# 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.

# Wendy Richardson

Support for MMP system of proportional representation. Brief explanation of why the system would benefit the citizens of BC.

## KEY THEMES

Wendy Richardson expressed a number of concerns with the current electoral system, including the distorted conversion of votes into seats at the last election; the tendency for voters to vote against the previous government rather than for the party which won; low voter turnout, particularly among youth, First Nations and other ethnic minorities; and the lack of representation for women, minorities, young people and significant minor parties. In contrast, she argued that under a proportional representation (PR) electoral system votes represent people's sincere political preferences, because there is no need to vote strategically against a particular party. Ms Richardson addressed criticisms that PR produces unstable minority governments, has insufficient local representation, and that party lists are not democratically selected. She argued that Canada's previous experience of minority federal governments has demonstrated that they can produce valuable legislation, such as Medicare and the Canada Pension Plan. Ms Richardson supported the introduction of MMP to ensure that local representation is retained under PR. She argued that local representation is strengthened by having separate votes for the constituency MLA and the party in an MMP system, because this leads to candidates being selected for their constituency service rather than their party affiliation. Ms Richardson also explained that party lists could be democratically selected by members of a political party, rather than by the party executive. She spoke of the need for a public education campaign to accompany any new electoral system.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Wendy Richardson recommended the introduction of MMP in British Columbia.

She also recommended a public education campaign on electoral reform.

> *Quote: "Worldwide at least 70 countries use some form of proportional representation. The ones that don't, Britain, Canada and the US, are suffering serious voter apathy and low voter turnout."*

## QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

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

| Q | When you say you would like to encourage party lists to be selected democratically, do you think that should be left to the party or should it be mandatory? |
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| A | It can be left to the party but I think that it's important to involve party members rather than just the decision of the leader. |
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| Q | If the assembly was to propose MMP, do you think it should be mandatory for lists to be open or for there to be a cut-off period so that members can't be signed up at the last minute? |
| A | I think that lists should be elected by party members, and that there should be controls to ensure that people can't sign up last minute members.  The whole process should be as democratic as possible |

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

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### QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

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

| Q | As a member of a group that doesn't have a private vote – I'm blind – how do you feel about increasing turnout by the use of on-line voting? |
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| A | I would support it, provided that there are controls in place to avoid the problems experienced with electronic voting in the US. |

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

**SUBMISSION:  YES**        **SUBMISSION ID#  TO FOLLOW**