

Background Briefing Paper – Restoring House of Assembly Numbers

September 2022

Purpose of Background Briefing Paper:

The cut in the Tasmanian Parliamentary numbers occurred over 20 years ago in July 1998. For many Tasmanians, whether current MPs, journalists, political commentators, or voters, this all happened ‘before their time’. Hence, for many, the current composition of the Tasmanian Parliament is all they have known.

The intent of this Briefing Paper is to draw into one location key background and information to help provide context to the current debate surrounding Premier Jeremy Rockliff’s recent undertaking (25 May 2022) to restore the House of Assembly numbers back to 35 MPs.¹

Further, it is hoped this paper will provide a practical resource given that the government has released its draft [Expansion of Parliament Bill 2022](#) for consultation.

Much has been written on matters relating to the number of elected representatives both prior to and since the 1998 cut in numbers, of which this paper does not purport to present an exhaustive catalogue. Instead, it focuses on key matters pertinent to the current move to restore the Assembly numbers back to 35 MPs based on the pre-1998 model of the 5 established electorates returning 7 MPs each.

What is the backstory to the 1998 cut in MP numbers?

Since the early 1980s the two major parties have flirted with the idea of reducing the number of MPs elected to the Tasmanian Parliament. Coincidentally, the early 80s saw the emerging trend of independents (Dr Bob Brown) and minor parties (Norm Sanders, the Australian Democrats) securing representation in the Lower House.

However, the Liberal Party’s preferred model of 44 MPs could not be reconciled with the Labor Party’s preferred 40 MPs model.

In attempts to find a circuit-breaker, and to seek justification for reducing MP numbers, two key independent inquiries were established to investigate options for reducing MP numbers however those inquiries consistently advised against any cut to representation.

During the 1990s minor parties and independents were still achieving representation in the Assembly, with the major parties and business sector agitating against the risk of minority government. Against the anti-minority government backdrop, the 1993 ‘40%’ pay-rise for state MPs was used to fuel anti-politician populist sentiment and foster ongoing attempts to cut MP numbers. In 1995 then Labor Opposition Leader Michael Field MP tabled a Bill to cut Assembly numbers to 25, but it lapsed before it was ever debated. Similarly, an attempt in 1997 by then-Liberal Premier Tony Rundle to propose a referendum on cutting numbers failed.²

In summary:

¹ Premier Rockliff made his initial undertaking during debate on a Tasmanian Greens’ ‘Restoration of Number of Seats in House of Assembly’ motion debate, see *Hansard* HA debate, Wednesday 25 May 2022.

² Rundle’s referendum attempt was to seek support for a unicameral Parliament of 44 MPs (the Morling Inquiry had indicated this was the only feasible option), which was not supported by either Labor or the Legislative Council.

- At the time of the 1998 move to reduce numbers the Legislative Council had 19 MLCs, and the Assembly had 35 MPs (known as MHAs at the time), via five seven-member electorates (Assembly had 35 MPs since 1959 when it was increased from 30 to 35 to avoid even 'split').
- The 1998 cut reduced the Parliament to the current 15 MLCs and 25 MPs.
- Cabinet was cut from 10 Ministers to 8 (*although 2002 saw that amended to 9. Or 8 plus Cabinet Secretary*).
- At the time of the 1998 cut to numbers the Assembly's make-up was 16 Liberal, 14 Labor, 4 Greens and 1 independent (Bruce Goodluck MP, Franklin).

It was a Liberal minority government, under Premier Tony Rundle, with Greens on the cross-benches providing confidence (but no formal arrangement in place).

Timeline of the *Parliamentary Reform Bill 1998 (No. 31 of 1998)*:

It took two attempts in 1998 to pass legislation to cut the number of MPs.

On **21 May 1998** the Labor Opposition brought on for debate their reintroduced Bill to cut numbers and establish their 5 electorates with 5 MPs model for the Assembly. Although the Bill was defeated, Liberal backbencher, Bob Cheek MP, controversially crossed the floor and voted with Labor.

