

STATES OF JERSEY

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MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT REFORM: COMPOSITION AND ELECTION OF THE STATES ASSEMBLY (P.151/2004) – SECOND AMENDMENT

Lodged au Greffe on 12th October 2004
by Deputy M.F. Dubras of St. Lawrence

STATES GREFFE

MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT REFORM: COMPOSITION AND ELECTION OF THE STATES
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In paragraph (a)(iv), for the number “47” substitute the number “37” and for the table showing the number of members for each of the 6 constituencies substitute the following table—

“	1.	St. Helier West	6 members;	
	2.	St. Helier East	6 members;	
	3.	St. Clement and Grouville	5 members;	
	4.	St. Saviour and St. Martin	7 members;	
	5.	St. Brelade and St. Peter	6 members;	
	6.	St. Lawrence, St. John, St. Mary, Trinity and St. Ouen	7 members.	”

DEPUTY M.F. DUBRAS OF ST. LAWRENCE

REPORT

The Special Committee, in its proposal in principle to reduce the number of States Members from 53 to 47, all of a new category, to be elected in 6 new constituencies as set out in (a)(iv), appears to me to have arrived at the number of 47 quite arbitrarily, with little meaningful basis underlying the number.

The Special Committee in the opening remarks to its report agrees with and “shares many of the conclusions of the Clothier Panel on the need for change”.

Indeed it goes on to state that “the Committee believes that more radical change is required” (my emphasis). It identifies 5 issues that need to be determined (paragraph 2.4). It proposes a ‘package’ that will work together. As indicated in my submission in response to R.C.25/2004, I concurred with the following –

- a single general election on one day;
- a 4-year term;
- a single spring election date from 2008 for all members and Connétables;
- that Connétables be given a choice whether to be elected to the States of Jersey (as Deputies);
- that the position of Senators be abolished.

The Special Committee only then went on to consider the issue of the total number of members. In Section 7 of its consultation document R.C.25/2004 I was delighted to read and concurred with its conclusion in paragraph 7.2 that “the overall changes being proposed represented a ‘one-off’ opportunity to make significant changes and, if the number was not reduced at this stage, it would be more difficult to make changes later.” (my emphasis). In fact, I could not have agreed more.

To my amazement, while accepting in the subsequent paragraph 7.6 that there are arguments in favour of a greater reduction, the report timidly sets out in paragraph 7.5 the Committee belief that “an appropriate reduction at this stage might be from 53 to 48” and then uses this number as the basis for its subsequent proposals.

Imagine my disappointment on receiving P.151/2004 and reading proposition (a)(iv) and its supporting report section 8 that due account had been taken of the consultation process and, while acknowledging the contributions of the Deputy of St. Martin (Table 8.6) and myself, it has concluded in paragraph 8.5 that the number should be reduced ‘significantly’ to 47!

In my wildest dreams I could not consider a reduction of 6 radical.

Following publication and discussion of my proposed amendment, I have been pleased to receive feedback to the effect that my proposal is considered “quite brave” and an appropriate level of reduction (30%) based on “going back to first principles”. One correspondent not only set out his own thoughts “that the proposals do not go far enough” but agreed that “a small step in the right direction” was better and more likely to be approved. He went on and forwarded me a copy of a letter to the Editor of the Jersey Evening Post of March 2004 quoting a Professor Emeritus of the University of British Columbia, a Jersey-man and long-time reader of ‘the Weekly’, who expressed the view that he never understood “why the Clothier Report was not accepted in principle when it recommended that all Members of the States should be Deputies” as it was an unicameral chamber.

He concluded that “for a community of 100,000 people, Jersey must have one of the most expensive forms of government per capita because of the number of politicians and their generous salaries.” I sense he is not alone; it was interesting to hear during a recent public meeting on the issue of Members’ remuneration, the serious view that Jersey could be adequately governed by as few as 5 Ministers!

I believe therefore that my amendment is reasonable and appropriate for implementation in conjunction with all the other changes by 2008.

Amendments to amendments of Deputy of St. Martin

It will be noted that as well as lodging these amendments, I have also lodged amendments to the amendments of the Deputy of St. Martin seeking approval for a reduction to 37 members but based on a Parish-based constituency model. I have always believed that a Parish-based system is preferable to the 'super constituency' model as proposed by the Special Committee, but I accept that a majority of members may prefer the Committee's scheme. I do nevertheless believe that it is essential that the number of members is reduced to 37 and I am therefore bringing forward these amendments, even though they will only need to be debated if the Deputy of St. Martin's amendments, whether amended or not, are rejected.

Financial and manpower implications

Based on the figures provided by the Special Committee and estimates provided earlier by the Finance and Economics Committee, I estimate the reduction in number of members by 16 will be equivalent to a reduction in direct outgoings per annum of the order of £620,000 (2004) together with consequential reduction in costs of providing support services in various departments and the Greffe.