

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

WHISTLER PUBLIC HEARING
DATED 3 JUNE 2004
AT TELUS WHISTLER CONVENTION CENTRE

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.

Doug Morrison

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

A presentation on a form of mixed member proportional representation with a preferential ballot, and with constituency MLAs voting power in the legislature being weighted according to riding population.

KEY THEMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The presenter recommended the introduction of MMP with a preferential ballot for local riding seats and a weighted voting power for elected representatives in the legislature. Under this system 60 to 80% of MLAs would be elected as local members and 20 to 40% would be elected as proportional list representatives. Mr. Morrison argued that such a system of MMP would provide for government stability while enabling the representation of a more diverse set of voices in the legislature. According to Mr. Morrison, electing local members via the alternative vote with a preferential ballot would solve problems of vote splitting, and such a system is already used for the election of party leaders. Mr. Morrison preferred the preferential ballot to the majority run-off system, on the grounds that this system too heavily favours the two leading candidates on the first ballot. The presenter argued the view that preferential ballots work to reflect the views of voters and tend to work against parties.

Under this system of MMP, proportional members would be elected on a separate ballot, enabling voters to choose a favoured individual for the local riding and perhaps vote for a different party on the proportional ballot. A defined limit of candidates (perhaps 40) could run on a party list and be elected according to their relative popularity within that party. Individuals could also run as a party of one. After the election fractional voting power would be introduced for MLAs within the legislature on the basis of the number of eligible voters within the constituency from which they were elected. This system would negate the problem of changing numbers of constituents within districts and support the notion of “one vote-one value”. The difficulty of counting such votes would be negated by the introduction of a computer in the legislature equipped to perform such a task. According to Mr. Morrison, this system would come much closer to representing what British Columbians want in government.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

Q Do you feel that your system would take care of some of the problems of party discipline?

A I have been concerned with this problem. This system may help but this is still a difficult issue. I think it would be helpful to have mandatory periodic secret votes among party members to enable pressure to be brought to bear by the average backbencher on the prime minister and the cabinet.

Comment Your proportionate voting system is fascinating given that we are faced with this problem of dealing with constituencies with few members, and not wanting to take away their local representation, but to be able to make votes of equal value.

Q Under this system, would you be prepared to adjust these numbers to allow for a minority government?

A I'm not speaking against minority governments. It depends on your views where you draw the line on the division between local and proportional members, but I think the mixed system has some validity. It allows for the continuation of local representation but also enables the emergence of new views. I'm not proposing this system to eliminate the possibility of minority governments.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Q I think people vote because they think they can influence the outcome; isn't there a danger with the introduction of a complicated system that people will be turned off as they can't understand how their vote counts?

A People just need to look at a ballot, you have thoughts about your local member, and you vote for your party on the proportional ballot. If you know that the proportional members are only going to be represented by 20 to 40% of the legislature then you will vote for that party knowing that you want emerging views to be represented without compromising the stability of majority government. The preferential vote is really not that complicated, your vote still counts even if your member was knocked out in the first count.

Q I would suggest not making the system easy just to get more people involved. Does fractional voting exist elsewhere?

A I don't know. It seemed to me that it's especially useful in BC. It's not the number of people that vote that should determine the power of the vote, but the number of eligible adult constituents.