

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

COURTENAY/COMOX PUBLIC HEARING
DATED 26 MAY 2004 AT THE COAST
WESTERLEY 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 BY CLICKING ON "GET INVOLVED". IF SUCH A SUBMISSION IS AVAILABLE, IT WILL BE NOTED AT THE END OF THIS REPORT.

Pamela Munroe

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

Merits of Mixed Member Proportional Systems.

KEY THEMES

Pamela Munroe told the hearing that she had been a Proportional Representation (PR) signature campaign canvasser in 2002 and supports a Mixed Member Proportional system because it mixes local representation with proportionality. She argued that the current system is outdated and does not represent the diversity of views in the province. Ms Munroe explained the mechanics of the MMP voting system as it operates in New Zealand and suggested several modifications, including either a 50/50 or two thirds/one third split between riding seats and list seats, a requirement that a party must stand candidates in minimum number of ridings to qualify for list seats, a requirement for parties to file a record of their selection process with Elections BC, and the use of flexible lists. She argued that local representation could improve under MMP because list MLAs may be live in an area that already has a constituency MLA.

Ms Munroe addressed a number of concerns that have been raised about MMP including the risk of unstable minority or coalition governments, the potential for the proliferation of small political parties, and the fear that party lists will include ‘party hacks’ and MLAs who have been rejected by voters in their constituencies. She pointed to the examples of Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands as evidence that coalition and minority governments can be stable and effective, and argued that a 4 or 5 per cent electoral threshold will prevent the election of “tiny parties with very narrow agendas.” Ms Munroe also explained that parties will have an electoral incentive to ensure that party lists reflect a balance of social groups and that flexible lists would give voters an opportunity to move a popular candidate to the top of a party list.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Pamela Munroe recommended the introduction of MMP in British Columbia.

Quote: “I support moving to a proportional voting system in British Columbia because I believe our current system is out-dated and does not accurately represent the diversity of cultures, races or value systems in this province.”

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

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

Q	We have had a number of submissions favouring the NZ electoral system. What have been some of the pitfalls in
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	the previous NZ system?
A	The major pitfall was the lack of proportionality because they used the same system we do: First Past the Post. Also, New Zealanders were concerned about the corporatisation of politics and wanted to address that.
Q	Do you think open lists would be a viable option in BC?
A	Yes, I do.
Q	I have a question about district size, what are your thoughts on this issue?
A	The model we had proposed in the Pro-Rep campaign in 2002 reduced the number of seats in BC to 72 and used the 36 federal ridings with 36 list seats. But you could leave the current number of seats and split them either 50/50 or one third/two third.

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

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

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

Q	How is the list chosen?
A	In the MMP system in New Zealand the list is made up by political parties, either by the membership or the executive of the party. I think if a party was serious about it, it would open up the process to members. Most MMP systems use closed lists, which is similar to the current situation here where party members select the constituency candidates.
Q	Do they have the same problem with young people not voting in New Zealand?
A	In countries with Proportional Representation there is higher voter turnout and more representation of women. In New Zealand they also set aside seats for their Indigenous group, the Maori.
Q	Do they always end up with a coalition government?

A	No, if a party is popular and has 60 or 70 per cent of the vote then it will get 60 or 70 per cent of the seats.
Q	Do you support an electoral threshold?
A	Yes, a five per cent threshold because with anything below that you risk electing parties with distorted agendas.
Q	How could MMP affect the corporatisation of politics?
A	An electoral system can't solve that problem without other elements to the process such as party financial reform.

Comment: There were no further comments from the audience.

SUBMISSION: YES

SUBMISSION ID# 0206