

Attention: The Expert Reference Group reviewing the size of the Assembly

This is a personal submission by an individual adult resident of the ACT. I have no special expertise in electoral or political matters, but take an active interest in the ACT's affairs.

Though **I suspect strongly that the Assembly needs to be increased in size** to increase the size of the pool of potential ministers so as to increase the efficiency of government, I do not have any quantitative information to support this. But the **main issue I wish to comment on is the nature and size of ACT electorates.**

A worrying trend in Australia, as well as in some other modern democracies, is the polarisation of politics into a gladiatorial contest, between two main antagonistic teams, in which differences are confected and exaggerated and points of agreement downplayed. While it is lively (but not good) theatre, and is nectar to the media, it does not help our legislators find constructive solutions to the problems facing our societies. This is bad for our democracy.

Polarisation and aggression is destructive, but so is the false simplification of the diversity of public opinion down to two, large, and not particularly different, groups. If we are to remain a civil society and, hopefully, become more so, we need to accept the validity and importance of, and find a voice for, the wide range of minority opinions held within society. This can be difficult where multi-member electorates have insufficient numbers of members, and is extremely so in more traditional, single member electorates, particularly in Australia where party discipline within the two dominant parties is so strong - much stronger than in England and the USA. I believe that **the current minimum in the ACT of 5 member electorates is too low and propose that the minimum should be raised to seven.**

The contention that representation of minority opinion leads to instability is a canard. The logical extension of this view is that dictatorship offers ultimate stability - perhaps it does, but at the expense of democratic principles. My impression of the experience of minority government, in the ACT, in Tasmania and also in the current federal government, is that it often leads to better and more open government, because more genuine debate has to take place on the floor of the parliament/assembly. So often journalists and politicians refer to the current federal parliament as a "hung" parliament when its record of legislation passed shows it to be anything but hung.

Because I support the other guiding principles submitted by the ACT Electoral Commission to the 2002 Assembly inquiry, my proposal would limit the options for increase in the number of members of the Assembly to 21 or 27, but if, as at present the ACT were to retain three electorates, but allow nine members in one of them, then a 23 member Assembly would also be an option.

In summary, I submit that: we must retain multi-member electorates; the minimum number of members in each electorate should be raised to seven; and the ACT should have 3 electorates with a total of either 21 or 23 members.

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