

Size of ACT Legislative Assembly Inquiry Submission

Submitted by:

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1. Is increasing the size of the Assembly justified? In applying the government's own standard in relation to cost and efficiency, the justification for increasing the size of the ACT Legislative Assembly should be based on workload and affordability and not just on representation.

Why have 50 members if 21 can do the job as well but more efficiently?
Why spend more money increasing the size of the ACT Legislative Assembly when the money could be better spent delivering services to the ACT Community?
Increasing the number of members does not guarantee that the elected members will be capable of performing the task of ministers or shadow ministers. It does not guarantee that there will be sufficient members on the opposition side to do an adequate job of shadow ministries (look at the outcome of the most recent Queensland election).
If the number of ministers and shadow ministers are increased this will also result in additional ministerial reporting and therefore workload for Directorates (more members, more questions, more work, more DLO's). There has not been any consideration of the cost related to this side of things in the report that will be a consequence of any increase in the number of members of the assembly.
The amount of areas that need the attention of ministers or shadow ministers can also be controlled and determined by the government. Some thought therefore should be given to the way the roles and responsibilities of ministers are structured so that there are no inefficiencies in this arrangement that are contributing to the need to increase the size of the ACT Legislative Assembly. It would seem that not all elected members of the Government currently hold a ministry? Does this mean that some of the existing elected members are not up to the task of taking on a ministerial role? How would electing more members be guaranteed to fix this deficiency? If the government is trying to rein in spending in difficult economic times by cutting down the size of directorates and the services they deliver how does this translate to the need to increase the membership of the ACT Legislative Assembly?
2. If the number of members are increased what should the total number of members, electorates and members per electorate be? Given the requirements of the Hare Clark system, an initial increase of 4 members to 21 divided into three electorates of seven members would be a reasonable place to start. This would deliver a 23.5% increase in man power just in members without counting all the additional staffing requirements to support that increase. On the face of it that would deliver a significant increase in resources.
3. Other issues not addressed in the report: Consideration should be given to a maximum number of terms able to be served by any member of the ACT Legislative Assembly. I would suggest that a maximum of three terms is a reasonable number. This gives any one member

the opportunity of serving for 12 years. In a relatively small assembly this reduces the impact of any one person's influence to the detriment of others and any entrenched positions that stop the Assembly from performing to a high level and in an innovative way. In a small assembly strong individuals can dominate over others and the longer they are in these positions the worse it can get. It is obvious that particular members are able to have a strong influence on the overall spending allocations in the budget which may not be based on the needs of the ACT Community and robust strategic planning objectives but rather on pet interests of the individuals. Limited terms ensures a continuous contemporary assembly which better reflects the underlying qualities that the government has in recent times espoused such as innovation, technology and efficiency and ensure that representation keeps up with the changing demographic representation of the ACT Community.

The report identifies that the ACT provides services to residents of NSW. This is so but that does not mean that NSW residents should be able to influence decisions in relation to elections, electorates and members of the ACT Legislative Assembly. This should be up to the registered voters and residents of the ACT only.

An increase in the number of members and by inference the number of ministers and shadow ministers will also mean that the time taken to conduct the business of the government in the Legislative Assembly sittings will likely increase. There would likely also be a larger number of committees, which will result in more time for public servants and ministers sitting in proceedings and answering questions. This is a cost and efficiency issue. More time, more hansard recording, more cost. More ministerials, more questions on notice and otherwise, more cost.

The optimal number of members of the ACT Legislative Assembly is not only about proportional representation, it is also about efficiency and affordability. The ACT community should be proud of the fact that our government is smaller and has less levels than all other jurisdictions. Better representation is about the members listening to their community and responding accordingly, it is not about how many members there are in total. The workload of individual members does not increase proportionally to the increase in the population. All members of the Assembly should be fully utilised to deliver good government.