Monday 13 July 1998, with nine days warning, Liberal Premier Tony Rundle announced Parliament would be recalled for a special sitting on Wednesday 22 July 1998 to reduce the size of the Tasmanian Parliament.

- **13 July 1998** – announcement of early recall of Parliament to:
 - a) rescind previous 21 May vote which defeated Labor's 5 x 5 model (rescinding was necessary as Parliamentary Standing Orders (the rules) prohibit the reintroduction of a defeated Bill before 12 months have passed);
 - b) re-debate previously defeated Labor Bill with 5 x 5 model.
- **22 July 1998** – Bill passes Assembly, with the Liberals backflipping on previous rejection of Labor's 5 x 5 model (*Labor & Liberal vs Greens*)
- **23 July 1998** – Bill passes Legislative Council
- **29 August 1998** – first general election returning 25 MPs in the Assembly: 14 Labor, 10 Liberal, and 1 Green (former Tasmanian Greens Leader Peg Putt MP) returned. Jim Bacon's Labor obtained majority which they did not lose until 2010 balance of power parliament.

What did the independent inquiries say?

The 1984 Ogilvie Report

- **1984** the *Advisory Committee on the Proposed Reduction in the Number of Members Elected to Both Houses of the Tasmanian Parliament - the Ogilvie Report* (established by Liberal Premier Robin Gray) - advised against cutting the numbers.

The Ogilvie Report recommended the following:

3. *Retention of the Existing number of Members of the House of Assembly is desirable to minimise the risk of deadlocks and balance of power situations occurring and to maximise the effectiveness of the Hare-Clark electoral system so that a majority of voters is likely to be represented by a majority of Member in the House of Assembly.*
4. *The present size off the House of Assembly is appropriate when considered in the light of the history of the Tasmanian Parliament, the growth in governmental functions and activities ,*

and the growth in Tasmania's population since the inception of responsible government in 1856.³

The 1994 Morling Board of Inquiry

- **1994** the Board of Inquiry into the Size and Constitution of the Tasmanian Parliament – the Morling Inquiry (established by Liberal Premier Ray Groom) – advised against reduction in MP numbers.

The Morling Inquiry Report recommended the following:

- i) ... A House of Assembly with fewer than 35 members would have difficulty in discharging adequately its functions as the house of Government. We do not think the reduction in the number of members of the Assembly should be made at the risk of impairing its ability to discharge those functions.
- ii) The number of members of the Legislative Council could be reduced to 15 without the same degree of risk of impairing its ability to discharge its functions as a House of Review. But the consequential small reduction in the overall number of members of the Parliament would achieve very little and is not recommended. [... and later]
- iv) We do not believe that a reduction in numbers is imperative. In our opinion a bicameral Parliament is to be preferred if the method of election of members of the Council is changed as suggested in (v) and if the mechanisms for the settlement of disagreements between the houses are adopted as suggested in (vi).
- v) We recommend that members of the Assembly should continue to be elected from the existing five electorates each returning 7 members...⁴

Amongst other findings, the Morling Inquiry flagged that although its preferred position was for the Assembly to stay at 35 MPs, if it was deemed an imperative to reduce MP numbers then it should only occur via establishing a unicameral chamber of 44 MPs, of which 28 should still be elected from **7 member** electorates.

... and since the 1998 cut to MPs?

During the 2000s criticism grew of the detrimental impact the cut in MP numbers had made on the Assembly's capacity to fulfil its democratic and parliamentary functions, reduced effective representation, reduced capacity for the Opposition to keep the government to account, increased instability as the Executive was hit with scandal with limited capacity to replace resigning Ministers, the decimation of a functioning committee system, and ironically, increased 'risk' of minority government.

By 2010 the fact the cuts to the Assembly was a critical mistake impacting Tasmania's system of democratic governance, had gained broad acceptance, culminating in the signed agreement by the three Party Leaders to restore the number back to 35, and reinstating the previous model of 7 MPs per each of the 5 established electorates.

