

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

SALT SPRING ISLAND PUBLIC HEARING
DATED 19 JUNE 2004 AT LIONS' HALL

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 BY CLICKING ON "GET INVOLVED". IF SUCH A SUBMISSION IS AVAILABLE, IT WILL BE NOTED AT THE END OF THIS REPORT.

J. Douglas Dobson

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

We should change from the current system to one of mixed PR, open list with geographic/constituency representation.

KEY THEMES

Doug Dobson supported the introduction of a Mixed Member Proportional electoral system in British Columbia, and specified that the party list should be an open list put forward by the party but prioritized by the voter. He suggested that the size of the constituencies is not really an important issue because party discipline prevents MLAs from effectively representing their constituencies. He argued that an open list PR system will force representatives to be more responsive to their constituents. Mr Dobson addressed a number of criticisms of proportional representation, arguing that minority government can be a positive result of a PR electoral system as it could moderate the wild policy swings that BC has experienced under First Past the Post. He also argued that splinter parties need not have undue influence if there is a high electoral threshold. Mr Dobson dismissed suggestions that a PR system may cost more by arguing that effective democracy is worth any extra cost. He discussed the benefits of an open list, which gives voters input into the order of the list of candidates to be selected. He acknowledged that a closed list is generally perceived as facilitating the election of more women, but argued that the under-representation of women is not due to the electoral system but to the fact that very few women stand for election. He proposed that a ballot using an open list should use the Australian option for above or below the line voting, where a voter can either cast one vote for a party, or else they can vote below the line and rank order their preferences for candidates among the party lists. Mr Dobson proposed that the number of top-up MLAs be flexible, with only as many top-up MLAs as needed to make the election result proportional to be elected. He proposed that recall legislation be amended to provide a mechanism to recall non-constituency MLAs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Doug Dobson recommended the introduction of MMP with an open list in British Columbia.

Quote: "I don't think the size of the constituencies is really as important as its made out to be at least at the Provincial level, as it matters not how many members are in the governing party, and to a lesser extent the opposition, because with very few exceptions they all express and vote the party line."

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

There were three members of the panel who sought clarification on elements of the presentation.

Q	I'm curious, of the 79 seats we have available, how many do you think should be top up seats?
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A	I don't think there should be a fixed number. Maybe 25 per cent less should be constituency seats, so maybe 50 or 60 constituency seats. I do make use of my MP and my MLA but generally the person who helps me is the office staff, so why not instead of having more MLAs we should make sure that each MLA has more office staff.
Q	Just clarifying that there will still be regional representation. With the party lists, would they be broken down into regions or would there be one list for the whole province?
A	It would be province wide. I'm not sure how that could work at the national level because we wouldn't know enough about the candidates.

Comment from panel There were no comments from the panel.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Following this presentation one member of the audience had a question.

Q	You made reference to the Australian system and I understand they have compulsory voting. Is that within the Assembly's mandate?
A	(Answered by panel member) No, mandatory voting is not within the scope of our mandate.

Comment: "I just want to comment on your statements about women in politics. The reason why most of us don't get involved is because we want to stay at home and raise our children."

SUBMISSION: YES

SUBMISSION ID# 0100