

# PRESENTATION SUMMARY

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NORTH VANCOUVER PUBLIC HEARING  
DATED 2 JUNE 2004  
AT THE LONSDALE QUAY 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.

# Lance Balcom

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## DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

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The Citizens' Assembly recent 'Preliminary Statement to the People of British Columbia' highlighted the lack of proportional representation and tendency toward government dominated two-party politics as weaknesses in our current system. I concur but I am also wary of the bureaucracy and additional legislative complexity that a remedy may imply. I would like an opportunity to briefly speak on the role that direct democracy might play to act as a counter-weight to this tendency.

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## KEY THEMES

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Mr. Balcom discussed the importance of maintaining local representation as local MLAs possess an understanding of the community, its needs, and its problems. Beyond retention of the local member, however, Mr. Balcom expressed the opinion that a second ballot was required to enable people to vote for party platforms and policies.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The presenter recommended adopting a system of MMP similar to that used in Germany and New Zealand in order to enable both the better reflection of the diversity of BC and to allow for more open and considered debate in the legislature. Mr. Balcom rejected the notion that such a system would give political parties too much power, but rather would enable parties to solicit opinion, dissent on current government policy, formulate alternatives and, most importantly, coherently present those choices to the electorate for consideration and acceptance. Mr. Balcom offered his support for the use of party lists on the grounds that voting for a party entails voting for a set of ideas, not a personality, gender, or ethnic background. Despite this, Mr. Balcom argued that MMP would lead to government more inclined to act slowly and bureaucratically. According to Mr. Balcom, a loss of effectiveness may result under MMP as a result of members, claiming to represent their constituents, promulgating, or blocking proposed legislation. In order to temper this threat, Mr. Balcom advocated the introduction of mechanisms of direct democracy. Specifically, Mr. Balcom made two recommendations:

1. That the existing thresholds and requirements needed to launch an Initiative be lowered to a level that would be realistically achievable.
2. That criteria be established requiring government initiatives of a certain size or impact to be taken to plebiscite or referendum. These criteria should be stringent as the objective is to hold the government to account, not to immerse ourselves in endless, and expensive, rounds of public voting.

*Quote: Indecisive government is not, and cannot be, an effective remedy for decisions we don't like.*

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QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

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Q            If you are in favour of small ridings and proportionality, how do you envisage this system of MMP being adopted within the constraints of the current size of the legislature?

A            Clearly there is a trade-off to be made. I don't have a problem with constraining the number of seats to the current 79; what makes sense is to take some number say 25% of the seats to be proportional seats and create a commensurate increase in the size of the local ridings.