

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

VICTORIA PUBLIC HEARING DATED
10 JUNE 2004 AT THE WESTERN BALLROOM,
HARBOUR TOWERS

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.

Michael Wheatley

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

The primary focus must be selection of the electoral reform which is most likely to succeed rather than the reform is seen as best because the adoption process is weighted in favour of rejection and interests that are both wealthy and influential are likely to oppose adoption.

KEY THEMES

Michael Wheatley argued that the rules for the adoption of a proposal for electoral reform at a referendum in May 2004 give every vote against electoral reform three times the weight of a vote in favour of reform. For that reason, he recommended that the Assembly consider which system is likely to garner most support in a referendum, rather than which system is the most technically proficient. Mr Wheatley explained that thirty-two constituencies are capable of blocking the vote in BC and suggested that opposition would be more likely to come from larger rural ridings with smaller populations that are resource dependent, because the industries in those areas are likely to oppose a new system. He pointed to the New Zealand experience of electoral reform referenda and explained that well-funded opposition to electoral reform by large corporations in that country had succeeded in reducing support for MMP from 65 to 53 per cent.

Mr Wheatley made a number of specific suggestions to improve several of the more popular electoral systems. He recommended that a Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) system should incorporate a preferential ballot for both the candidate and party vote as there is no need to retain any element of the current First Past the Post system. He advised the Assembly to include a 5 per cent electoral threshold. Mr Wheatley recommended the use of the Hare quota rather than the Droop quota for the Single Transferable Vote (STV) system, or the STV districts in Nick Loenen's Preferential-Plus model. He also recommended that any system with a preferential ballot should provide a series of columns where voters can place a mark in each column to indicate their first, second and third choices rather than requiring voters to write numbers on the ballot.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Michael Wheatley recommended that the Assembly select an electoral system for BC that they believe is most likely to win support at a referendum.

Quote: "I would rather you recommend a flawed system that is more likely to be adopted than have you recommend an ideal system that has less chance of being adopted."

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

One member of the panel sought clarification on elements of the presentation.

Q	You mentioned using a multicolumn ballot but surely this will result in the ballot being as wide as it is long,
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	maximizing the number of spoiled ballots?
A	With an effective touch screen computer voting system this need not be the case. Also with a multicolumn ballot it's very difficult to spoil. With a paper ballot, perhaps you could limit the number of columns to five or ten.

Comment from panel There were no comments from the panel.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Following this presentation quite a few members of the audience had questions.

Q	I've heard that with computer voting it's impossible to do a recount. Is there any way to fix this?
A	It's only impossible to do a recount with computer voting in the US because Republican corporations have controlled the type of computer voting system. You have a number of options, such as using a paper ballot and then scanning it, so that there is both a paper and an electronic ballot. Or you could use a computer system to vote that will print out a paper copy of your ballot.
Q	Are you aware of the number of New Zealanders who chose to vote for STV rather than MMP? It was 17 per cent. I would like to point out that David Farrell does not classify STV as a proportional system.
A	My source for STV being a proportional system comes from the IDEA handbook. Again, I'd like to specify that the proportionality of STV depends on the district magnitude.

Comment: There were no comments from the audience.

SUBMISSION: YES

SUBMISSION ID# 0581