

Review into the size of the ACT Legislative Assembly

Dear Sir/Madam

I write to forward the following comments on your current inquiry.

While it is clear that the ACT and Jervis Bay need responsible, responsive and accountable government and a viable, efficient and responsible ACT public service, the role of a parliament (and therefore parliamentarians) is a separate matter.

A simple mathematical, comparative argument using other jurisdictions is not appropriate.

The key issue is workload and skill-base. However Mr Quinlan's suggestion that:

"Legislation should be changed to allow the appointment of two or three non-elected ministers"

is extreme and would disrupt parliament as two types of ministers (elected and appointed) could create competition between each and would attract community criticism due to the unelected component in the ministry. There could emerge a competition between 'real' ministers and 'adjunct' ministers. What level may be seen as junior to the other - with any number of ramifications for the nature of portfolios handled by each.

However workload is a key issue but this issue may, in fact, be signaling another problem. Is parliament trying to be both legislature and administrator? Are parliamentarians trying to do too much after legislation has been established? Can more post-legislative functions be delegated to an ongoing, viable, efficient and responsible ACT public service?

In your Review, I hope you keep a keen eye on ensuring that power and administration do not become concentrated in ways which create long-run threats to efficiency and responsiveness no matter how many parliamentarians are provided for.

In essence it appears that better legislation, providing enhanced delegations to an efficient public service, may serve the ACT community better than appointing more ministers, or parliamentarians based on workload arguments.

Skill-base of parliamentarians

An expansion of members, based on their role in representing the ACT community in the legislative process, freed of much subsequent administration and inter-jurisdictional consultation, seems highly desirable. Such expansion need not be for comparative reasons, but is suggested more by the growing

complexity of ACT affairs and the growing insistence of the ACT community for involvement and consultation. If parliamentarians focus on consultation and legislation, the electorate will be better able to assess candidates skills for this role. Judging by the stream of media releases coming out of ministers offices it appears that their functions have become blurred such that no person could be expected to have the necessary skill sets. Unless this is addressed, adding more members will not resolve the issue.

Electorates

I feel that an adjustment of Assembly membership may also provide a further benefit in that all ACT electorates could end up with the same number of representatives. It appears that ACT politics has been disrupted when there is one electorate with more members returned than others.

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