

# 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.

# Stephen Phillips

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## DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

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I propose to discuss the beneficial transformative effects that a properly designed system of proportional representation would likely produce in BC. I would also like to rebut some of the popular misconceptions about PR.

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## KEY THEMES

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Mr. Phillips stated that FPTP is perhaps the most unfair, anti-democratic, and dysfunctional voting system that has ever been devised. The presenter discussed the unfortunate ability of the current system to produce artificial and exaggerated majorities effectively creating “an elected dictatorship”. Mr. Phillips raised a number of arguments in favour of proportional systems including: their ability to promote a more inclusive, participatory, and democratic electoral process; their potential to improve the quality of government in the legislature by fostering a more mature and consensual approach to the formulation of public policy; their ability to make citizens feel that their votes count; and the boosting of voter turnout. The presenter stated that under PR, minority and coalition governments would become the norm in BC. This was argued as advantageous by Mr. Phillips as they would promote a more thoughtful and consensual approach to policy making. The presenter argued that the current FPTP system promotes adversarial politics and tends to simplify the trade-offs that governments must make. Furthermore, under FPTP the opposition is marginalized and parliament is degraded. Mr. Phillips also addressed the myth of the instability of PR systems under coalition governments.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The presenter recommended the adoption of MMP as used in Germany, New Zealand, Scotland, and Wales. Under this system one-half to two-thirds of the members of the Assembly would be elected from single-member constituencies while the remainder would be elected from regional lists on the basis of a compensatory system of proportional representation, subject to a provincial threshold of 5%. Mr. Phillips advocated an open list ballot to give voters some choice in the selection of list candidates. The presenter also supported the introduction of legislation requiring political parties to conduct their internal affairs, including nomination meetings, in an open and democratic manner.

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QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

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Q           What is your opinion of the appetite of BC for having to wait a number of months to ascertain who will be governing the province?

A           The legislature actually doesn't sit for very many days each year. The government is actually run by the bureaucracy most the time and that would continue. I think that it would be worth it.

Q           Have you given any consideration to the STV?

A           I'm familiar with that system, it is not widely used. It does produce proportional results. I would be prepared to endorse STV if the Assembly went that way. However, I think that MMP provides a less drastic break with the system we are used to. MMP is an easier sell than STV as a result of the complexity of the transference of preferences under that system; not that other forms of PR are simple.

Q           Have you looked into the level of voter satisfaction with these systems in Germany, New Zealand, Wales, and Scotland?

A           Germany has had it for the longest time and they had the strongest economy in Europe for the longest time. They are having some difficulties now, but they seem to have been happy with the system. The other examples are worth looking at, and these systems vary the division between list and local seats. You don't need to have a 50-50 division to ensure proportionality.