



Steve DICKSON MP

Member for Buderim



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Finance and Administration Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000



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Dear Committee Chairman

Re: submission to Inquiry into introducing four-year terms for the Queensland Parliament

Below is my submission to the Inquiry into introducing four-year terms for the Queensland Parliament.

I support replacing the current three-year terms for the Queensland Parliament with set four-year terms.

I believe four-year terms would provide the following benefits:

1. Certainty for business

One of the criticisms of three-year terms, particularly given the terms are often shortened due to the Premier's prerogative to call early elections, is that the business community is faced with the uncertainty of not knowing exactly how long a political party and its particular policies will be in place.

This uncertainty impacts negatively on business planning, which requires consideration of many factors – including relevant government policies - and can take many years.

It is an issue highlighted by business and industry:

The Queensland Chamber of Commerce and Industry, in its submission to this inquiry, noted the benefits of four-year terms:

Accordingly in our view longer parliamentary terms have the potential to enhance business confidence and business investment, by eliminating uncertainties created by frequent elections and subsequent shifts in government policy or attitudes toward certain projects.”¹

The Queensland Resources Council suggests the similar:

“Election date speculation may make for interesting conversation around a dinner table, but around a board table, it is cause for concern in terms of planning for resources projects worth hundreds of millions of dollars,” Mr (Queensland Resources Council Chief Executive Michael) Roche said.

¹ Queensland Chamber of Commerce and Industry submission,
<https://www.cciq.com.au/assets/Advocacy/Submissions/parliamentary-terms-fac-submission-280915.pdf>

"Business likes certainty, and anything that governments can do to deliver more certainty is welcome."²

The uncertainty is itself touched upon on the website of the Electoral Commission of Queensland:

"...there is no minimum period required between State elections, so a Government can choose to hold the election at any time during its three year term. With no fixed election date, it is unknown when the next election is, until it is announced."³

It is particularly noteworthy that during the last five state elections the parliamentary term has been an average of two years and nine months. This is hardly enough time for businesses to carefully plan and implement projects without the overhanging fear that government policies will change and planning will be derailed with the possible introduction of a new government.

Four-year terms would help alleviate this business uncertainty, which would have positive spinoffs for business confidence, investment and subsequent job creation.

2. More effective Government

The formulation, preparation and introduction of legislation that is effective in improving the lives of Queenslanders, takes time.

The shorter three-year terms can have two side-effects: legislation that is rushed and potentially flawed, or legislation that is carefully planned but unable to be introduced due to an election and/or change of government.

The average parliament terms over the past five elections of two years and nine months have been a hindrance to achieving legislative change.

Four-year terms would assist legislators by providing a clear understanding of the time available to achieve desired legislative targets.

This is a view supported by the Queensland Chamber of Commerce and Industry:

"CCIQ believes that a three year term is not sufficient time to allow the State Government to facilitate good economic planning for both the private and public sectors..."

CCIQ is aware of many projects or policy initiatives stalling through change of government or at the very least delayed through caretaker arrangements implemented during elections.⁴

And the Queensland Resources Council:

Mr (Queensland Resources Council Chief Executive Michael) Roche said four-year terms should provide future Queensland governments with an incentive to take a more expansive view of policy implementation, particularly in relation to major infrastructure developments and potentially controversial decisions.

"Four-year terms should provide future state governments with ample opportunities to demonstrate their case for re-election in terms the electorate can understand and measure.

² Queensland Resources Council media release, https://www.qrc.org.au/01_cms/details.asp?ID=1312

³ <https://www.ecq.qld.gov.au/elections/electioninformation>

⁴ Queensland Chamber of Commerce and Industry submission, <https://www.cciq.com.au/assets/Advocacy/Submissions/parliamentary-terms-fac-submission-280915.pdf>

"Similarly, the opposition can set itself a clear timetable for consultation and policy development that is not subject to the political whims of the government of the day.

"Under this scenario, Queensland wins," Mr Roche said.⁵

Local Government in Queensland introduced four-year terms for councillors in 2000. This has proved to be successful and beneficial. I believe similar benefits could be experienced through four-year terms at a state government level.

3. Saving election costs

State Elections cost the taxpayer significantly.

Figures for the 2012 State Election put the total cost of the poll and subsequent reimbursements to parties as \$34.29 million.

The operational cost of the 2015 State general election was an estimated \$34.775 million.

Here are costings for the 2012 State general election drawn from the Electoral Commission of Queensland's 2011/12 and 2012/13 annual reports:

	Operation	Public Funding	TOTAL COST
2012 State election	\$19.13M	\$15.16M	\$34.29M
2015 State election	\$24.075M	\$10.7M*	\$34.775M*

*estimated final figure⁶

Based on these figures, the cost of four elections (three-year terms) over 12 years equals approximately \$140 million.

Three elections (four year terms) over the same period would cost \$105 million.

Queensland taxpayers would see a saving of \$35 million over 12 years with the introduction of four-year terms. This equals at least \$2.92 million savings per year on current figures.

4. Summary

It is very vital to the ongoing economic strength of Queensland that legislators consider all policies and mechanisms that deliver increased certainty for business, better outcomes for our citizens and greater efficiency of government.

The introduction of four-year parliamentary terms will support this overall philosophy.

I strongly support the introduction of four-year parliamentary terms.

⁵ Queensland Resources Council media release, https://www.qrc.org.au/01_cms/details.asp?ID=1312

⁶ Table courtesy of Electoral Commission of Queensland (Email from Colin Petersen, Senior Compliance Officer, Funding, Disclosure and Regulation, Electoral Commission Queensland, 29 September 2015).

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission. If you have any further queries, feel free to contact me.

Kind regards



Steve Dickson

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