

STATES OF JERSEY



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

Presented to the States on 12th January 2011
by the Privileges and Procedures Committee

STATES GREFFE

COMMENTS

The Privileges and Procedures Committee strongly opposes the proposition of Deputy Noel.

Although PPC recognises that it would be appropriate to review the current allocation of Deputies in the States, the Committee does not believe it is realistic to suggest that wholesale reform as proposed by Deputy Noel can be agreed without any advance warning or consultation, and on the basis of a proposition lodged for the minimum 2 week period required. If this proposition is adopted it would, in light of the decision already taken to reduce the number of Senators, lead to a reduction in the membership of the Assembly of 10 members from this autumn, and PPC believes that the consequences of a significant reduction of this nature need to be properly assessed before the States are asked to take such a far-reaching decision. The appropriate time to have discussed reform of the Deputies would have been when PPC's own reform proposals were debated last October.

PPC has in the past proposed a move towards larger constituencies, but PPC's reform was always in the context of the abolition of the Senatorial position, and it is difficult to imagine how electors would react to a single election day in October 2011 where the Senatorial election is retained alongside the election of Deputies in new large constituencies. Deputy Noel's proposition does nothing to simplify the complexity of the 3 categories of member in the Assembly and his proposals, in fact, make it more complex for electors. PPC has always considered that, as far as possible, any large constituencies should be of equal sizes so that each elector in the Island has the same number of representatives. Under Deputy Noel's proposition, St. Helier becomes one large district with 7 Deputies, whereas 2 other larger constituencies only elect 3 members, and PPC believes that this fundamentally undermines one of the important principles of equity that should underlie any move to introduce large constituencies.

When PPC last asked the States to agree the principle of large constituencies the proposition stated that, if adopted, PPC would undertake detailed research to ascertain the most appropriate constituency boundaries. The 2 tables set out in Appendix 2 to Deputy Noel's propositions draw attention to the difficulty of making an appropriate division without proper research. The first table relates to the population per Deputy to the 2001 Census figures which are now clearly significantly out of date. Even using these Census figures from some 10 years ago, the large constituency of St. Brelade and St. Peter is clearly under represented. Table 2 in Appendix 2 of the Deputy's proposition draws even greater attention to the discrepancies in the sizes of the proposed large areas where, using the 2008 registered electors, the large constituency of St. Brelade and St. Peter has 3,464 electors per Deputy compared to the 2,168 electors per Deputy in St. Helier. Even if Deputy Noel had proposed 4 Deputies for St. Brelade and St. Peter, the area would still have been unrepresented compared to St. Helier.

On 13th October 2010 the States, by large majorities, agreed incremental reform to the composition and election of the States, and PPC believes that members should now reject Deputy Noel's attempt to re-open this issue and should support the Draft States of Jersey (Miscellaneous Provisions) Law 201-, as lodged by PPC, as this gives legal effect to the decisions already taken by the States.

PPC accepts, as mentioned above, that consideration does need to be given to the current allocation of Deputies' seats, and is willing to undertake to begin work on this issue in due course so that reform, if considered appropriate, could be put in place in time for the elections in 2015. Any work would, of course, need to be informed by the results of the 2011 Census so that it could be based on up-to-date population figures, and not the figures from 2001 used by Deputy Noel that are now considerably out of date.