

STATES OF JERSEY

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SIMULTANEOUS ELECTRONIC VOTING: REPLACEMENT FOR 'APPEL NOMINAL'

Lodged au Greffe on 4th February 2003
by the Privileges and Procedures Committee

STATES GREFFE

PROPOSITION

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

- (a) to agree that a system for simultaneous electronic voting should be introduced to replace the ‘appel nominal’ and that the Greffier of the States should, if requested to do so by any elected member of the States, announce the details of each member’s vote immediately after the result of the vote is declared;
- (b) to request the Privileges and Procedures Committee to bring forward the necessary amendments to the Standing Orders of the States to give effect to the changes and to request the Committee, in consultation with the Environment and Public Services Committee, to take the necessary practical steps to bring into operation the new system as soon as practicable.

PRIVILEGES AND PROCEDURES COMMITTEE

Note: The Finance and Economics Committee’s comments are to follow.

REPORT

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Following the controversy that arose after the voting for P.101/2002, the Policy and Resources Committee's Population Policy, members have requested that the Privileges and Procedures Committee investigate the possibility of using electronic, simultaneous voting to replace the 'appel nominal'.

2. History

- 2.1 On the 11th October 1994, the States were asked to consider a proposition brought by Deputy J.L. Dorey for a new system to replace the 'appel nominal'. There was an amendment to this proposition brought by Deputy Duhamel, the final States decision being that; "*voting on the appel nominal should be conducted by means of a system of simultaneous voting*".
- 2.2 The then House Committee investigated this in great depth and brought forward a proposition (P.115/95) requesting that the States approve the introduction of a simultaneous electronic voting system to replace the 'appel nominal'. This was subsequently debated by the States on the 24th October 1995 but rejected with 16 votes in favour and 33 against.

3. Arguments for and against the adoption of simultaneous electronic voting

- 3.1 At the last debate on this subject in October 1995, the arguments centred around the following points -
- (i) the 'appel nominal' allows members and the public to know the direction in which individual members vote;
 - (ii) the possibility and perception that members' direction of voting is influenced by the direction taken by their colleagues voting before them;
 - (iii) the recording of voting direction in the standing vote.
- 3.2 The existing 'appel nominal' allows States members and the public the opportunity to hear the direction in which individual members vote. This is particularly important for the media and those who choose to follow the business of the Assembly on the radio. The Privileges and Procedures Committee is of the opinion that this benefit in the existing system could be extended to the proposed new system, by giving members the option to request the Greffier to announce the record of individual voting following the casting of the votes. This would occur without delay although, as stated above, it would only take place at the formal request of an elected member. It is suggested that printed versions of the record should also be available to members and the media via printers located in a members' room and the media boxes. The details of the vote would, of course, still be recorded in the States Minutes.

4. The Standing Vote

- 4.1 The Committee is of the opinion that use of the standing vote should be retained as it is clearly more suited, and less time-consuming, for non-controversial, routine matters, such as the individual articles of draft legislation. The electronic voting system would, of course, be available for use just as, at the present time, any member can call for an 'appel nominal'.

5. The Proposed System

- 5.1 Votes would be cast by activating one of three buttons; 'Pour', Abstention, or 'Contre'. The wiring for the system already exists at each member's seat but it will be necessary to install the voting buttons in the desk positions. Once members have cast their votes, within a limited time period, the results would be displayed on a screen at the Greffier's desk and possibly also at a repeat display at the Bailiff's desk. The Environment and Public Services Department has made allowance for a large plasma screen display in the

Chamber which it has proposed to install in the alcove to the left of the Bailiff. However, a members' display presents several problems. Firstly, in attempting to preserve the aesthetic appeal of the Chamber, there are limitations to the areas where a screen could be suitably sited. The proposed alcove would not allow a clear view of the results for all members. It is possible that a second display could be considered for the opposite side of the Chamber to alleviate this but, due to the design of the Chamber, would be slightly more intrusive. Secondly, the cost of each of the large screens is in the region of £9,000. The Committee is of the opinion that, as it has never been suggested that the present announcement of the result by the Bailiff is unsatisfactory, it would be difficult to justify the cost of screens and the aesthetic detraction simply to replace this aspect of the process for little or no advantage. Certainly, this would be of no benefit to the listening public, who would be reliant on the Bailiff's or Greffier's announcement anyway.

5.2 The Privileges and Procedures Committee is of the opinion that it would be wise to make provision in the hopefully unlikely event of a breakdown in the electronic system. This will be considered and included in the amended Standing Orders which, of course, will be subject to the approval of the States.

6. Financial and manpower implications

6.1 Funding of £35,000 has already been identified and included in the Phase II work to the States Building approved by the States on the 21st January 2003, This is based on costings received by the Environment and Public Services Department from the Department of Electronics who have researched suitable systems. In already identifying a potential saving of £9000 by not having the large display screen, it is expected that the final figure will be lower than that allowed.

6.2 The on-going maintenance costs of the system are understood to be minimal although there will be a need for minor expenditure on consumables such as paper and cartridges for computer printers. The proposition has no implications for the manpower resources of the States.

7. Conclusion

7.1 In conclusion, the Privileges and Procedures Committee urge members to support this proposition for the following reasons -

- (i) the system would remove any possibility of the perceived effect of one member's vote influencing another;
- (ii) the announcement of individual members' voting direction is retained on request, to the benefit of the media and public alike;
- (iii) the system will be more efficient and will save a small amount of time per vote compared to the 'appel nominal'. Where there are a large number of votes during one meeting the time savings will clearly accrue;
- (iv) the system allows a secure recording of voting direction which would be available in a paper version to those who may request it.