

STATES OF JERSEY



STATES ASSEMBLY: TIME LIMITS ON SPEECHES IN DEBATES

Lodged au Greffe on 11th September 2019
by the Privileges and Procedures Committee

STATES GREFFE

PROPOSITION

THE STATES are asked to decide whether they are of opinion –

- (1) (a) that speeches in debates in the Assembly should not normally exceed 15 minutes in length, excluding time spent on interventions, points of order and clarification, and questions to the Attorney General;
 - (b) that the presiding officer should be permitted to exercise discretion to allow a member to speak for longer than 15 minutes;
 - (c) that the presiding officer should be permitted to announce and implement a shorter time limit on speeches if he or she considers that it is necessary to do so; and
- (2) (a) to request the Privileges and Procedures Committee to prepare and lodge amendments to Standing Orders to give effect to paragraph (1) above; and
 - (b) to request the Bailiff to issue guidance on the discretion which may be exercised by the presiding officer under paragraphs (1)(b) and (c) above, following consultation on that guidance with the Privileges and Procedures Committee.

PRIVILEGES AND PROCEDURES COMMITTEE

REPORT

The Privileges and Procedures Committee (“PPC”) believes that the Assembly should consider the introduction of time limits on speeches in the Assembly. Time limits are common in other jurisdictions (see **Appendix** to this Report). They would help the Assembly manage business more effectively to fit within the 3 allotted days for each meeting, while enabling as many Members as possible to speak in debates.

There have been several States meetings over the last 18 months which have exceeded the 3 days set aside for Assembly business, which has led to inconvenient late Sittings and Sittings at short notice on Mondays or Fridays. Without time limits, the only way of curtailing Sittings is to defer propositions to a later date, which isn’t always possible, or to use the closure procedure. The closure has been used more frequently in 2019 than before, but even when the closure is proposed, Members do not necessarily make shorter contributions, which means that Members who want to speak on a topic are denied the chance to do so.

PPC’s proposal is that there should be a straightforward change to Standing Orders to introduce a presumption that Members do not speak for more than 15 minutes in debates, subject to discretion on the part of the presiding officers to permit longer speeches, or to reduce the time limit, in certain circumstances. A time limit would not apply to the Member bringing a proposition, and nor should it apply to a Member directly affected by a proposition – for example, a Member who is the subject of a vote of no confidence.

The Committee suggests that the Bailiff should issue guidance on when a longer speech, or a shorter time limit, may be permitted. For example, PPC would expect Members to be able to apply to the Bailiff in advance to make a longer speech on a proposition if, for example, they had a number of technically complex points to make, or the subject was especially emotive. The presiding officer could also exercise discretion during a debate, in accordance with the guidance. In relation to shortening a time limit, this might be desirable to ensure that debate on a proposition can be concluded by 5.30 p.m., or after a closure has been proposed, to enable as many Members as possible to speak. In both cases, PPC would wish to be consulted on the guidance before it is issued.

Few Members speak for more than 15 minutes in debates, and the Committee’s view is that in most cases any Member can get across the points they want to make within that period of time. The Assembly has experienced presiding officers who are capable of enforcing time limits fairly and effectively, and exercising discretion sensibly and in accordance with the mood of the Assembly.

PPC suggests that the implementation of time limits should only proceed after digital clocks are installed in the Chamber. The Assembly agreed to the installation of digital clocks back in 2015 ([P.39/2015](#)). For technical reasons, this proposition has not yet been fully implemented, but I understand from the Greffier that this can be done during 2020.

Financial and manpower implications

There are no direct financial or manpower implications arising from this proposition. However, shorter Assembly meetings would bring about some modest reductions in expenditure, particularly in relation to transcription.

APPENDIX

Time limits on speeches in other jurisdictions

Australia (federal): a range of [time limits](#) apply, mostly varying between 5 and 20 minutes.

Canada (House of Commons): complicated [rules](#) set different time limits on different types of proceedings. Most speeches are limited to 10 or 20 minutes' duration.

Council of Europe: 4 minute limit on almost all speeches, routinely reduced to 3 minutes.

Ireland (Dáil): time limits only apply to debates on backbench business and are typically between 8 and 10 minutes (again, the rules are complex).

New Zealand: like in Canada, different [rules](#) apply to different types of debate, but 10 minutes is a standard time limit and there are also restrictions on the number of speeches in a debate.

Scotland: no formal rules.

UK (House of Commons): Extract from *Erskine May*:

“Standing Order No 47 provides that the Speaker may announce in relation to any debate that backbench speeches or backbench speeches between specified times shall be limited to a specified length. The Speaker may at any time make subsequent announcements varying the limit upwards or downwards. Whenever the Speaker has made such an announcement, the occupant of the Chair shall direct any Member (other than a Minister, a Member speaking on behalf of the Leader of the Opposition, or not more than one Member nominated by the leader of the second largest opposition party) who has spoken for the specified period to resume their seat forthwith. The Standing Order also provides for ‘injury time’ in respect of interventions; the Chair is required to add one minute, plus the time taken by the intervention, for each of the first two interventions. It is not uncommon for the Chair to delay the operation of a formal time limit under the Standing Order until a short way into the debate, thereby allowing slightly longer speeches from Members with a particular contribution to make, such as the mover of an amendment which has been selected or the Chair of a relevant select committee.”

Time limits as short as 3 minutes have been imposed in the Commons.

Wales: very complex rules apply in Wales, but a 5 minute time limit on speeches is typical.