

# **30<sup>th</sup> June 2010 VERSION IVAN**

## **Billet d'État \*\* of 2010 - Article \*\***

### **Island-Wide Voting – 2<sup>nd</sup> Report**

Mr Bailiff,

I have the privilege today, as chairman of the States Assembly & Constitution Committee, of putting before the Assembly proposals, for Island wide Voting which are the result of a successful comprehensively supported amendment presented to the States back in April 2006,

Agreeing that the then House Committee undertake a comprehensive review of all practicable methods of Island wide elections to enable its introduction in 2012.

This was then followed by my Committee's States Report in 2009 detailing eight principle options; the Assembly noted that report and agreed that we submit a further report with details of elections that would take effect from the General Election in 2012

So Sir, today Members you have three well thought out options, contained in this report

I can assure everyone and I am aware some Members may disagree, however each of these proposals will work, especially with a population of approximately 62,000 on an island of 25 square miles.

The principle objective is the will to want to make it work, therefore once an option is chosen my Committee will submit a further comprehensive report.

I know these proposals are long-awaited by several members of this Assembly not to mention the vast majority of the public of Guernsey, for whom we represent,

Who, like many of us ,have fought for many years for the introduction of island-wide voting; by given them the opportunity to elect all or a vast majority of their Government who represent them.

25 years ago, when I was first elected as a Member of the States, I believed that the States of Deliberation should be elected by island-wide franchise. That view is as strongly held today as it was then.

Indeed, my support for island-wide voting was strengthened, when I stood in island-wide elections in the 1990s and saw first-hand that they were perfectly possible to arrange, then having 28 candidates, were certainly popular with the electorate, and more democratic than the existing system.

Yes with all members being elected Island Wide, or a majority initially we will need to propose detailed changes to that particular election method, to ensure which ever option is supported will work smoothly, which we will, within in our future report.

However we must never under estimate the ability of the voting public.

Indeed, I believe, that the States made a serious mistake in 1997 in abolishing the office of Conseiller, and with it ending after only three years in operation the practice of electing at least some members island-wide.

Following our States report in January 2009

on Island Wide Voting, it is that work which the Committee has been engaged in since, and we very much hope that our work will be endorsed today by members voting to introduce one of the electoral systems outlined in the report before the Assembly today.

After which we will return in time with comprehensive details for the 2012 elections on Hustings, Manifestos, electronic counting etc.

Members will be aware that, following last year's debate, the Committee undertook a successful public consultation exercise.

I say 'successful' because the response rate well exceeded the Committee's expectations and – involving, as it did, some 14% of the entire adult population, and around one-fifth of the electoral roll – it was undoubtedly one of the most effective consultation documents ever issued by the States, or a States Department or Committee.

Which proves the interest and support from the public wanting to elect a majority of their Government.

On behalf of all members of the Committee, through you sir,

I should like to thank the very nearly 7,000 people who took the time to participate in this public consultation, the findings of which informed the Committee and proved beyond doubt that there remains a very broad and indeed very considerable public

Support for as I have just mentioned the concept of island-wide voting.

This overwhelming majority of respondents – was quite incredible, in excess of 80% – favoured island-wide voting. The current electoral system,

which of course includes no island-wide voting, was supported by no fewer than one in five respondents.

People do want change.

!!Let me please repeat these figures more than 80% of the people who responded wanted to elect the majority of their Government, not just by District or Parish each of our options allow this, surely they cannot be ignored!!

The majority of my Committee is of the view that no democratic electoral system can thrive, or even survive very long, without broad public support. And, very simply, such support does not exist for the present arrangements, but most certainly does exist for some form of island-wide voting.

In a moment, I will address each of the three options for electoral reform contained in the propositions on page 942 of our report.

But at this point I wish to summarise more generally the case for island-wide voting, which the majority of our Committee regards as very compelling indeed.

The first point to make – and, in many ways, the basis of the case for these proposals – must be that democracy is best served when the electorate has the maximum say possible in electing how and by whom they are represented in a parliament, in our case in the States of Deliberation.

In Guernsey, as I have mentioned, a relatively small island with a relatively small population, such democracy can reasonably be obtained by conferring upon each elector, each member of the public, the right to elect some, most or even all of their representatives without the need for

narrowing democratic choices via the imposition of constituency boundaries.

That is what the present system, without any provision for island-wide voting, actually does – it narrows the exercise of democracy in a way that is unnecessary and unhelpful.

It is true, of course, that today the vast majority of decisions made by the States of Deliberation relate to matters which are of relevance to the whole island, and not just to one or other of the parishes.

Therefore, and since in a democratic society parliament is the buckle that links the public to government, our democracy would be strengthened by replacing the sense of parochialism in the voting system with a recognition that this is one island with one electorate and one collective identity.

Island-wide voting would also at a stroke strengthen the accountability of this Assembly.

At present, through no fault of their own, it is possible for members to be elected where they have particularly strong but very local support from within one parish, or district whereas they might not command broad support from among the island electorate as a whole; and importantly it is on behalf of that whole island electorate that elected representatives will be acting and voting.

Surely, Sir, accountability is about being accountable to all those on behalf of whom you are acting – and if so, in Guernsey, that should mean the introduction of island-wide voting.