- **2009** – Joint Select Committee on Ethical Conduct [Final Report 'Public Office is Public Trust'](#), (No. 24), included as one of its recommendations:

Recommendation 14 – *The Committee recommends that an independent inquiry be conducted into:-*

³ *Ogilvie Report, 1984* – see Conclusions. *Report of the Advisory Committee on the Proposed Reduction in the Number of Members Elected to both Houses of the Tasmanian Parliament*: Pg 60.

⁴ *Morling Report, 1994*– see Summary of Report. *Report of the Board of Inquiry into the Size and Constitution of the Tasmanian Parliament*: pgs 1-2.

- a. whether or not there should be an increase of the number of members elected to the Legislative Council and the House of Assembly;
- b. if an increase is recommended, to report on the way such increase should be achieved; and
- c. any matters incidental thereto.⁵

- **2011** – *Review of the Proposal to Restore the House of Assembly to 35*, by Independent Appointee Emeritus Professor Peter J. Boyce AO, report tabled 8 March 2011.

Following the 2010 three Leaders Agreement to restore the Assembly to 35 MPs with 7 members from each of the five electorates, Professor Boyce was appointed to review the proposal and public submissions received.⁶ The Boyce review found:

(1) *The overwhelming majority of submissions received by the independent Appointee favoured a restoration of the House of Assembly membership to 35 in time for the next state election.*⁷

- **2020** - *House of Assembly Select Committee on House of Assembly Restoration Bill 2018 [Final Report](#)* – unanimously supported the restoration of Assembly MP numbers back to 7 MPs per 5 established electorates. Committee consisted of 3 Liberals + 2 Labor + 1 Green (Chair). The Committee Report contains 35 findings, including:

2.21 *The Committee finds the costs associated with restoring the House of Assembly to 35 Members are justified to improve governance, accountability, representation and to provide for a better functioning Parliament which enhances democracy and in turn improves public services.*⁸

Hare-Clark: why is the 5 electorates by 7 MPs model the best option?

Recognised Hare-Clark authority, George Howatt MA, stated the following:

*“With five seven-member electorates instead of seven five-member ones, the variations in party voting strengths within electorates are smaller because larger electorates encompass a wider range of people.... Fewer and larger electorates provide a better cross section of the State than smaller, more numerous ones.”*⁹

Fundamental intents of the Hare-Clark system include:

1. **Reflecting the vote accurately.** Hare-Clark seeks to ensure that the vote received by candidate groupings (such as political parties) is reflected as accurately as possibly by seats gained, i.e. if 51% of vote received, that group should secure 51% of seats – unlike some parliaments where majority seats can go to parties whose received a lower vote.

As Howatt states, *“The Hare-Clark system is purposely designed to give effect to the wishes of as many electors as is technically possible.”*¹⁰

⁵ Joint Select Committee on Ethical Conduct, 2009, *Final Report*: pg 12.

⁶ See the *Agreement for Parliamentary Reform*, signed by Premier David Bartlett MP, Liberal Leader Will Hodgman MP, and Greens Leader Nick McKim MP, 2 September 2010.

⁷ Boyce, 2011. *Review of the Proposal to Restore the House of Assembly to 35 Members*: pg 17.

⁸ HA Select Committee on House of Assembly Restoration Bill 2018, 2020, *Final Report*: pg 10.

⁹ Howatt, 1958: pg 22. This Paper informed debate at the time to increase the Assembly from 30 MPs to 35.

¹⁰ Howatt, 1958: pg 7.

The 35 MPs of 7 MPs elected from 5 electorates model's quota of 12.5% reflects this democratic principle more accurately than the current quota of 16.7% required for the 5 MPs by 5 electorates model.

2. **Provide the capacity for a broad range of opinions** held within an electorate to be represented in the Parliament, rather than just the main dominant views.

According to Howatt, *"as the underlying principle of the Hare-Clark philosophy of representation is securing the best possible reflection of public opinion, provision for minority representation is a necessary feature of its electoral machinery."*¹¹

Both the subsequent Ogilvie and Morling inquiries reiterated Howatt's assessment that 7 seats per electorates provides the capacity for a deeper cross section of the community to achieve representation, rather than just the two dominant political parties.

