

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

QUEEN CHARLOTTE CITY PUBLIC HEARING
DATED 12 JUNE 2004
AT THE SKIDEGATE COMMUNITY HALL

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.

Thomas Cheney

DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

A presentation discussing the advantages of MMP.

KEY THEMES

Mr. Cheney discussed his increasing concern with growing voter apathy, decreasing voter turnout, and the disproportionate representation of political parties in the legislature in comparison their popular support in the electorate. The presenter argued that the current system has become dysfunctional and is in need of reform. In support of this contention, Mr. Cheney noted examples of “wrong winners”, and exaggerated majorities that have occurred in BC at the elections of 1996 and 2001 respectively. According to Mr. Cheney, the current FPTP system does not function effectively in today’s diverse, multi-party democracy and a need exists for the introduction of a more representative form of election and governance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr. Cheney advocated the adoption of a form of MMP similar to the systems used in Germany and New Zealand. The presenter recommended that the system have a small majority of constituency seats, perhaps 40 constituency members, with the remaining 39 members being elected via the use of party lists. Mr. Cheney argued that a large number of list seats were desirable in order to make parties accountable to the views of the entire province, rather than just local constituencies. Further, Mr. Cheney supported the introduction of enough list seats to ensure the proportionate translation of votes cast into seats won. Regarding the selection of list candidates, the presenter advocated the use of an open list, giving the electorate the ability to select their preferred candidates. Under this system, if a particular candidate reaches a certain threshold they automatically advance to first place on the party list. Mr. Cheney argued that people should not be overly concerned with the possibility of unstable coalition governments and/or the emergence of radical parties under MMP as this would be moderated by the introduction of an appropriate electoral threshold. The presenter also noted that under MMP, party lists may be carefully balanced to ensure that urban and rural representation is secured.

Mr. Cheney stated that the advantages offered by MMP in terms of higher voter turnout, improved proportionality, the moderation of wild policy swings, and the production of a more balanced legislature, far outweigh the system’s noted shortcomings. In addition, more voters will perceive that their votes actually count toward the election of members.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL

Q The introduction of MMP would necessitate increasing the size of rural ridings; what is your opinion on that?

A My opinion is that as long as northern ridings are generally smaller than urban ridings then there wouldn't be a problem. I think that we should combine ridings that are largely politically homogenous and share common interests.

Q You indicated that voters should be able to select list candidates, so you are proposing an open list, but then you indicated that party lists would be carefully balanced to allow for urban and rural representation. Why wouldn't we assume that urban candidates would be favoured?

A I think that we should have a predetermined list, but if people find one particular candidate they like then I think there should be a threshold of 15%. So people can either go with the party list or pick a candidate they like, that is just to try to create democratic choice around the issue of which particular party candidate people want to win rather than just party hacks.