

**SUBMISSION TO FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE**  
**INQUIRY INTO CHANGES TO TERMS OF THE QUEENSLAND PARLIAMENT**  
**BY DAVID WHITE ON 20 OCTOBER 2015**

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**1.0**

It is noted that the Parliament authorised the FAC to inquire into these matters on 15 September 2015 and the FAC must report by 9 November 2015, an interval of only 54 days during which time the FAC will notify citizens of the inquiry, arrange and hold public hearings, receive and consider submissions, and reach a conclusion based in the response of citizens who have become aware of the inquiry and taken the time and made the effort to respond

**1.1**

It is submitted that this period of 54 days is completely inadequate to enable a full and proper examination into the issue of the terms of Parliament, even given the very restricted terms of reference given to the FAC [see more on this at 2.0 below]. This severe time limitation must lead to the conclusion that the Parliament, in establishing this inquiry, did not and does not want to fully examine the wider questions of what form of “democracy” exists in this State, and how it is conducted.

## **1.2**

**The very severe time limitations that are always a feature of committee inquiries also mean that the overwhelming majority of citizens will continue to remain ignorant of how Parliament or any of its committees operate, primarily because of wholly inadequate avenues of information provided to citizens on how they can know what is happening and/or participate in any way in its proceedings. For most citizens who lead busy lives, the only information they receive about Parliament is when very controversial Bills are passed or when sensational material is published or broadcast by commercial media.**

## **1.3**

**In the case of this inquiry, not one of 30 citizens that I raised the issue with, were aware of the fact the inquiry had been set up, so none were aware that they could make their views known in any way whatsoever. This failure to properly inform citizens must inevitably encourage feelings of powerlessness, increased cynicism and alienation amongst the citizenry. For the FAC to publish advertisements in some printed media does not properly address the need for full and widespread publicity. This need for adequate publicity could have been partly met if each of the 89 elected Members kept their electorates informed, on a weekly basis, of what ‘work’ the Parliament has been doing. How many of the 89 Members have advised their constituents of this inquiry? I would venture that the number is zero.**

## **1.4**

**At a time when the our State’s society and its elected Parliament have failed to address the fundamental issues of chronic unemployment, homelessness, serious physical and mental health issues, massive social and financial inequality, an epidemic of legal and illicit drug consumption, a massive addiction to all forms of gambling, very serious restrictions of basis rights and freedoms of assembly, association, movement and access to fair justice, and the devastation of our natural environment, it must be considered the ultimate denial of reality for the 55<sup>th</sup> Parliament to consider that one of its relevant roles is to consider whether to extend the term of Parliament. State Parliaments are viewed by normal citizens as basically alien to their daily lives, so they look on them with resignation, derision and contempt.**

## **2.0**

**It is submitted that the FAC’s terms of reference are much too narrowly drawn up, and that by using the word ‘will’ in Clause 3 it seems the Parliament has**

**already decided what the outcome of the inquiry should be. It is noted that the limitations placed on the matters to be examined ignore all of the following matters, each of which are – or should be- associated with any proposal to change the duration of parliamentary terms:**

**the conduct and administration of elections;**

**the power to call an election;**

**who can be a candidate for an election;**

**the funding of an election;**

**the power to recall and/or dismiss an elected Member;**

**the power of Parliament to propose and pass any Bill;**

**the right of citizens to scrutinise and reject any Bill between elections;**

**an independent body to decide the number of electorates and elected members;**

**the remuneration of elected Members, and former members;**

**the desirability of having Members who represent as many citizens as possible;**

**the accountability of individual elected Members to their constituents; and**

**advertising and publicity associated with an election.**

**All of these issues are fundamental to the establishment of a fully functional, representative and responsive democracy based on equal rights, maximum citizen participation and control, the freedom of all to live as valued members of society without fear of persecution, and including proper oversight and consultation. In all of these aspects, our current form of democracy, effectively operating as a plutocracy, is a complete failure. All parts of society other than those with wealth and privilege, are diminished and weakened by our current form of government.**

### **3.0**

**There is no acceptable evidence that extending parliamentary terms from three to four years enhances the quality of government in any way. Neither does it make the outcome of its operations any better. Any extension simply gives the ruling group more power to continue to make major changes to society that it wants, without getting any approval or consent from its citizenry. We have seen the massive damage done to society and to our way of life by the 54<sup>th</sup> Parliament,**

and there is nothing in the current proposal to stop any political group in the future from doing the same or greater damage in the future.