The majority of the Committee firmly believes that island-wide voting would stimulate a renewed interest in elections and in politics more generally.

It is considered unsatisfactory by many, people that they are precluded from casting a vote for candidates from districts other than their own and of whom they are strongly supportive, especially, as is sometimes the case, when they do not feel adequately represented by any of the candidates standing in their own district.

Often in this Assembly we are forced to reconcile raw public opinion with a different view which we reach collectively having been exposed to all the relevant information.

It is about the balance between listening to public opinion and reaching one's own judgement based on the evidence available.

But the Committee suggests that on few issues is public opinion more important than the electoral system, which is the basis of our democracy.

I ask members to give very serious consideration to public opinion when deciding how to vote today – because it is important that a significant majority of the island's public who take an interest in Political matters plainly want some form of island-wide voting.

At this stage, I wish to acknowledge the view among some quarters of the Assembly that there should be a reduction in the number of States members, possibly with a view to facilitating a smoother transition to island-wide voting.

Personally, and I know that I am not alone on the Committee, I have always taken the view that on balance 45 members does result in unnecessary over-representation in a jurisdiction with a population of 62,000, especially where, very happily and sensibly, we operate with a system of government by committees rather than with a ministerial system. However, in truth the number of States members is a quite separate issue from whether to elect those members on an island-wide basis. The one does not have to rely on the other.

The Committee took the view that it would have been unhelpful to conflate the separate issues, and therefore early in the drafting of its report resolved not to include proposals at this stage, to adjust the number of States members, however I do respect we will now have amendments on this issue

Turning now to the detail of the propositions, and in part owing to the strong support for each of the three island-wide voting options presented in the public consultation.

The Committee decided that it would be appropriate to put all three options to the States.

I am fairly confident that it will become evident in the course of this debate that members will harbour varying degrees of support for each of the individual options, but hopefully and I honestly believe from previous debates a vast majority of members as were the public, will be united in believing that all of the three options are preferable to the status quo of no island-wide voting at all.

Firstly, option 1 – that is 45 Deputies elected island-wide for a four-year term. Under this option all Deputies would be elected in one election, and

electors would have the maximum possible choice over their representatives.

In option 2,

Half the total number of Deputies would be elected in an island-wide election every two years. This option means that all members would have an island-wide mandate, but it reflects the views of many people that electing 22 or 23 candidates at each election is a more manageable proposition than electing all 45 members in one go.

2012 district election as now, top 3 would serve 4 years bottom half 2 years then island wide 2014 remainder Island wide half in 2016 thereafter every 2 years Option 2 also carries with it certain financial implications which I will refer to again in a moment.

Under option 3, and I will say at this stage alleviates the concerns that any new Potential Members would stand no chance against known names in an Island Wide Election,

Each parish would have one Deputy, and the remaining 35 Deputies would be elected island-wide, both on the same day.

Having Parish Deputies would ensure, of course, that each parish had direct representation in the Assembly, St Saviours and Torteval do not have currently direct representation.

However, in this option more than three-quarters of all States Members would be elected island-wide.

This option strikes an appropriate balance between the advantages of strong constituency links between some deputies and their public, and the desirability of the majority of the States being elected by and directly accountable to the wider voting public.

Members today this is in your hands as a Committee we can and will make any option you decide to choose and I hope you do, work sensibly in time for 2012.

Sir, once the States have decided which of the voting options is preferred; there is an additional proposition

Which asks the States to decide whether it is of the opinion that in island-wide elections each voter should be limited to casting no more than ten votes.

This is put as a separate proposition as it can apply equally to each of the three main options and certainly makes voting more manageable.

Those Members who believe that electors should be given as many votes as there are seats in the Assembly will wish to vote against this proposal.

It is there because the Committee is aware of concerns about inviting electors to vote for up to, say, 45 or even 30 candidates in one go, as an overhaul package this would be unmanageable even though the electors don't have to vote for all 45 some would, unless we control this part of process

If Member believe a voter should have more hopefully this will come out in debate.

I do not, at this stage, propose to address all of the logistical issues and matters relating to manifestos, hustings etc,

Which are laid out in the Billet and which will be dealt with in more depth in a subsequent report setting out detailed proposals relating to the procedure at, and conduct of, elections to be held under whichever of the electoral options is approved today?

What I will say is to reiterate, we can and will make any of the three options work to allow the voter to speak with all candidates and read everyone's manifestoes perhaps in newspaper form which will be delivered and also not preventing candidate's from spending certain days in each Parish, perhaps giving a longer period between nomination and election.

I should, however, say a word about costs. The Committee believes that options 1 and 3 can be funded within the Committee's present budget allocation for elections.

However, option 2, which involves elections being held every two years, would require an increase in budget.

With regard to option 2, I should also draw attention to the letter of comment supplied by the Home Department, which is included as Appendix 1 to the Committee's report, however what price to you place on democracy? Members that is for you to decide.

So, sir, the Committee is presenting three options for the introduction of island-wide voting, and of course

I sincerely urge members to have the will to vote in favour of one of those options for all the reasons I have set out in this opening speech.

Members today a vast majority of Islanders need your support and the belief, Island wide voting can and will work.

Thank you