

# STATES OF JERSEY



## **PUBLIC ELECTIONS – SINGLE TRANSFERABLE VOTING SYSTEM (STV) AND AN ALTERNATIVE VOTING SYSTEM (AV)**

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**Lodged au Greffe on 17th July 2013  
by Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade**

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**STATES GREFFE**

## **PROPOSITION**

**THE STATES are asked to decide whether they are of opinion –**

to bring forward plans for the implementation of a single transferable voting system (STV) for multi-member constituencies and an alternative voting (AV) system for single member constituencies in time for the 2014 elections.

DEPUTY M. TADIER OF ST. BRELADE

## REPORT

During their work on electoral reform, the Electoral Commission employed the expert advice of Dr. Alan Renwick, University of Reading. Dr. Renwick is a reader in comparative politics and Director of Postgraduate Research Studies in Politics at the University of Reading.

Part of his work for the Commission was to look into voting systems and to compare Jersey's current system of *first-past-the-post* in both single and multi-member constituencies with alternative methods of voting. The full papers will be circulated separately as a companion document to this proposition; however, I will be quoting his key findings in this report.

Dr. Renwick was remarkably clear in his advice on the changes that needed to be made –

*'There can be no justification for maintaining multi-member plurality in Jersey in preference to STV. It is rarely possible for an electoral system expert to give such a definite judgement: in most cases, one electoral system performs better on some criteria, while another performs better on other criteria; the final decision then depends on which of these criteria one values more. In Jersey's case, however, all the plausible criteria point the same way: STV performs better on all criteria.'*

Similarly, for single seat constituencies he says –

*'It would clearly be advantageous to introduce AV also for the elections in single-member districts.'*

The Electoral Commission was obviously convinced by these findings as they recommended on page 37 of their final report, under *SUBSIDIARY RECOMMENDATIONS* that –

*'A Single Transferable Vote System should be introduced in elections for Deputy in 2018 and should the Constables remain as members of the States, an Alternative Vote System should be introduced in respect of their election.'*

As things currently stand, Islanders will be electing one Connétable, up to 4 Deputies and 8 Senators each. STV and AV are desirable *anyway*, but they become even more necessary when choosing 8 Senators if we are to stop it becoming '*a complete lottery*', as some members have quite correctly called it.

The answer given by the Electoral Commission as to why, in the face of such seemingly compelling expert advice, they would wait until 2018 to adopt the new voting model was that it would be *too confusing* to the public to bring in this changes this quickly, especially when coupled with other changes.

I do not agree with this logic, personally. There is a strong case to suggest that it is an appropriate change to bring it with all the other reforms. Currently, it is unclear whether there will be any reforms for 2014, other than those already agreed.

However, on the subject of *complexity*, Dr. Renwick gives the following advice –

*'The only credible criticism of STV in the Jersey context is that it is complex. There is no doubt that the process of counting votes under STV is often complex. But **ordinary voters** do not need to understand that complexity in order to understand how to exercise their vote and why the election result is as it is.'*

Finally, Dr. Renwick highlights 3 important disadvantages of our current system (multi-member plurality), whilst making the case for STV.

*'First, it can seriously misrepresent opinion. If groups of voters tend to vote for the same set of candidates, the largest group can secure all the representation even if it is in the minority of the population as a whole. The groups here might be partisan, but need not be: for example, they could be ideological or geographical.'*

*Second, as a corollary of the first point, multi-member plurality can lead to large numbers of wasted votes, an effect that is likely to depress electoral turnout. There is clear evidence that greater proportionality in elections leads to higher turnout. In non-partisan Jersey, standard measures of proportionality have little meaning. But wasted votes are strongly associated with non-proportionality. Thus, it is safe to surmise that Jersey's non-proportional voting system harms electoral turnout.'*

*Third, multi-member plurality can do a bad job of choosing the most popular candidates, as vote-splitting between candidates with similar constituencies can allow a less popular candidate through. Such problems are more likely to arise than under single-member plurality because of the greater number of candidates.'*

*STV would significantly reduce each of these difficulties. It would be wholly compatible with Jersey's non-partisan politics: it is used in many non-partisan elections, such as trade union elections and elections within the Church of England.'*

Given the clear and compelling evidence, I would argue that there is no valid reason not to change from our current system of voting to the suggested AV and STV systems.

I would add that it will be necessary to educate the public, the counters and members on the exact workings of the new system. I would envisage that we would invite Dr. Renwick to come and speak to members *prior* to the debate so members can ask him questions.

### **Financial and manpower implications**

There will be consequential work for both the States Greffe and Law Draftsman's Office if this proposition is adopted. It is envisaged that these costs would be met from pre-existing budgets. It is also worth noting that there was also a £59,863 under-spend from the Electoral Commission Budget. This may be able to be redirected towards the implementation of this proposition.