of the Assembly with, say, the number of part-time councillors in state capital councils, which often cover only a small part of a city, are not particularly meaningful for this Review.

Also, some observations are made regarding the relative (geographic) size of jurisdictions and possible impact on representation.

The Table below shows lower house (or single house) membership per state/territory by population, voter enrolment, land area and voters per square kilometre.

It also shows totals and the average number of enrolled voters per square kilometre across Australia (excluding external territory land areas). The average number of voters per square kilometre is 1.86 across Australia.

Western Australia, Queensland, Northern Territory and South Australia have lower average enrolment per square kilometre than the Australian average. Whilst South Australia is lower than average, this is tempered by the fact that most of the population is concentrated in the south-east of the state.

Lower enrolment per square kilometre would translate into extra travelling by members within the electorate to visit constituents, or constituents to visit members.

Analysis of the relationship between the number of members and the number of enrolled voters indicates a strong linear relationship between the number of members and the *square root* of the number of enrolled voters. This can also be expressed the other way around, that is, there is a strong relationship between the *square* of the number of members and the number of enrolled voters.

The *square* of the number of members, or the number of members raised to the power of *two*, may be an appropriate relationship with the number of enrolled voters, to take into account the abovementioned observations on the interaction of the *two* components of the members' work – representation and a workable legislature.

¹ Proportion = \$29.323Bn/ \$190,989Bn x 100% = 15.35%.

Local government expenditure = \$29.323Bn.

State government expenditure = \$198.199Bn less \$3.853Bn (ACT state) less \$3.357Bn (state grant expenses to local governments) = \$190.989Bn.

Source ABS - 5512.0 - Government Finance Statistics, Australia, 2010-11 General Government Operating Statements Tables 000-1 (Australia all sectors) and 238-1 (ACT state).

Table: Lower house (or single house) membership and state/ territory characteristics

State/ Territory	Lower (or single) House Members	Enrolled voters	Population	Land area (km ²)	Voters/ km ²
Northern Territory	25	126,762	234,800	1,349,129	0.09
ACT	17	257,190	374,700	2,358	109.07
Tasmania	25	359,145	512,000	68,401	5.25
South Australia	47	1,103,973	1,654,800	983,482	1.12
Western Australia	59	1,387,350	2,430,300	2,529,875	0.55
Queensland	89	2,779,556	4,560,100	1,730,648	1.61
Victoria	88	3,619,729	5,623,500	227,416	15.92
NSW	93	4,648,429	7,290,300	800,642	5.81
Total (excl Jervis Bay)		14,282,134	22,680,500	7,691,951	1.86

The number of members from Northern Territory, Western Australia and Queensland are relatively higher than the other states and territories. This may be explained by the fact these jurisdictions are partially countering for otherwise even greater travel distances resulting from having lower than average voter enrolment per square kilometre.

If these jurisdictions are excluded on this basis, and the ACT is excluded as the Review is trying to determine an appropriate size for the ACT Assembly, the linear relationship between members and the *square root* of the number of enrolled voters is slightly stronger².

Based on information the Table, the Chart below plots the number of members of the lower house (or single house) against the *square root* of the numbers of enrolled voters. It also shows the trend line derived from the relationship between the number of members and the *square root* of the number of enrolled voters of the states (no territories) excluding Queensland and Western Australia.

The states and territories are not labelled in the Chart, however they follow the same

² The formula resulting from the linear regression analysis is
Number of members = 0.04496 * (Square root of the number of enrolled voters) – 0.916.
(The derived R-squared value is 0.993. A trend line is most reliable when its R-squared value is at or near 1.)

order as the Table, that is the Northern Territory (with the fewest voters) is on the left and New South Wales (with the greatest) is on the right.

Using the trend line depicted in the Chart (with its formula as shown in Footnote 2), the resulting number of members of the Assembly would be 22.

A similar result would be obtained if populations rather than the number of enrolled voters were adopted.

Noting from above that local government functions would add some 15 per cent to ACT Government state expenditure, a further 3 members of the Assembly would be appropriate (or a further 13 per cent).

This would result in an appropriate Assembly size of 25 members.

It is noted that using the derived formula, the ACT would need some 500,000 enrolled voters (or a population around 750,000) to justify a 35 member Assembly (including 4 members to allow for local government functions). It is difficult to see how the ACT population could ever reach this size, or 35 members be justified.

Chart: Lower house (or single house) membership and the square root of state/ territory voter enrolments

