



**The Australian Workers' Union
Queensland Branch**

**THE AUSTRALIAN WORKERS' UNION OF
EMPLOYEES, QUEENSLAND**

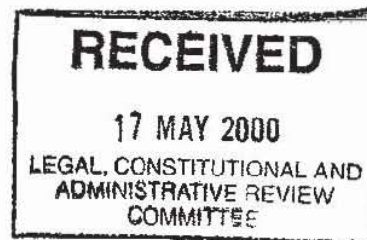


ALL CORRESPONDENCE SHOULD BE ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY

BN

15 May 2000

Research Director
Legal, Constitutional and Administrative
Review Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE 4000



Submission No 52

Dear Sir

Subject: AWU's Submission on Four Year Parliamentary Terms

Please find attached the AWU's submission on Four Year Parliamentary Terms for your attention and information.

Yours faithfully

W. P. Ludwig
W P LUDWIG
SECRETARY *pa*
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Encl.

Australian Workers' Union
submission to the Legal,
Constitutional and Administrative
Review Committee on Four Year
Parliamentary Terms.

Introduction.

A growing trend has developed throughout Australia and many OECD nations towards four year parliamentary terms. In Australia alone since 1973, all states and territories except the Australian Capital Territory and Queensland have introduced four year parliamentary terms. In 1973, Tasmania became the first to move to this system, this was soon followed by: Northern Territory in 1978, New South Wales in 1981, Victoria in 1984, South Australia in 1985 and Western Australia in 1987. The systems to which these states and territory are governed in relation to four year terms vary slightly. For example in Tasmania and Western Australia each government may choose to hold an election at any point during that term. In the other states the government is bound to hold office for a period no less than three years with New South Wales terms required to follow the full length. It is important to compare and contrast the systems of these states and territories as the system proposed for introduction in Queensland by the Queensland Constitutional Review Commission believes that the most relevant model for Queensland would be that similar to South Australia and Victoria. The proposed model is as follows:

“R5.2 That the maximum term of the Legislative Assembly be extended to four years subject to a provision that a dissolution may not be granted during the first three years unless (a) a vote of no-confidence is carried or a vote of confidence fails to be carried, or (b) an appropriation Bill is defeated or fails to pass. The provisions should be referendum entrenched”.

A move towards this model would also be similar to recent changes to terms in relation to Queensland Local Government elections. The new laws governing this area will see Local Governments elected every four years instead of every three years.

Parity throughout the state and nation is but one reason for Queensland moving towards a four year model. It is the opinion of the Australian Workers Union that the Queensland Parliament should adopt the aforementioned model. The reasons for this view will now be outlined.

Supporting Principles.

Policy Longevity

It is a widely held and accepted view that four year parliamentary terms would encourage the development and implementation of policies that were more beneficial to the state as the government of the day would be less influenced by the electoral cycle. The electoral cycle refers to the rhythm to which policy occurs. In this current system a government will spend the first year of their term familiarising themselves with their positions and functions. The second year will be spent on tough decisions, legislative enactment, budgetary review and generally establishment of a long-term vision. The third year of the term is spent in campaign mode. It is this third year where governments are extremely reluctant to take tough decisions for fear of a public backlash in the soon to arrive ballot. This system encourages short-term government, with short term vision. It also leaves continuity of government lacking which in turn causes fiscal waste. Fiscal waste refers to money spent by a government on a particular initiative, vision or program that is withdrawn by the next government before they have an opportunity to see the results. This deficiency costs millions of dollars every cycle. It is often witnessed that a program is withdrawn by a new government on philosophical grounds rather than practical grounds before the program has an opportunity to reach a stage where the full extent of the program is understood or quantified in outcome terms. Further, tough decisions in a budgetary sense often require an additional year to generate an outcome. This leaves the voting public unaware of the result of the initiative which is often seized upon by the opposition as a political weapon. The introduction of four year parliamentary terms in this sense allows for more accurate scrutiny of policy on the part of the public.

Electoral Costs

What does an average election cost the Queensland taxpayer? Approximately 5 million dollars is the average cost of democracy in Queensland. The introduction of a four year term would assist in reducing the burden to the taxpayer over time. Research in other states and the Northern Territory prove that through their respective moves towards four years terms they have managed to save millions of dollars that has been redirected to social and other policy needs. In Western Australia elections are held every 3.3 years where previously they were held every 2.6 years. In Victoria elections

are held every 3 years where previously they were held every 2.8 years. In South Australia elections now occur every 3.7 years where previously they were held every 2.7 years. This trend continues across the board except in New South Wales with elections at the same rate. This cost to the taxpayer will be able to be redirected to more tangible outcomes of direct benefit.

Business outcomes and stability

Business confidence is an issue that is particularly relevant to whether or not Queensland moves to a four year term model. It is widely acknowledged throughout the business community that four year terms would do more to increase business confidence than three year terms. This is asserted on the grounds of political and budgetary stability. An increase in business confidence or even a stability in confidence would enhance certainty and lead to greater levels of employment and certainly retainment of staff. This is a view supported by the Business Council of Australia in their submission to the Commonwealth Parliament on this issue only on a federal level.

Interstate parity

As has already been mentioned in this submission nearly all states and territories in Australia and throughout the OECD have recognised that four year terms are better for the nation than three year terms. Stability and the ability to target long term issues and needs are the two most significant points cited as reasons why four year terms are the most appropriate option. It could be said that if Queensland does not introduce four year terms just as the other states have that this will result in Queensland in Queensland being the only Australian entity without four year terms. It is anticipated that the ACT and Federally that four year terms will soon be introduced. This could result in Queensland suffering from a business perspective as companies move to the other states in search of greater political stability. Though this is not likely to occur often if the situation ever eventuated where a period of great instability was to occur that companies may choose to move interstate.

Public Inconvenience

It is often stated by constituents that they are required to go to the polls too frequently. A move towards four year terms would satisfy the popular fact that voters wish not to vote as often as they do.

Industrial Relations

From an industrial relations perspective many of the aspects cited by the business community are equally relevant. It is a fact that industrial relations and in particular workers are adversely affected by the frequency of elections. Industrial relations systems barely have the time to be legislated for and take force but they are rewritten by a new government. This system does little for workers whose entitlements and conditions are based upon government legislation. What is required in relation to this matter is greater stability. It will also enable workers to make longer term decisions about their own lives and lifestyles as they will know what their employment status is likely to be. This stability will trickle down with its effects into other sectors of the economy.

Conclusion

It is widely accepted and recognised on most sides of politics and in the general community that a move to four year terms is required. It is required to add greater stability to the economy, business, policy development and lifestyle. For these reason and the experiences in other states that have benefited from the proposed model that the AWU supports the introduction to referendum of R5.2.