

Submission to the Parliamentary Salaries and Allowances Inquiry.

Mr Tim Abey
President,
and Commissioners of
Full Bench of the Tasmanian Industrial Commission

For many years I have been in a position to closely observe the roles and responsibilities of many Tasmanian politicians, both Ministers and backbenchers, and of both political persuasions.

It is my assessment that members of Parliament, particularly those holding Ministerial responsibility and the Government backbenchers, have an exceptionally heavy workload which has been exacerbated by the reduction in the numbers in the Tasmanian parliament.

I was a supporter of the reduction in numbers in parliament at the time it was put to the vote, but having now observed the result of the change, I am absolutely satisfied that the reduction has had a drastic adverse impact on the ability of the parliament to function effectively and efficiently and Tasmania, and Tasmanians have suffered as a consequence.

I am aware that politicians salaries have been "frozen" for some time and I consider the decision to do so was commendable given the parlous financial circumstances that prevailed at that time. However those circumstances have changed a little for the better in Tasmania in my view and the portents for further improvement are encouraging.

I dismiss the vacuous arguments that because Tasmania is a small State the responsibilities of the parliament are commensurately less.

Tasmania is a sovereign State with the same structures and responsibilities as the larger States, and although the scale may differ, the same high level of governance is expected, nay, demanded by the voting public. Indeed it could be argued that the small size, particularly of population, imposes significant demands on our elected representatives to be innovative and skilful at a higher level than their interstate counterparts to take advantage of every opportunity to maximise the commercial benefits that may present for the benefit of Tasmania.

I have scanned the Issues Paper but have not had time to consider it in the detail I am sure it deserves but I am concerned at the very substantial difference between the salaries of Tasmania's politicians compared to those of the other Australian jurisdictions, and the fact that there appears to be a lack of uniformity in relation to loadings paid to various positions. Surely there should be similar remuneration for similar positions regardless of jurisdiction.

My recollection is that some years ago the vexed question of fixing parliamentary salaries without the intervention of participation of politicians was addressed by paying the Tasmanian politicians a percentage of the average salary of the other jurisdictions. I believe that the percentage was in excess of 87% but I am not absolutely sure of that percentage.

I do know that there was substantial public support for this approach and I feel that a similar approach would again be 'tolerated' by the public. It would be too much to expect overt public support as the remuneration of politicians has always been a popular public "whipping boy".

However it is important that a fair approach be employed and I am sure that most members of the public would be unwilling to make the sacrifices that most politicians make in terms of:

- a) attending meetings outside the normal sitting hours of Parliament;
- b) in travelling to the furthest corners of their electorate at times when most people would be enjoying time with their families, or enjoying some other personal pursuits unrelated to their employment;
- c) spending countless hours examining documentation related to important matters before the Parliament;
- d) supporting public sporting, charitable and other bodies, usually financially, within their electorate;
- e) making themselves available to the unrelenting scrutiny of the media;
- f) suffering the severe criticism of the public, whether deserved or not; and
- g) being prepared to make decisions to ensure the betterment of the community, knowing full well that their best efforts will always attract criticism, ridicule or sometimes threats of personal violence to the member or their family from certain elements of the community.

This is by no means an exhaustive list of the less attractive aspects of a "politician's lot" but are just some of the issues I submit should be considered in assessing a fair remuneration.

I do not often find myself agreeing with media political commentators but I read an article by Barry Prismall in The Examiner dated the 30th September 2015, on this subject with which I found no argument. Indeed Prismall's research was far more in depth than mine and his conclusions in my opinion are irresistible. Like Mr.Prismall I usually take the view that politicians are big boys and can look after themselves but I believe the time has come for the general public to make their views known on this issue. I have taken the liberty of attaching a copy of the article.

I realise that the issue of the numbers of members in the Tasmanian Parliament are not a matter for this tribunal, however, I suggest that the increased workload generated as a consequence of the reduction in numbers is a matter to which some weight could be given in assessing a fair remuneration.

In my opinion it is totally wrong that senior public servants should be paid a substantially higher salary than senior politicians, particularly those holding the position of Premier or Minister, and every effort should be made to address this disparity.

My submission is forwarded for your consideration.

Richard J Chugg APM, JP.