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Finance and Administration Committee
 Inquiries into possible changes to Queensland parliamentary terms

To the Chair: Di Farmer MP

Dear Di,
 I am in receipt of your letter dated September 25, 2015.
 Please be aware I am no longer president of the Tully and District Chamber of Commerce.
 I would, however, like to make a submission in regards to your inquiry in a private capacity and as a small business operator.

My submission is based on your letter, the explanatory notes provided by Mr Walker for both the Constitution (Fixed Term Parliament) Amendment Bill 2015 and the Constitution (Fixed Term Parliament) Referendum Bill 2015, details contained in Hansard for September 17 2015, and various guidelines on making submissions.

I clearly state at the outset that I do not favour fixed four-year terms for Parliament, but I do favour fixed three-year terms for Parliament.

HANSARD

Mr Walker in presenting the Bills to Parliament made various claims that need answering.

“To ensure Queenslanders are served with a more accountable parliament” suggests that all that has gone before has not been accountable, which is rubbish.

“Since 2008, local governments in Queensland also now have fixed four-year terms”. Many Queenslanders would argue this has not been a good and productive move, and three-year terms would be better. The length of terms is at the discretion of the State Government.

“Average terms of parliament” since 2004 have been just two years and nine months, which gives the government the political advantage of being able to call an election at any time that is in its political interest. Both major political parties have been guilty of this, and the best way to stop it is with fixed terms – but for three years.

Mr Walker claims his Bill would provide for better government...because decisions can be made in the outcomes of and better services for Queenslanders, rather than short-term political gain or what may be in the news that day or that week. Rubbish. Politics is widely perceived as being about political gain and staying in power. A move to fixed four-year terms does not, will not and

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cannot guarantee better services for Queensland.

Mr Walker claims fixed terms would remove the constant speculation from the political process and provide fairness to all political parties... A gentle reminder goes to Mr Walker that the previous LNP government went to an early election, presumably for political gain, and the move backfired spectacularly. His Bills reek of recent righteousness.

Mr Walker also claims that fixed four-year terms would provide confidence and certainty in government from the public and also from the business community, which drives investment, economic confidence and job creation. Many in the public and business community would be content with fixed three-year terms. After all, what happens when a majority of voters lose confidence in a government knowing that government is embedded, by law, for four years rather than three?

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EXPLANATORY NOTES TO THE CONSTITUTION (FIXED TERM PARLIAMENT) AMENDMENT BILL
2015

The proposed date (second Saturday in March in the fourth calendar year) shows Mr Walker's singular lack of knowledge about Queensland's climate at that time of year. It is during our "wet season" and our cyclone season. A check of historical weather data shows that heavy rain and flooding, and intense category cyclones (such as Cyclone Larry) occur in March. Any election held during March runs the risk of severe disruption, and in many cases voters being unable to register their vote.

Climate predictions indicate there might be fewer cyclones in future years but they will be more intense. The predictions also include they are more likely to cross the Queensland coast further to the south - hence into more densely populated parts of the State.

ALTERNATIVE DATE: Some time in June.

Point 4 in the explanatory notes regarding the Governor being able to dissolve the Legislative Assembly will, unfortunately, remind many Queenslanders of Sir John Kerr. While there might be a need for such an action, Mr Walker has failed to give a coherent explanation as to why.

Under a sub-heading of "alternative ways to achieving policy outcomes", Mr Walker states there are none.

ALTERNATIVE: The clear alternative is fixed three-year terms.

Mr Walker recommends that a referendum on fixed terms would be cheaper if run in conjunction with local government or state elections. This might be true, but by doing so it would detract one election from the other, and distract voters.

Doing so would also play into the hands of a political party or parties trying to link their referendum policy with their political policies.

ALTERNATIVE: If it comes to a referendum, it should be stand-alone so there are no distractions.

Under Consultation, Mr Walker states the LNP has made public references to these Bills and the possible referendum, which it has but without any great penetration into the public's mind. Mr Walker also claims the LNP has consulted

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with Queenslanders through a feedback survey, which might be true. The quality and quantity of such feedback is unknown to the vast majority of Queenslanders who remain unaware of it and have not contributed to it.

Under “Consistency with legislation of other jurisdictions”, Mr Walker points out that other States have moved to fixed four-year terms. Just because it has been done in other States does not mean it should be done in Queensland. Queensland is a “sunrise state” while most others are “sunset states”; in other words they are declining while Queensland climbs. There is no benefit to Queensland, the other States or the nation by having uniform fixed four-year terms. There is no evidence that those States that have moved to four-year terms now have better government.

. . .

OTHER POINTS

There is no evidence that fixed four-year terms are better than the present system, or fixed three-year terms.

While there are individuals and organisations that favour the longer terms, the point they rely on is that there will be better government – and that can never be guaranteed.

One trend in Australian politics is for the governing political parties to dump their leaders when their public standing (and therefore their standing in the party) goes into decline.

Going on recent examples, a government that wins a four-year term could have two or more changes of leadership in that period.

The policies taken to an election can change soon after the election, and again as political imperatives change.

The idea that a longer fixed-term would provide for better government is a complete nonsense.

The confidence of the public and business would be better served with fixed three-year terms.

That way the agony of putting up with a dysfunctional government is at least reduced by a year.

Thank you for considering this submission.

Regards,
John Hughes