

## TO THE REVIEW INTO THE SIZE OF THE ACT LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Before the question of the size of the ACT Legislative Assembly is treated simply as a matter of the ratio of population to number of members, and an increase in size as a foregone conclusion, consideration should be given to whether the current system can overcome the alleged problems.

There appear to be two grounds advanced for an increase in the size of the Assembly: the need for more representatives of the electors, and for more ministers and therefore a larger pool from which to draw them.

The first argument ignores the culture of Australian political parties, whereby members almost never publicly differ from the line of their parties and certainly never vote against their parties, regardless of what their electors think. More members would not equal more representatives of the electors, but more publicly-funded party operatives to cajole their electors.

As for the second argument, even with 25 members in the Assembly the pool for the appointment of ministers, the majority party or coalition, would still be too small.

There is a better solution. As the Commonwealth Parliament has to pass some legislation to make any change, it should be asked to change the system in the ACT to one more appropriate to a small jurisdiction. The so-called "Westminster system" is inappropriate for such a jurisdiction. The ACT (Self Government) Act already embodies significant departures from the Westminster model, by having no equivalent of a state governor and the Assembly directly electing the Chief Minister. Further departures would be beneficial.

There should be a chief executive (however titled) directly elected for the same fixed term as the Assembly, with power to appoint a specified number of heads of portfolios who would not be members of the Assembly and not necessarily party members. They would appear before the Assembly and its committees as required.

The Assembly would remain at its present size and concentrate on legislating and inquiring, without worrying about shifting the couple of votes needed to change the government. The chief executive would not have to worry about losing those votes.

The sterile game of government versus opposition, with a shadow government under the imperative to oppose everything and their tiny backbench faithfully following, would be abandoned. After a time members would rediscover their role of representing their electors and realize that they do not have to vote for things they do not really believe in. This situation would better suit a legislature elected by proportional representation.

The ACT is different from the states. Let it set an example of creative difference.

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