

# PRESENTATION SUMMARY

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SECHELT PUBLIC HEARING DATED  
5 JUNE 2004 AT THE DRIFTWOOD INN

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.

# Jim Elliott

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## DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

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I want to point out some of the merits of proportional representation (more educated voting, less despair voting etc.) citing data from New Zealand and from Henry Milner's *Civic Literacy*.

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## KEY THEMES

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Jim Elliott argued that the current electoral system fails to produce a legislature that reflects the diverse backgrounds and political philosophies of people living in British Columbia. He described the 'winner takes all' system, where the winning candidate can be elected with far fewer than a majority of votes in a riding, as contributing to voter apathy because people feel that their votes have not contributed towards electing a representative. Mr Elliott discussed Henry Milner's book *Civic Literacy*, to demonstrate that a more participatory democracy results in more informed voters. He cited examples from New Zealand to demonstrate that the introduction of MMP can lead to increased voter turnout, more politically informed voters, more socially representative legislature, and more co-operative governments. Mr Elliott argued that geographic and demographic similarities between New Zealand and British Columbia make New Zealand a particularly appropriate example to look to for electoral reform. He suggested that local representation may be a myth of the current system, when strong party discipline requires an MLA to put the party view ahead of the views of their local constituents and when MLAs outside cabinet have little influence over public policy. Mr Elliott argued that a mixed system combines proportionality and local representation. He warned against copying a system directly from another country and recommended that any system be modified to suit the needs of BC, especially the isolation of people in rural areas.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Jim Elliott recommended the introduction of MMP in British Columbia.

*Quote: "We have the opportunity to make history in BC as we build a system that will give those who follow us a greater sense of participation and involvement in the running of the province."*

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## QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

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

Q	Do you prefer a closed or open party list?
A	I prefer parties to select the candidates because I think we'll get the top people that way. In New Zealand, there were some cabinet ministers who chose not to stand for election in constituencies but were instead placed by their party at the top of their list. So you get the best qualified people at the top of the list.

Q	I'm wondering if you have any concerns over the difference in the size of the legislature between New Zealand, where there are 120 seats and 79 seats here in British Columbia?
A	I'm not so concerned, even though this will mean increasing the size of the ridings, because it seems to me that the federal ridings are a lot larger but that the type of representation is the same as in the current provincial ridings.

**Comment from panel:** There were no comments from the panel.

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**QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE**

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

Q	How would MLAs elected under your system not be subject to party discipline?
A	There would still be party discipline but there would also be a wider range of people elected in the legislature so you would here a more diverse range of views.

**Comment:** There were no comments from the audience.

**SUBMISSION: NO**