

# Draft laws' consultation time slammed

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**Matt Maloney**

THE state government has relented to a call from a key disability lobby group for extended consultation of new laws which will make voting in elections more accessible for Tasmanians with a disability.

Disability Voices Tasmania (DVT) on Monday demanded a longer consultation period, which was to run over 15 days from November 2 to 15. The bill will give the Tasmanian Electoral Commissioner the power to approve alternative voting procedures for people with disabilities. DVT earlier this year raised concerns with a parliamentary committee looking into the operation of this year's House of Assembly and Legislative

Council elections about significant barriers faced by people with disabilities who wished to cast their vote. It pointed to barriers such as faulty technology, inaccessible venues, and the reliance on another person to cast their ballot paper.

DVT chief executive Vaughn Bennison said the consultation prior to the draft bill's release was inadequate, as was the 15-day consultation period.

"This is a key reform for which Disability Voices Tasmania along with Blind Citizens Australia's Tasmanian branch and other community organisations have been advocating for over two years," he said.

"After all this time, the community has been shut out from actually working with the

government to develop the bill, and that we have been given only two weeks to respond to a draft we had no idea was coming. It is a great shame that while welcoming movement on this issue we have to complain about yet another failure to understand the importance of including people with disability as partners for change on matters that affect us."

Nelson independent MLC Meg Webb is chairwoman of parliament's joint standing committee on electoral matters. She said she had written to Mr Barnett and Disability Minister Jo Palmer to request a consultation period of at least six weeks.

"Why the rush? There are other draft bills open for consultation for periods of up to 12

weeks," Ms Webb said.

A government spokesperson when contacted for a response on Monday said: "The Tasmanian government consulted extensively with relevant disability and other stakeholders in the development of this policy. There is now further opportunity for stakeholders to have their voices heard through this consultation period".

Hours later, Attorney-General Guy Barnett issued a statement, saying that consultation will now run until December 15.

"Given the strong desire from community and disability advocates to engage with this process as thoroughly as possible - the government is extending the consultation process by six weeks," he said.

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