Think of each electorate as a slice of a multi-tier cake with 7 or more layers: Limiting the number of elected representatives to five per slice reduces the opportunity to contain the range of opinions contained across the seven levels of cake in your slice. The proposal to add two new electorates is like saying to Tasmanians you can have extra slices of cake but you will probably still only be able to sample the opinions in the top five 'layers', rather than include the broader range of opinions contained in those last layers.

In contrast retaining the current five electorates and restoring the previous number of 7 MPs per electorate increases the opportunity to include more than just the few top layers of the 'electoral cake'. It does not guarantee a variety of views, independents or minor parties will be elected, that is up to the voters, but it does provide a more equitable and level playing field to facilitate that outcome.

The TEC's (2022b) advice to the Rockliff government also details specific logistical obstacles presented by any attempt to change the current 5 established electorates.¹²

Who has said the 1998 Cut to MPs was a mistake?

Mercury newspaper editorial, 29 June 2007

Back in the 1990s, this newspaper argued in favour of a smaller parliament and abolition of the Upper House. It is prepared to acknowledge past mistakes. Now the Upper House is all that stands between the Government and absolute power.

Mercury newspaper editorial, 25 June 2008

Tasmania needs a bigger, stronger parliament to make the State Government more accountable... This newspaper supported a smaller parliament when the Labor and Liberal parties introduced the change in 1998 but now acknowledges that it was a mistake.

Former Solicitor General Bill Bale to the ABC, upon his retirement, in 2008:

*"I think the reduction in the size of the parliament, and that is, of the House of Assembly from 35 to 25, was a retrograde step. I don't believe that 25 people generally elected on a two-party basis, in Tasmania, there may be a third party, certainly a third grouping. I don't believe that leaves the governing party with enough people on its benches to provide a strong ministry, particularly if two or three ministers, as has happened fairly recently in this state, for one reason or another, find that they've got to resign, there's very, very little on the reserve bench. And I simply don't believe that leads to good decision making."*¹³

¹¹ Howatt, 1958: pg 13.

¹² TEC (2022b) – *Advice to the Premier in relation to revising Tasmania's electoral boundaries from 5 to 7 divisions*, dated 24 June 2022, but released by Premier Rockliff on 9 August 2022.

¹³ ABC Stateline Tasmania, 18 July 2008, interview with former Solicitor-General Bill Bale transcript.

Former Labor Minister, David Llewellyn MP, ABC, 2011:

“And I could admit now, I guess, as being part of the government back in 1998 or 1997 in conspiring – I suppose that’s not the best of words, but I think that’s what it was – [...] between the Liberal Party and the Labor Party to reduce the size of Parliament on the basis that it would take more percentage from minor parties to actually win a seat. And I think that was wrong. I’ll admit it was wrong. And I think we really should do something about that...”¹⁴

Former President of the Legislative Council, Sue Smith MLC, in 2013:

“I am the first to admit that the cutting of numbers in the parliament was a major error ... The people of Tasmania should accept and acknowledge that the cuts in the House of Assembly have cost them...I urge members that if that issue comes up again you take a very broad look at the numbers because the responsibilities of the House of government are significant. It is not about the size of your state...

The people of Tasmania expect exactly the same services from their ministers and from their government as other states. Yet we are continually asking to stretch the ministership role, particularly in the House, so broad that it is very difficult for ministers to be able to keep a handle on every arena. That then does pass a lot of the responsibility down to the bureaucrats. Then you have to ask yourself whether the bureaucrat is the elected person who will take the responsibility and answer to the community, or whether it is the elected person who should take that responsibility. We never send an apprentice into the hairdressers and on the first day at work give them a pair of scissors. Yet in this place we have seen where young people, learning their trade of being politicians, have come into this place and had to pick up ministerships straightaway. I believe that does them a disservice and it is very unfair and in the long term it does the people of Tasmania a disservice as well. The concept of parliamentary secretary working that process, learning some of the ropes, taking some responsibility off the minister is all part of the training process that this state deserves...”¹⁵

