

3. Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill 2013 – First Reading approved

Mr Corkish to move:

That the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill 2013 be read a first time.

The President: We move now to Item 3, the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill 2013. I call on Mr Corkish to take the First Reading.

Mr Corkish: Thank you, Madam President.

I first apologise for the Wagnerian operatic overtones this morning.

Hon. Members will be aware that there has been considerable debate on this Bill in another place. In introducing this Bill to Council and moving its First Reading I will take the opportunity to outline what the Bill is about.

The purpose of the Bill is to equalise House of Keys' constituencies so that each one has the same number of Members representing broadly the same number of people.

Regardless of where they live, all electors will have the same number of votes in elections to the House of Keys and the same level of representation.

The Bill legislates for two of the recommendations of the Boundary Review Committee, an independent body which was appointed by the Governor in Council, following the resolution of Tynwald. These recommendations have already been approved by Tynwald.

The first of these deals with the process for reviewing boundaries. Boundary review committees are appointed by the Governor in Council, following a resolution of Tynwald. There is currently no requirement in legislation for any regular review of the constituency boundaries to take place.

This Bill provides for the Governor in Council to establish an Electoral Commission within 12 months of the general election of 2021, and thereafter following every second general election.

The primary purpose of the Electoral Commission will be to review the number *and* boundaries of constituencies. However, there is also provision made for the Electoral Commission to consider other electoral matters, if so directed by a resolution of Tynwald.

The second element of the Bill is the provision for the Island to be divided into 12 constituencies each returning two Members to the House of Keys, and that the new constituencies should apply to the general election to be held in 2016.

Madam President, having introduced the Bill and outlined its purpose, I beg to move that the First Reading of the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill 2013 be approved.

Mr Downie: I have much pleasure in seconding, Madam President, and in supporting the Bill.

We know we have had this inequality for some years: the two examples which are often given, places like Glenfaba where you have a very small number of electors, and then Peel which has grown out of all recognition in the last few years. Obviously, the situation speaks for itself, it has to be changed. I think the opportunity now to have an Electoral Commission look at this situation periodically and make sure that the distribution of the numbers on as fair a basis as possible is what is going to happen in the future, I think has to be supported.

So I am supporting the First Reading of the Bill.

The President: The Hon. Member, Mr Braidwood.

Mr Braidwood: Thank you, Madam President.

Madam President, yes, I will be supporting the Bill as well. My preference – and I know in my submission to the Commission was 12 times two – as the Hon. Member of Council has mentioned

and the mover, it is a far better system. It is fairer, everybody in each constituency has the same number of votes. There has always been controversy, as mentioned, such as you could say Castletown where they only had one vote; then you would go to Rushen or to Onchan where people could have three votes. So at least now we are on a level playing field.

It has been a long time in coming, but 12 times two for the Keys is the way forward and I will be supporting.

The President: The Hon. Member, Mr Turner.

Mr Turner: Thank you, Madam President.

I too support the Bill. I think it has – the basics of it, of course – had much debate in another place, when the Boundary Review Committee came with their reports and then came back with subsequent reports. Obviously it has gone through the other place and ended up with us here.

I think the issue of a level playing field is an interesting one, and one that will always be at the centre of debate, because of course it could be argued that Douglas still has higher representation (**Mr Braidwood:** Under-representation.) – under-representation says my colleague –

Mr Braidwood: – for their number of people.

Mr Turner: But there again if we are looking at certain issues that crop up, could be where to locate an incinerator, or a land-fill site –

Mr Braidwood: Energy from waste plant.

Mr Turner: – or anything else that may crop up, of course. The rural areas could always argue that they are at a disadvantage. I live in a rural area and I think the general feeling is that people out in that area are quite pleased they are going to be getting the opportunity to have two representatives when this comes in.

So I will keep my remarks at that, but support the Bill at this Reading.

The President: The Hon. Member, Mr Butt.

Mr Butt: Thank you, Madam President.

Very briefly and slightly tongue-in-cheek: I will also be supporting this 12 times two, but I think my personal preference would have been for there to have been eight constituencies with three people.

I think the maths make it more simple on the geography, and it may have actually made the reform of Legislative Council easier had they gone that way. But I will be supporting this 12 by two. (*Laughter*)

A Member: Shame on you!

The President: The move to reply.

Mr Corkish: Thank you, Madam President.

Firstly thanks to the seconder, Mr Downie, and for his supportive remarks.

I thank also Mr Braidwood, who agrees with the 12 by two.

Mr Turner's support, and his remarks. I would just mention that the votes in Tynwald, of course, in Council: eight votes registered for this.

I also thank Mr Butt for his support. This Bill has no effect at all on Legislative Council elections in the future –

Mr Butt: Makes it harder.

Mr Corkish: This is all part, Madam President, of electoral evolution which has not happened now for over 25 years.

So, in thanking the Members, I beg to move.

The President: The motion is that the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill 2013 be read a first time. Those in favour, please say aye; against no. The ayes have it. The ayes have it.