

# **STATES OF JERSEY**

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## **DRAFT AMENDMENT (No. 28) OF THE STANDING ORDERS OF THE STATES OF JERSEY**

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**Lodged au Greffe on 21st June 2005  
by Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier**

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**STATES GREFFE**





Jersey

## **DRAFT AMENDMENT (No. 28) OF THE STANDING ORDERS OF THE STATES OF JERSEY**

### **REPORT**

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I believe that question time performs a vital function in the overall business of the States. Under ministerial government, it will not be replaced by the scrutiny function but will remain as an essential adjunct to it. I remain convinced, as I was when I brought my amendment to P.171/2004 in October, and the subsequent amendment to Standing Orders in P.5/2005, that the experiment of reducing question time to an hour was a step too far. It has not only reduced the time spent on questions but, far worse, it has significantly reduced the quality of the interactions.

In the past I have referred to the proceedings of 9th November to illustrate what I mean. There were 12 oral questions tabled, along with 12 answers to written questions. Many of the latter were fully answered in a brief paragraph. These might have been more appropriate as oral questions with consequent supplementaries, were it not for the artificial restrictions we have placed around question time.

We saw that day the introduction of a 90 second limit for presidents' answers. The inevitable result was that 2 presidents failed to get any sort of answer out at all, which in turn meant that the first supplementary was wasted in inviting the president to complete a competent answer. In addition to this unsatisfactory outcome, I counted 3 questions where members still had supplementaries unasked when time was called.

Today we can see a growing demand for questions directed at controversial and often urgent topics in order to hold committee presidents to account in the assembly. We have regularly seen 14 and 15 oral questions tabled and once nineteen. That members do have a problem with the current format of question time was revealed by the decision by the Assembly to raise standing orders not only for Deputy Scott-Warren's missed question in the meeting of 7th June, but for all unanswered questions on that day. It appears to me that this particular Standing Order is interfering with rather than promoting the good order of the House.

When those questions which have not received an oral answer are tabled for a written answer, what we are doing is storing up a bigger problem. Oral questions are designed to be fleshed out by supplementary interrogation. When a written answer provides a partial or holding answer, the supplementary process cannot happen, so the questioner returns with a fresh, but slightly different aspect of the question at the next meeting. What we are seeing is a snowball effect where questions not properly explored are transferred in one guise or another to the subsequent meetings.

Members will recall the 21/21 tie on the possibility of 90 minutes for question time in the vote on P.171/2004. They will also recall that the Assembly divided with 23 votes on each side of the debate on P.5/2005. In the absence of a clear direction on this issue, I am returning this decision in a new form to the House for reconsideration.

There are no financial or manpower implications to this proposal.





Jersey

## DRAFT AMENDMENT (No. 28) OF THE STANDING ORDERS OF THE STATES OF JERSEY

*Made*

*[date to be inserted]*

*Coming into force*

*[date to be inserted]*

**THE STATES**, in pursuance of Article 27 of the States of Jersey Law 1966,<sup>[1]</sup> have made the following amendments to the Standing Orders of the States of Jersey<sup>[2]</sup> –

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### 1 Standing Order 14A amended

- (1) In the heading to Standing Order 14A the words “**order in which**” shall be deleted.
- (2) For Standing Order 14A(1)(a) there shall be substituted the following sub-paragraph –
  - “(a) in the presence of another person, draw lots –
    - (i) to determine the order in which the questions are to be asked at the meeting, and
    - (ii) where notice is given of more than 15 questions, to determine the 15 questions that are to be asked at the meeting?”.

### 2 Standing Order 14B amended

In Standing Order 14B –

- (a) for paragraph (1) there shall be substituted the following paragraph –
  - “(1) No more than 15 questions of which notice has been given under Standing Order 12A shall be asked at a meeting.”;
- (b) paragraph (7) shall be deleted.

### 3 Citation

This Amendment may be cited as Amendment (No. 28) of the Standing Orders of the States of Jersey.

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[1] Chapter 16.800.

[2] Chapter 16.800.15.