

In my view the issue(s) of electoral reform/composition of the States Assembly has/have become very confused.

The most recent round in a very long list of Propositions, amendments and debates began with Deputy Andrew Lewis's proposal which sought, inter alia, the reduction from three to two classes of States member through the removal of Senators and the establishing of so-called super constituencies. Deputy Lewis said his objective was to give the Assembly the opportunity to think again about the reform referendum. That the Assembly rejected the outcome of the referendum was widely criticized publicly and had Deputy Lewis's Proposition sought simply to give the States a second chance to consider it, then it would have been readily understood by the electorate.

But Deputy Lewis's Proposition went further. Then the water was more muddied by amendments, the main one being the retention of Senators. It was interesting that Deputy Lewis sought to withdraw his Proposition at that time.

By now those of us who follow these matters closely were becoming confused? Where exactly are we? If students of the States are confused, what chance do the public (who it is often forgotten are the people our politicians are supposed to be representing) have of keeping pace with the reform agenda? In any case much of the public is suffering States reform fatigue and, above all, is yearning for clarity.

As an aside, clarity is what was lacking in the choices offered to the electorate in the referendum. A question, or number of questions, which demand a simple Yes or No answer is what any referendum requires.

Now, we appear to be in a muddle with, in my view, the worst of all worlds. Still three classes of States member, but the traditional parish-delineated electoral boundaries are to be scrapped in favour of the so-called super constituencies.

Eight Senators elected by the whole Island, 12 Constables elected by the parishes and (how many?) Deputies elected by new electoral districts. Three separate electoral constituencies!

This is not one step forward and two back, it just a step back.

What is needed now is for a line to be drawn under the debate. There is insufficient time to properly consider all the options and implement them prior to an election next May.

The need for reform is urgent, but so it was in 1998 and the Assembly of the day recognized that fact when it appointed a body to undertake a review of all aspects of the Machinery of Government. That body, under the chairmanship of the late Sir Cecil Clothier reported back in January 2000, since when its recommendations on reform of the Assembly have been consistently overlooked. Nearly 20 years have elapsed since that urgent need was identified; another year taken to bring forward a clear and simple proposal that the whole electorate will understand will not be time wasted.

John Henwood.