

From:
Sent: 23 October 2012 17:26
To: CPG Mailbox
Subject: . Response to consultation on improving operation of assembly

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Dear sir or madam

I wish to make this response as an individual- I am not representing the views of any body or institution.

Chapter 1 number of seats

The case for some reduction (especially by comparison to other devolved regions) appears unanswerable. One qualification is unintended consequence- worth asking if some political parties relative to others would make disproportionate gains and whether the degree of "excessive stability"/inertia which may characterise the current position would be aggravated.

Chapter 2 length of terms

Movement to regular 5 year terms would probably aid a shift in mla/executive towards more strategic, considered decision making (as opposed to electoral short termism).

Chapter 4 government and opposition

In principle the admittedly rather unusual arrangements under the 1998 agreement could be justified as a response to ni's historical legacy, but also in principle it is harder to justify continuing with these arrangements.

I would offer the following points:

- 1 history and international experience suggests the government/ opposition model does work to keep governments on their toes and also provides the capacity for the political system to refresh itself.
- 2 many people are beginning to ask where is the penalty in ni's existing system against under performance?
- 3 do reduced turnout and registration figures tell a tale of disillusionment with the status quo?
- 4 inclusivity is a good principle and probably some sort of cross community threshold/protection needs to be retained. However, should five parties be guaranteed a place in government? Excessive inclusivity brings a cost in terms of a lack of clarity and cohesion in policy- it may be worth comparing the programmes of government produced by the executive to their counterparts in London, Edinburgh and Dublin.
- 5 the consultation implies a rather passive approach to this issue ie wait until support in the assembly. This may be very unlikely to arise- those who do well from the status quo unlikely to lead up the charge for reform. The SOS should consider whether she has any role to catalyse the public mood for change- an "ulster spring", perhaps through putting this question to a referendum.