Former President of the Legislative Council, Jim Wilkinson MLC, in 2018:

“I don’t think parliament has worked as well as it did prior to 1998.”¹⁶

Former senior advisor to the Liberal Premier Ray Groom, Greg Barns, in 2022:

Reported as saying he was “wrong” to push for a cut in numbers, Mr Barns stated, *“I think what history has shown us is (the reduction) has failed because you need to keep the executive government accountable – you can’t do that in a parliament where just about everybody’s a minister or a shadow minister.”¹⁷*

Will restoring MP Numbers Affect the Legislative Council?

No – it appears the Premier’s priority is to restore the House of Assembly back to 35 MPs, and leave the Legislative Council with its current numbers of 15 MLCs.

This is consistent with an informal ‘understanding’ – established after the 1998 cut once it became apparent the Assembly was unable to function as it should – that any proposed reform involving the Legislative Council would not be imposed without that Chamber’s involvement and consent.

¹⁴ ABC Statewide Morning Radio, 13 May 2011 transcript.

¹⁵ Hansard LC, Sue Smith MLC valedictory speech, 18 April 2013.

¹⁶ ABC News, 13 March 2018. Note: during this news report Wilkinson also argues for the Upper House numbers to be restored.

¹⁷ Rob Inglis, *The Mercury*, 28 February 2022.

Shouldn't the current move to restore MP numbers be consulted?

Ironically, the issue is not about **lack** of consultation regarding the best model for the House of Assembly but instead that all the previous rounds of independent consultation processes, and their respective recommendations, were deliberately ignored in 1998.

Public consultation did **not** occur in 1998, when Labor and Liberal parties ignored the advice to not cut numbers from the previous two rounds of independent inquiries which did include public consultation, and instead adopted a model specifically advised **against** by both the earlier Ogilvie and Morling inquiries respectively.

Since the 1998 cut the following investigations, both involving public consultation processes, occurred:

- In 2010, following the three Party Leaders Agreement a public submission process was undertaken into restoring the Assembly numbers along the pre-1998 cut model of 5 electorates delivering 7 MPs. That report found the overwhelming majority of submissions received supported the restoration of 35 MPs from the current five electorates – *the current move to restore MP numbers of 35 from 5 electorates is consistent with this public review and recommendation made.*
- The 2019 tripartite Parliamentary Committee inquiry into the House of Assembly Restoration Bill 2018, (which reported in 2020) provided a public consultation and submission process, as well as public hearings during its consideration of that Bill which proposed the five electorates by 7 MPs model be restored. That Committee unanimously recommended the restoration of that model — *the current move to restore MP numbers of 35 from 5 electorates is consistent with this committee inquiry and recommendations made.*

The current Assembly restoration move to return to the 5 electorates by 7 MPs model is consistent with, and finally respects, all previous independent consultation and inquiry processes – do we really need to repeat them yet again?

Wasn't the 1998 cut to MPs a trade-off for the 40% pay-rise?

Efforts by the two major parties to reduce the number of MPs predated the 1993 40% pay-rise.

However, public disquiet over the pay-rise was used to justify ongoing efforts to cut numbers against the independent expert advice received. The Liberal Premier at the time, Ray Groom, attempted to link the two in 1993 by proposing a reduction in the House of Assembly from 35 to 30 members and a 40% salary increase for the remaining MPs. However, these were unlinked during debate with only the 40% pay rise passing.

The eventual cut to MP numbers in 1998, five years after the 1993 pay-rise, was based more on Labor and Liberal anti-minority government campaigns, and specifically to block the election of the Green Party.

Former Premier Doug Lowe stated to a meeting of the Constitution Society that the sole rationale of the Labor-Liberal agreement to cut numbers was driven by anti-Green sentiment.¹⁸ As mentioned above, this was reiterated by former Labor Minister David Llewellyn's 2011 statement on ABC Radio that the bipartisan 'conspiring' was to prevent minor parties winning seats.