### **3.1**

This damage is all the more serious because many decisions made by a government can never be reversed, or are extremely difficult to reverse. If public land or property is sold by an Act of Parliament, or a citizen is imprisoned as the result of an unjust law, how can these acts be fairly rectified? A new government may be able to change the law that created these actions, but the financial compensation may well be very high. And how do you adequately compensate a person unjustly jailed for the time he/she has lost whilst locked away?

### **3.2**

It is a fact that most governments proceed to pass legislation that they have no approval from the citizenry to enact. During every election period, political groups make promises which are usually of a broad nature, expressed in terms that give the groups great leeway to change their position after the election has concluded. There is no requirement for any government to adhere to its election promises in any way, so that we have had one Federal government adopt a position of core and non-core promises, and it is common for elected governments to ignore even the policies of its own Party members expressed at party conferences. Furthermore, many political groups make their promises available for information just days before an election via a website! One group published many of its policies on its website in 2012 just 48 hours before the polls opened.

### **3.3**

It has been argued that governments need more time to fulfil their mandates, that three years is simply not enough time to make the changes that the government need to make. This argument is a false one. No recent government has come to power with a comprehensive written stated policy that detailed all of its proposals and no others. Where is the mandate? There is none. And since most political groups appear to have no detailed plans for the economy, for society or for the environment, either before an election or afterwards, where is there any legitimacy?

### **3.4**

It has also been argued that governments deserve more time because they are always accountable. This argument is not only false, it is demonstrably so; ask any representative group of citizens if they feel that their local Member is accountable between elections. You will get howls of derisive laughter, and more commonly you will get the question “who is my local member – I have never seen him/her do anything constructive?”

**What test of accountability for elected members currently exists? Since most elected members have a large percentage of their electorates who do not want them as their representatives, how are they accountable to them? The answer is of course that they ignore them perpetually.**

### **3.5**

**There is actually an arguable case for parliamentary terms to be reduced, unless a raft of measures is put in place to ensure full accountability. A shorter term would increase the pressure on political groups to formulate and action more responsive and effective plans to improve society. It would also make elected members more aware of the views of constituents and more open about just what they are doing to receive their salary from the public purse.**

### **3.6**

**If three years is to remain as a maximum term of a parliament, then these measures must be implemented:**

**All Bills\* to be laid on the table for a minimum of 4 [four] months before debate;**

**All Bills\* to be subject to widespread consultation, mandatory public hearings in every electorate;**

**No Bill to be passed that disposes of any public property over \$2 million without a plebiscite;**

**All Bills\* to have a 2 [two] year sunset clause;**

**In the case of a Bill that limits individual freedom of assembly, association or movement, there must be a plebiscite;**

**an independent statutory authority to conduct all aspects of elections, including candidates, funding, dates, eligibility, and advertising.**

**\*Except for Bills that are of a purely administrative nature**

### **4.0**

**The proposal for fixed term parliaments is not without merit, given that the current system that allows an election to be called at any time at the whim of a Premier if he/she sees a political advantage is fundamentally an abrogation of a real democracy.**

**However, with a fixed term parliament, the political group that is currently in power has more freedom to enact very draconian legislation when it knows that**

**failing a massive split in its party, it can proceed without having to face the anger and disgust of the electorate for years to come. And the electorate knows that the longer any legislation is operational, the more difficult it generally is for that legislation to be overturned by a succeeding government. I use the GST as a prime example: a fundamentally flawed tax that, given a fair voting system would never have been enacted. Read your history.**

**What is required, if a fixed term is to be considered, is a mechanism that would enable recall of a parliament for an early election when the government in power act beyond what it promised in the previous election period.**

**On the issues raised by the CCIQ on this point: the argument that businesses suffer during or before an election, is a total fantasy. Businesses in general have successful periods and times of recession, but neither are the direct result of election timing or electioneering or speculation. I have found that most businesses that fail or are failing occur due to poor products or service.**

**There is a final point here: some would argue that frequent elections are a burden on citizens and that they cost too much to be held frequently. These arguments are fatuous because citizens generally do not find voting onerous; they simply find the election period with its current political advertising standards disgraceful and odious, knowing that there will be no check on the ruling group after the election for another three years. It is also the failure of the current voting system that leaves so many citizens without representation that they want, that causes the cynicism and alienation that politicians experience.**

**As for cost, given the amount of annual State revenue, the cost of elections is not an argument that has any merit.**

## **5.0**

**Any change to the term of a parliament would need consent via a referendum. It is apposite here to say that no one that I have canvassed on this issue has ever seen or read the State constitution, and furthermore it is arguable that anyone other than someone who craves wealth, power and privilege or an academic really wants to know what is contained in that document.**

**When are we to have a constitution that is meaningful and practical?**

**END**

**Submitter's Name**

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**[REDACTED]**