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Submission

INQUIRY INTO POSSIBLE CHANGES TO QUEENSLAND PARLIAMENTARY TERMS

It is my pleasure to present this submission on the proposal by politicians to extend their length of service in the Legislative Assembly of Queensland.

In brief, I believe the move is unnecessary and will be seen as just another power grab by politicians who will financially benefit from this reform, if successful.

I believe the people of Queensland would benefit greatly from political effort if it was instead directed towards the re-establishment of Queensland's upper house the Legislative Council of Queensland, which was abolished in 1922 after a referendum in which the people asked that it be retained.

I will develop my arguments against extending Qld Parliamentary terms, and supporting the return of the Legislative Council of Queensland further in my submission.

I am Opposed to Extending the Parliamentary Term from the Current 3 Years to 4 Years

Firstly we need to acknowledge that the Queensland isn't governed under a Westminster system of government – because we don't have an Upper Chamber (the Legislative Council) as a review house for the legislation that is passed by the Lower House (the Legislative Assembly). Each of the other State Governments, and the Commonwealth Government, operate under this system, where there are two chambers of government –

- Each elected by different voting methods - typically one by electorates, and the other a proportional voting method.
- Each serving for different electoral terms – one serving from election to election, and the other serving a fixed term independent from when elections are held eg the Commonwealth Senators serve a six year term from the first of July on a triennial basis with half the house elected each three years. This provides for longer term stability of government as there are not sudden changes of the whim of the electorate.
- Each has a different role in forming legislation – one formulates the proposed legislation, and the other serves to review the legislation before it becomes law.
- Each has a different role in the formation of government – the government of the day is decided by which party gains or is able to negotiate for a majority representation in the lower house, irrespective of what representation it may have in the other house, whose role is to review the legislation.

This Westminster system of government is designed to hopefully provide citizens with better legislative outcomes and less ad hoc legislation than we sometimes see in Queensland where legislation is rushed through the one-house Parliament to become law, whereas review by a second house may have ensured a better outcome in the end. In the end I believe this provides for more stable government.

Queensland does not have the benefit of a bi-cameral government as our Upper House, the Legislative Council, was abolished in 1922 – even after the people had voted by referendum to retain it!

In the Notes provided for this review there is a comparison table for the other Australian jurisdictions and the lengths of their terms of parliament. There is however no mention that each of these jurisdictions have dual houses of parliament, or a comparison between how long members serve in their lower and upper houses. Is the withholding of this information intended to be misleading? I sincerely hope not.

The significance of all this is that while each of the Australian states and territories may have four year terms, they also have the safeguard of a second house for review, and if legislation does not pass both houses, then there are mechanisms for an election to be held (eg a double dissolution) before the completion of the four year term. The people can then get to have their say on the performance of the government, and on the house of review. This is significant.

While ever Queensland does not have an Upper House of Review, we should not be extending the term of our one-house parliament beyond the current three-year arrangement. At least this gives us some form of say and control over a government that may run away with its perceived mandate to do whatever it thinks it wants to.

While some politicians insist that they are operating under a “Westminster” system, they are persisting in a lie which is necessary if they are to continue to centralize power for their own, and party benefit. These changes suggested are a simple continuation of this lie! The benefit of this “lie” is an all powerful Cabinet ... the extension of this is an all powerful Premier!

I am Opposed to Fixed Parliamentary Terms, and to Extending the Terms to 4 Years

The suggestion that fixed and longer terms would provide political and economic certainty for the public is insane and absurd, when the only certainty is for the politician and bureaucrat, and the public be damned! There is nothing in this suggestion to help the public except more spending, more costs, and more perks and salary for politicians.

The discussion paper proposes that Queensland fixed four year terms be held in March every four years. In Queensland, Local Government elections are held on a fixed term basis in March. If both State and Local elections are held on a fixed basis in March, then it is almost certain that in some years these elections could both fall in the same month – which I am sure would be totally confusing to the voting public.

Some Disadvantages of Extending the Parliamentary Terms to 4 Years

My main views on this are covered in the first point above.

Your discussion paper mentions that a referendum was held in 1991 to extend the parliamentary term to 4 years, and that this was defeated. There was also a Commonwealth referendum held to extend the term of the Commonwealth Parliament to 4 years (and to 8 years for Senators). This was also defeated. The discussion paper does not indicate that for the jurisdictions that have four year terms how that decision was approved – were they by referendum of the people, or a decision of the respective parliaments, as a self-serving benefit to themselves?

What is more significant is – have the people voted to approve four year terms – or has this decision been imposed on them by the only people to benefit from that decision?

When a Referendum Should be Put to the People of Queensland

The people of Queensland voted at referendum to retain the Upper House – the Legislative Council – but in 1922 this was taken away from us by a parliament that ignored the wishes of the people! A referendum to extend the term of parliament to four years should not be put to the people until the Upper House, the Legislative Council, is returned to Queensland system of

government. We have already voted in 1991 that we don't want four year terms! Deal with real issues.

It is noted that most parliaments with four year terms have wisely kept their Upper House as a protection against totalitarian instincts of politicians seeking their will over a long suffering public. Queensland has no such protection and the present bunch of politicians are anything but anxious to restore this protection.

Other Issues That Should Be Considered

Members of the Legislative Assembly should also consider the confusion they are causing by adopting the contentious term "MP" (Member of Parliament) where they used to be known as "MLA" (Member of Legislative Assembly), as are also federal members in Canberra who are also using "MP" where they used to be "MHR" (Member of House of Representatives). That they are prepared to do this and cause deliberate confusion in the public eye doesn't speak well for the changes they now want in other areas, and the objective they are working towards.

Another issue that relates to the cost of elections (whether they are three or four yearly) is the funding that political parties receive from the public coffers, based on the number of votes they receive as first preferences. The threshold for this was recently raised from 4% to 8% of the vote in order to qualify. This is another example of self-serving politicians looking out for their interests only, as this virtually guarantees the minor parties will receive no funding, the funding going only to the two major parties. What public benefit does this serve???? Providing funding to only the two major parties in no way contributes to public debate at election time, and is of no service to the electorate! There is no reason why the two major parties need to be funded from the public purse, while the minor parties and independents are expected to fund their own election campaigns. This hardly serves for a level playing field! If politicians are genuinely concerned about the cost of elections they would abolish all electoral funding to all political parties. Let the people support the party of their own choice.

Comment

The recent political experience in Australia is that we can't even get the Prime Minister that we have voted for for even one three-year term of Parliament – from whatever side of politics! Don't even think about four years! The same applies to some State governments as well.


Conclusion

In conclusion therefore, I restate my view that the move to extend Queensland Parliamentary terms to four years, and to fix them, is unnecessary, and is a detriment to democracy, and will be seen as just another power grab by politicians who will financially benefit from this reform, if successful.

I believe that the major electoral reform that Queensland needs is a reinstatement of the Upper House – the Legislative Council – as this would benefit greatly for providing for political stability and better legislation.

Again I thank you for the opportunity to make this submission on this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Ian H M Joyner".

Ian Joyner