¹⁸ Boyce, 2011, *Review of the Proposal to Restore the House of Assembly to 35 Members*: pg 6.

Will 7 MP electorates Impact Formal Voting Rates at Election Time?

These informal voting concerns are inconclusive. Some have raised concerns that voters being required to vote 1 to 7 on their ballot paper may risk increasing the number of informal – and therefore invalid – votes. While the issue of informal votes is a valid concern at elections for any tier of government, we need to be clear on all contributing factors.

The recent TEC (2022a) *2019 to 2021 Report on Parliamentary Elections*, provides a breakdown of unintentional informality trends which reveals the following:¹⁹

- The category with the largest number of invalidating errors (3527 ballot papers) is due to voters marking their ballot papers with ticks or crosses instead of numbers – this error is not due to voters losing track of voting 1 to 5, or 1 to 7, but reflects a fundamental lack of understanding of how to vote in state elections.
- The next highest category (3346 ballot papers) recorded repetitions or omissions between numbers 2 and 5 – this is the relevant category to these specific concerns regarding 1-7 potentially increasing the risk of informal votes.
- The third highest category (3232 ballot papers) were informal due to voters repeating the number 1 two or more times - this error also reflects a fundamental lack of understanding of how to vote in state elections.

This data points to the need for further investment in pre-election voter education, as informal voting rates concerns will not be resolved solely by reducing the formal vote requirement to a 1-5 vote only.

¹⁹ TEC (2022a), *2019 to 2021 Report on Parliamentary Elections*, see Informal ballot paper survey; pg 31.

Timeline of Key Events:

Historic Context ...

- **19 February 1955** – State election for 30 seat Assembly returned 15 Labor and 15 Liberal MPs.
- **1958** - [*Democratic Representation Under The Hare-Clark System: The Need for Seven-Member Electorates*](#), George Howatt, presented to the Tasmanian House of Assembly.
- **29 May 1958** - Bill increasing Assembly from 30 MPs to 35, based on 5 electorates returning 7 MPs model, passes House of Assembly. Premier at the time was Labor’s Robert Cotgrove.
- **3 December 1958** - above Bill passes Legislative Council.
- **2 May 1959** - First Assembly election held returning 7 MPs for each of the 5 electorates. Labor 17 seats, Liberals 16, Independents 2 seats (Bass and Denison). Premier is Labor’s Eric Reece.

... Contributing to Current Situation ...

- **1980** – Dr Norm Sanders (Australian Democrats) elected as Member for Denison (now Clark).²⁰
- **January 1983** – Dr Bob Brown elected as an independent Member for Denison on countback upon Dr Sanders’ resignation.
- **1983** - Liberal Premier Robin Gray established an advisory committee into the size of the Tasmanian Parliament, known as the **Ogilvie Inquiry**.
- **1984** - The Ogilvie Inquiry Report released and recommended against cuts to MP numbers - *Report of the Advisory Committee on the Proposed Reduction in the Number of Members Elected to Both Houses of the Tasmanian Parliament to the Premier the Honourable Robin Trevor Gray, M.H.A, 1984*.
- **1 November 1984** - Premier Robin Gray delivers a Ministerial Statement in response to the Ogilvie Report, declaring that due to its recommendations to not reduce the number of MPs, his government will no longer pursue that policy.
- **February 1986 state election** – Liberals 19 seats, Labor 14 seats, Independents 2, with Dr Gerry Bates elected as Green independent Member for Franklin additional to Dr Brown in Denison.
- **1989 – 1992** – the Labor-Green Accord following 1989 election. Labor minority government led by Premier Michael Field MP, supported by 5 Green Independents (later the Tasmanian Greens Party), one in each of the 5 electorates.
- **February 1992 state election** – Liberals one 19 seats, Labor 11, Greens 5 (one in each electorate).
- **November 1993** – then Liberal Premier Ray Groom tried to link two measures: a reduction in the House of Assembly from 35 to 30 members and a 40% salary increase for the remaining MPs (seeking to address the freeze on salaries in place since the 1980s). The Parliament ‘untied’ the two and only passed the 40% pay rise.
- **March 1994** - then Liberal Premier Ray Groom established the **Morling Board of Inquiry** into the Size and Constitution of the Parliament.
- **June 1994** - The Morling Report released and recommended against any reduction in MP numbers - *Report of the Board of Inquiry into the Size and Constitution of the Tasmanian Parliament, 1994*.

