

## **Submission – Size of the ACT Legislative Assembly Inquiry – Ted Quinlan**

My central theses are:-

1. There are insufficient ministers to carry the workload involved in the government of the Territory.
2. There is an insufficient number of members elected to a governing party to provide an adequate talent pool from which a competent cabinet may be selected.
3. There are not compelling arguments for increasing the number of non-ministerial members.

**I therefore recommend the extension of the numbers in Cabinet through the appointment of non-elected ministers, with all the powers of an elected minister other than a vote on the floor of the Assembly.**

In the interest of brevity, I will make some fairly bald observations drawn from my few years in the Assembly.

There is a wide disparity in the relative workloads imposed on various Assembly members.

Ministers each hold a cluster of portfolios which impose a hefty demand, political, representational and administrative. There is no avoiding the need for attention to the detail in a constant stream of matters. A minister is rightfully expected to be across the full spectrum of issues associated with his/her portfolios. Policy development and the exercising of ministerial delegations in matters administrative see ministers consistently receiving literally piles of files to address.

To provide some form of perspective, at one time I was a member of 13 or 14 national ministerial councils where state and territory ministers met with their federal counterpart. A few had relatively straight-forward agendas. Others such as the council addressing the “Insurance Crisis”, were very demanding.

It is a feature of our Assembly that the Opposition shadow cabinet outnumbered the governing Cabinet. Currently five government ministers face off against eight shadows, who can cherry-pick the issues that they wish to pursue. The workload of a shadow minister will largely depend on their own ability to prioritise, to absorb information and to build networks.

The lot of a government back bencher is, I believe, a fairly comfortable existence, the major pressures being committee work which has its own support, and the finding of opportunities to achieve public prominence.

What is needed for good government is an increase in the size of the Cabinet.

On face value an increase in the size of the Cabinet would dictate an increase in the overall Assembly membership from which to select a panel of relatively competent ministers. However I believe that there is an alternative.

Legislation should be changed to allow the appointment of two or three non-elected ministers. These would be appointed by the government of the day.

This proposal will allow the recruitment of people with the skill set necessary in a minister rather than the ability to gain political party preselection and election into the Assembly.

The non-elected ministers would be invested with the same executive powers that he/she would hold if appointed under the current process. They would participate in the Assembly just as any other members, entering debates, presenting bills, answering questions, etc.

**The one difference applying to a non-elected minister would be the absence of voting power. The balance of voting power on the floor of the Assembly would remain a reflection of that thrown up by the electorate.**

As panel members will be aware, the proposed system is not entirely unique, existing for example in USA, UK, France, Sweden, Netherlands, in some form or other.

I would be happy to discuss my suggestion, and my own experience in opposition and in government with the panel or its representative.



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