

1852.

Victoria.

INCREASE OF THE NUMBER OF MEMBERS  
OF COUNCIL.

*REPORT from the SELECT COMMITTEE on the Increase of the Number of  
Members of Council.*

ORDERED BY THE COUNCIL TO BE PRINTED, DECEMBER 9TH, 1852.

THE Select Committee appointed on the 16th of November for the purpose of considering and reporting upon the propriety of increasing the whole number of Members of this Council, and the means by which such increase may be effected, report as follows :—

The numerical inadequacy of your Honorable House to meet the increasing business of the Colony has been for some time apparent, and considerable inconvenience to individual Members, as well as serious delay in the conduct of important questions submitted to the Council, have resulted, from taxing too severely the time and attention of the small body of which the Legislature is composed. The magnitude of the amount of the Public Revenues at the disposal of the Council, and the rapid progress of events, fraught with consequences of deep importance to the welfare of the Colony, have added to the desire of enlarging the deliberative body, and of increasing the number of those Members of the House, whose private avocations are not of a nature to absorb the greater portion of their thoughts and time.

In the belief that there exists a very general concurrence in the opinions thus expressed, Your Committee refrain from urging them at greater length, and they proceed to canvass the means by which the objects contemplated in these views can best be achieved.

Your Committee in the outset did not consider, that the powers entrusted to them by Your Honorable House, authorised an enquiry as to the necessity of a vital change in the Constitution of the Colony, and they were besides almost unanimously of opinion that the time had not arrived, when an investigation of such serious importance could be undertaken with advantage to the public interests or satisfaction to themselves ; it was, likewise, felt that the delay which must necessarily occur, in obtaining the sanction of the Imperial Authorities to a measure of this nature,—a sanction rendered indispensable by our Constitutional Act, 13 and 14 Vict. cap. 59,—would defeat the intention of providing for present and pressing exigencies which Your Committee deemed to be the object of their appointment, and Your Committee therefore confined their attention to the course which must necessarily be pursued for effecting within the limit of the powers of Your Honorable House, the required alteration in the numerical strength of the Members of the Legislative Council,—a question which presented itself to the consideration of Your Committee as one capable of being determined by a choice of either of two separate modes :—

Firstly, the number of Members may be increased by an entire alteration of the Electoral Districts, and a plan of subdivision and classification of Constituencies and Interests, involving a repeal of a large portion of the present Electoral Act, and a General Election at an early period of the ensuing year.—and

Secondly, the same object may be attained by simply adding to the number of Members allotted to each present Electoral District, where this could be done without any glaring inequality in the representation, a course requiring but a slight alteration of the law, and unattended by a necessity for a dissolution of the present Council.

Your Committee have given to both these projects the most serious attention, and after weighing the arguments which could be adduced on either hand, they have determined to recommend to your Honorable House the mode of proceeding set forth in the latter of these schemes, being mainly influenced in this decision by the consideration that the contemplated step of an increase of Members in the present Council, is but preparatory to that more important alteration of the Legislature by a revision of the Constitution, which at no distant period must be the consequence, attendant upon the rapid progress in importance and prosperity, of this favoured Colony.

With the time near at hand therefore, when the whole question of the Representation of the Country must be fully and carefully considered, it seemed to Your Committee inexpedient to alter in any way the division of the Electoral Districts, or to interfere materially with the principles of representation which form the basis of the Electoral Act; and it would clearly be both useless and unreasonable to involve the Colony in the excitement of a General Election, by dissolving a Council scarcely initiated in the routine of its Legislative duties, or acquainted with the nature of its responsibilities, when the necessity and intention existed of almost immediately repeating the process with all its attendant ill consequences,—not the least amongst which would be the want of Legislative experience, resulting from a constant change of the Elective Members.

Your Committee recommend to your Honorable House that the whole number of the Members of the Legislative Council should be increased to Fifty-four:—thirty-six of these elective, and in the way pointed out in the Schedule annexed to this Report; and it is believed that this addition can be made without creating any legal difficulty, or rendering it necessary to dissolve the present Council:—a larger number would materially interfere with the comfort and convenience, which the present Council Chamber affords to Honorable Members.

FRANCIS MURPHY,  
Chairman.

#### SCHEDULE.

ELECTORAL DISTRICTS.	Present Number of Members returned	Proposed additional number.
Melbourne ... ..	3	3
North Bourke ... ..	2	1
South Bourke ... ..	1	1
Geelong ... ..	2	1
Grant ... ..	1	1
Ripon, Hampden, Grenville, and Polworth	1	1
Villiers and Heytesbury ... ..	1	1
Belfast and Warrnambool ... ..	1	1
Portland ... ..	1	1
Normanby, Dundas, and Follett ... ..	1	1
Talbot, Dalhousie, and Anglesea ... ..	1	1
Kilmore ... ..	1	1
Wimmera ... ..	1	0
Loddon ... ..	1	1
Murray ... ..	1	1
Gipps Land ... ..	1	0
	20	16