²⁰ Dr Sanders was elected following a highly unusual state by-election. In December 1979 the Supreme Court of Tasmania found the earlier election of three Labor candidates, Julian Amos, John Devine and John Green, to be void, as they had exceeded their spending limits. As a result, all elected members for the electorate of Denison were required to face another election.

- **October 1995** - ALP Leader of the Opposition Michael Field introduced a Bill to reduce the Parliament to 40 - electing 5 in each of the five Assembly seats and 15 MLCs. This Bill lapsed without debate.
- **February 1996 – state election**, saw a minority Liberal government returned, under Premier Tony Rundle MP. The 4 Greens MPs on the cross-bench provided confidence but without any formal agreement between parties. One independent (Mr Bruce Goodluck MP) was also elected in Franklin, seeing for the first time since 1948²¹ a state electorate return two alternatives to the major parties: 3 Labor, 2 Libs, 1 Green and 1 Independent.
- **April 1997** - Liberal Premier Tony Rundle, via the joint Federal-State funded Nixon *Directions Report*, proposed a referendum on reducing the size of Parliament from 54 to 44 members, using the unicameral model the Morling Inquiry flagged as the only acceptable fall-back option should reducing numbers be an imperative. Establishing the proposed referendum failed to pass the Parliament.
- **October 1997** - The Legislative Council opposed the unicameral 44 seat model and instead passed a motion supporting a model of 25 MPs in the Assembly and no fewer than 15 MLCs (the Labor model).

... and ... Parliament Gutted ...

- **May 1998** – New Labor Opposition Leader, Jim Bacon MP, introduced the *Parliamentary Reform Bill 1998* which mirrored the 1995 ALP Bill’s model of an Assembly of 25 MPs, and Council of 15 MPs.
- **21 May 1998** - the Labor Opposition brought on for debate the *Parliamentary Reform Bill 1998*. Although the Bill was defeated (*Liberals & Greens voted against*), Liberal backbencher, Bob Cheek MP, controversially crossed the floor and voted with Labor.
- **13 July 1998** -following the Greens’ refusal to support the government’s proposed sale of the Hydro, Liberal Premier Tony Rundle announced Parliament would be recalled for a special sitting to reduce the size of the Tasmanian Parliament.
- **22 July 1998** – Debate in the Assembly to rescind the vote on Labor’s failed *Parliamentary Reform Bill 1998*, to allow a second debate and vote on the same Bill. Bill passes Assembly, with the Liberals backflipping on previous rejection of Labor’s 5 x 5 model and voting to cut MP numbers (*Labor & Liberal vs Greens*).
- **23 July 1998** – *Parliamentary Reform Bill 1998* passes the Legislative Council.
- **29 August 1998** – first general election returning 25 MPs in the Assembly: 14 Labor, 10 Liberal, and 1 Green (former Tasmanian Greens Leader Peg Putt MP) returned. Jim Bacon’s Labor obtained majority government which they did not lose until 2010 balance of power parliament.

... Buyers’ Remorse ...

- **2002** – *Constitution Act 1934*, S. 8A amended to increase Cabinet from 8 Ministers to either 9, or 8 Ministers plus 1 Cabinet Secretary.
- **2008** – 10 years later, the *Mercury* newspaper editorialises that the cut to Assembly numbers was a mistake which should be rectified.
- **2009** – *Joint Select Committee on Ethical Conduct Final Report ‘Public Office is Public Trust’*, (No. 24) raised need to revisit restoring MP numbers.
- **April 2010 - 2014** – *state election returns a balance of power parliament*: 25 Labor, 25 Liberals, and 5 Greens (one in each electorate). Minority Labor government with 2 Greens MPs in Cabinet.

