

# PRESENTATION SUMMARY

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KELOWNA PUBLIC HEARING  
DATED 24 JUNE 2004  
AT THE COAST CAPRI HOTEL

THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE PRESENTATION TO THE CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON ELECTORAL REFORM. IT ATTEMPTS TO CAPTURE THE KEY ISSUES AND ARGUMENTS THAT WERE PRESENTED AND DISCUSSED DURING THE PUBLIC HEARING. IN SOME INSTANCES, THE PRESENTER HAS ALSO MADE A SUBMISSION TO THE ASSEMBLY AND THIS IS ACCESSIBLE VIA THE WEBSITE AT [WWW.CITIZENSASSEMBLY.BC.CA](http://WWW.CITIZENSASSEMBLY.BC.CA) BY CLICKING ON "GET INVOLVED". IF SUCH A SUBMISSION IS AVAILABLE, IT WILL BE NOTED AT THE END OF THIS REPORT.

# Terry W. Robertson

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## DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

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The six main points that should be considered for the successful adoption of a new electoral process are, in order of increasing importance, familiarity, simplicity, stability, transparency, equality, and proportionality.

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## KEY THEMES

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Mr. Robertson argued that no electoral system is without its shortcomings and as a result it is of primary importance to identify the principals needed for effective change to the electoral system. The presenter stated that six main principles should be considered for the successful adoption of a new electoral process:

1. Familiarity. According to Mr. Robertson, for a new electoral system to be accepted by the electorate, it should involve some elements and processes that the voters are familiar with, for example, single-member constituencies and marking the ballots with X's.
2. Simplicity. Mr. Robertson argued that systems that require the ranking of candidates would make the voting process more complicated and will likely only exacerbate the trend of declining voter participation.
3. Stability. Any system of election must be capable and likely to produce a government that is seen to be both representative and functional. While stability is important, it should not be valued above all other principles. Reasonable limits can be instituted to increase stability in some electoral systems if it is desired.
4. Transparency. Systems of election which use complex formulas to determine the winner, STV for example, are not easily understood, nor will the result be readily accepted as valid by many voters. The public's lack of understanding and confidence in the result of elections is likely to reduce voter participation.
5. Equality. Mr. Robertson argued that a fair electoral system should achieve a level of local representation which is equitable in regards to geographical and population size. In addition, the elected legislature should attempt to fairly reflect most significant demographic segments of the general population. The presenter expressed the opinion that the electoral process must not be seriously skewed in favour of the two largest parties if we are to have a hope of extracting ourselves from the ongoing pattern of highly polarized, divisive, and confrontational politics.
6. Proportionality. According to Mr. Robertson, proportionality constitutes the most important factor for a truly fair and democratic electoral process. The presenter

argued that as citizens tend to vote for parties rather than individuals, the legislature should, as far as possible, reflect the voter support of the various political parties, including significant minor parties.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr. Robertson advocated the introduction of MMP on the grounds that it best fits the six criteria outlined above. In addition, the presenter argued against trying to fix the electoral system by introducing complex vote ranking and counting methods or to try to improve voter turnout by instituting mandatory voting.

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#### QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

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Q I understand your concerns about transparency and trying to make the system simple, however, unfortunately all of these PR systems use quite complicated counting systems. Under MMP the complexity arises in the allocation of the list seats, the formula used is not particularly simple. So in a sense MMP also fails the transparency test as the formula used in allocating list seats is quite complex. What is your opinion on that?

A I'm not familiar with the formula allocation in NZ, but there are ways that it could be simplified. There is a concern with the list seats that somehow this is undemocratic to have parties picking the people who will be on the ballot. I don't think this is any more undemocratic than under the current system where the parties can determine the local candidates. There is a problem of transparency with the construction of the lists but this could be improved upon, it doesn't have to be as complicated as it has been done in other countries.