

STATES OF JERSEY



COMPOSITION OF THE STATES: REDUCTION IN NUMBER OF DEPUTIES (P.2/2011) – THIRD AMENDMENT

Lodged au Greffe on 11th January 2011
by Deputy T.M. Pitman of St. Helier

STATES GREFFE

COMPOSITION OF THE STATES: REDUCTION IN NUMBER OF DEPUTIES
(P.2/2011) – THIRD AMENDMENT

PAGE 2, PARAGRAPH (a) –

For the number “21” substitute the number “28”.

PAGE, PARAGRAPH (b) –

For paragraph (b) substitute the following paragraph –

“**(b)** the 28 Deputies should be elected in accordance with the current provisions set out in Schedule 1 to the States of Jersey Law 2005 in relation to the 17 constituencies except that parish of St. Lawrence will return 1 Deputy instead of the current 2.”.

DEPUTY T.M. PITMAN OF ST. HELIER

REPORT

With the Assembly finally agreeing last October – after many years of frustrating debate – to at last implement a package of common sense, if still moderate reform, while like many who consider themselves progressives committed to modifying our system of government I might have liked these to go further, I had satisfied myself that this should wait until a new Assembly was in place.

However, the inability of a few Members to resist trying to reverse decisions they didn't like, or bring about wholly damaging change driven by political self-interest, left me, upon discussion with a number of constituents, with the feeling that as a result I would have to put aside this intent and propose some smaller, more realistic initiatives. This amendment is the first of two.

Prior to my election as a Deputy whilst employed by the Department of Education, Sport and Culture as a professional Youth Worker, I had a number of what are often referred to as 'inspirational' posters for young people on my office wall. One of these carried the maxim –

“If you tell the truth you don't have to try and remember what you have said”.

I mention this only because of the relevance of what I said when standing for election in the 2008 Senatorial campaign with regard to the issue of possible reduction in the number of States Members.

Not only did I state that I felt that a 6 year term for Senator was far too long and that if elected I would be willing to stand down after 4 years to assist such a change in law – a sentiment echoed by a number of other candidates as I recall, including Deputies Tadier, Southern, Wimberley and Higgins, not to mention a number of current Senators – I also stated that I felt though there remained a clear case for the retention of the Senatorial role there was none whatsoever for there to be 12 such positions.

It remains quite clear to me that whilst an Assembly of one type of Member, along the lines of the Clothier recommendations, may ultimately be the best way forward for creating a government that balances lean and effective democratic practice whilst ensuring we do not make false economies by cutting too far and thus allowing power to become concentrated even further in the hands of a few, removing a percentage of the current 12 Senators as the Assembly agreed overwhelmingly to do last October was the best way forward so long as we wished to retain our traditional Parish based system.

After all, analysis reveals both that one could not expect some parishes to lose their Connétable whilst others kept theirs; further still that a small number of parishes – St. Helier being the most striking example – were already under-represented due to significant increase in population over the years which made large scale reduction in the number of Deputies with their ancient parish link highly unrealistic. Nevertheless, the above reality was not to say that a couple of potential reduction opportunities did not exist.

The apparent obviousness of these two is quite starkly apparent when looking at the population figures utilised in the report accompanying Deputy Noel's proposition. However, if we are genuinely committed to fairness and equality in terms of

representation the fact must be acknowledged that only one truly fits the criteria of being genuinely superfluous and unjustifiable.

It is certainly true that in having the smallest population by far, St. Mary, certainly could be seen to be completely out of step with the other parishes and districts in terms of a population to Deputy ratio. However, just as with the Connétable scenario outlined above, could it really be fair to deny one solitary parish a single Deputy representative? From most members of the public and States Members that I have spoken to the answer must be no.

If we are to make additional savings – which we certainly should if possible in these difficult economic times – whilst protecting fair and effective representation for both country and urban regions alike then the one Deputy seat that clearly can be removed as largely unwarranted is one of the two seats in the parish of St. Lawrence. After all, just a quick glance at Deputy Noel's figures spells this out for all to see.

The parishes of Grouville and St. Lawrence have exactly the same population – 4,702 recorded. Yet while Grouville has just the one Deputy position St. Lawrence as a wholly unjustifiable two. Whilst I acknowledge that it can still be argued that in terms of quality Grouville still comes out the winner despite this unfair anomaly, this would be to miss the point. The justification for St. Lawrence to have 2 Deputies to Grouville's one – the parish already being blessed with an outstanding Connétable – simply cannot be made.

Thus, given the difficult economic climate in which we find ourselves – difficulties that have seen the Council of Ministers push through savage cuts to children's free school milk and highly valuable educational opportunities at the world famous Durrell – it is surely apparent that whilst the savings proposed by Deputy Noel would be both a false economy in terms of effective and democratic government, creating a muddled hotchpotch of a system that would not only result in a lopsided representation in the favour of country parishes, and ultimately destroy our whole traditional parish system in the process, painful though it might be, we should be willing to grasp the nettle and remove the one superfluous Deputy seat from St. Lawrence.

Super constituencies have after all already been firmly rejected by the majority of both Assembly and public alike. This reduction from 29 Deputies seats to 28 protects our parish system and though very modest makes a substantial saving in the process: a win-win outcome from all perspectives.

Financial and manpower implications

There are no additional financial or manpower implications as a consequence of this proposal being adopted. Indeed, it would lead to a saving in the region of £44,000 per annum whilst also demonstrating to the public that as a government we are willing to take difficult decisions and cut out unnecessary expenditure.