²¹ The 1948 state election was on the 30 MP numbers model: then-Denison electorate returned 3 Labor, 1 Liberal, 1 Independent Liberal and 1 Independent.

- **September 2010** – Three Political Leaders Agreement on Parliamentary Reform, including restoring Assembly numbers to 35 along the 5 electorates by 7 MPs model, signed by Premier David Bartlett, Opposition Leader Will Hodgman, and Greens Leader Nick McKim.
- **March 2011** – *Review of the Proposal to Restore the House of Assembly to 35*, by Independent Appointee Emeritus Professor Peter J. Boyce AO, tabled 8 March 2011. Report recommends the restoration of the Assembly to 35, via 5 electorates returning 7 MPs each.
- **May 2011** – former Labor Minister David Llewellyn admits on ABC radio that the Labor and Liberal parties ‘conspired’ in 1998, “to reduce the size of Parliament on the basis that it would take more percentage from minor parties to actually win a seat...”
- **2020** - *House of Assembly Select Committee (est. 2019) on House of Assembly Restoration Bill [Final Report](#)* released, unanimous recommendation to restore Assembly numbers to 35 on 5 electorates with 7 MPs model.
- **1 May 2021** – then-Premier Peter Gutwein calls an early state election. Majority Liberal government returned, Liberals 13 seats, Labor 9 seats, Greens 2 seats, plus 1 independent (Ms Kristy Johnston MP) elected in the seat of Clark (this electorate returning two alternatives to the major parties with the election of 1 Green and 1 independent – **25 years since electorate of Franklin returned this degree of diverse representation**).²²

14 May 2021 – 1st govt resignation: 1 day after election Liberal MP Adam Brooks resigns.

10 February 2022 – 2nd govt resignation: Liberal Minister Sarah Courtney MP resigns from Parliament.

25 February 2022 – 3rd govt resignation: Liberal Minister Jane Howlett MLC resigns from Cabinet.

4 April 2022 – 4th govt resignation: Liberal Premier Peter Gutwein MP resigns from Parliament. *Tasmanian Parliament prorogued due to government being in minority during countback.*

On the Road to Righting a Wrong ...

- **25 May 2022** – Premier Jeremy Rockliff’s [media statement](#) announcing intention to restore Assembly numbers to 35, during Assembly debate on a Greens’ motion to restore numbers, 25 May 2022.
- **6 June 2022** – Premier Rockliff states (during Budget Estimates hearings) he has sought advice from the TEC regarding the 5 electorates with 7 MPs model versus 7 electorates with 5 MPs model.

25 July 2022 – 5th govt resignation: Liberal Minister Jacquie Petrusma resigns from Parliament. *Tasmanian Parliament prorogued due to government being in minority during countback.*
- **9 August 2022** – Premier Rockliff [announces intention](#) to move forward restoring Assembly numbers back to 35 along previous established model of 5 state electorates each returning 7 MPs. Decision is based upon TEC (2022b) [Advice to the Premier in relation to revising Tasmania’s electoral boundaries from 5 to 7 divisions](#), detailing logistical and financial obstacles to moving to a 7 electorates with 5 MPs model, which Premier also releases on this date.

²² This denotes the diverse electorate make-up as elected by voters on polling day, as distinct from MP changes occurring *between* elections. For example, elected on the countback following Labor MP Scott Bacon’s resignation in 2019, Madeleine Ogilvie took her seat as an independent, despite contesting the 2018 election as an endorsed Labor candidate, giving the Clark electorate 2 Liberals, 1 Labor, 1 Green and 1 independent). Later that same term of government, following Liberal Clark MP Sue Hickey’s resignation from the Party on 21 March 2021, the electorate of Clark’s representative make-up was: 1 Labor, 1 Liberal, 1 Green and 2 independents.

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