

**MEETINGS OF THE STATES: RESTRICTION OF THE LENGTH OF QUESTION TIME (P.93/2002) -  
COMMENTS**

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**Presented to the States on 18th June 2002  
by the Privileges and Procedures Committee**

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**STATES OF JERSEY**

**STATES GREFFE**

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## Comments

The Privileges and Procedures Committee does not support P.93/2002 - 'Meetings of the States: restriction of the length of question time', of Deputy A.J. Layzell, lodged 'au Greffe' on 28th May 2002. Given that the States Assembly have already agreed that as part of its terms of reference, the Privileges and Procedures Committee is required to bring forward proposals on the revision of the Standing Orders of the States of Jersey and given that it is also charged to look at the timely and efficient management of public business, the Committee requests that Deputy Layzell withdraws his proposition and allows this matter to be considered in its wider context.

The Privileges and Procedures Committee notes that P.93/2002 has arisen out of Deputy Layzell's concern over the length of question time, the merits of question time and the management of public business. The Committee is of the opinion that in the absence of any other formal scrutiny mechanism in the current system in which we are operating, question time is considered to be the principal way in which Committees and their Presidents can be held to account.

The Privileges and Procedures Committee agrees that there should be a balance between the Assembly's functions in debating legislation, discussing policy and questioning of Presidents. However, the Committee is of the opinion that Deputy Layzell's proposition could severely restrict the rights of members, in particular 'back-bench' members, at the present time as there are no alternative mechanisms for seeking information and questioning Committee Presidents in the States.

As part of its terms of reference the Privileges and Procedures Committee is required to bring forward proposals on the revision of the Standing Orders of the States and the Committee intends to propose a complete revision of these. As part of this process the Privileges and Procedures Committee will be seeking the views of all members as well as looking at best practice in other jurisdictions. It is possible that changes may be suggested to the manner of asking questions but if changes are proposed there will need to be adequate safeguards to ensure that all members of the States are afforded adequate opportunities to obtain information and scrutinise Committee Presidents (and, in due course, Ministers) and it is possible that alternative mechanisms would need to be introduced before such limitations could be placed on question time.

The Committee is also charged to look at the timely and efficient management of public business and it is clear that yet again, there is a large backlog. Worse still, there is no coherent plan for the work of the Assembly and the States will continue to meet right up to the time of the election. The Committee recognises that the management of public business is haphazard and leads to the pressures to which the Deputy refers.

The Privileges and Procedures Committee believes that a more satisfactory approach to the matter of questions is for it to be considered as part of its overall review of the procedures of the States when question time can be considered in the overall context of the management of all aspects of States' business'. If the proposition, which only refers to the period ending 31st July 2002, were to be debated before the end of this session it is likely that it would lead to a long debate which could, in itself, take longer than the time that would be saved if it were adopted. The Privileges and Procedures Committee therefore requests Deputy Layzell to withdraw the proposition and allow this issue to be considered in a wider context.