



National Council of Women of New Zealand

Te Kaunihera
Wahine O Aotearoa

Oral submission to the Justice and Electoral Select Committee on the NCWNZ submission on the Inquiry into the 2014 General Election, S15.10

by Beryl Anderson and Helen Reilly on 13 August 2015

Justice and Electoral Committee

Chairperson: **Jacqui Dean** National; Deputy-Chairperson: **Jono Naylor** National List; **Lousisa Wall**, Labour List; **Chris Bishop** National List; **Marama Fox** Maori List; **Peeni Henare** Labour; **Alfred Ngaro** National List; **Russel Norman** Green List; **Tracey Martin** NZ First List.

Introduction

Good morning. My name is Beryl Anderson and my colleague is Helen Reilly. We are both members of the Parliamentary Watch Committee of the National Council of Women of New Zealand. The submission I present has been prepared from a background of policy decisions and consultation with the members of our organisation.

We welcome the opportunity to convey our members' views to the Committee. In our response NCWNZ has focused on issues relating to the representation of women – as candidates, Members of Parliament and Cabinet Ministers. [Ad libbed something in here about NCWNZ's support for suffrage.]

The membership is concerned that there has been little progress in achieving equitable representation of women in Parliament. With women making up just over 50% of the population their representation in Parliament should be between 40 and 60% of the Member of Parliament. The only time there has been a significant increase in women's representation was when New Zealand changed to Mixed Member Proportional representation. Both the MDGs (Goal 3) and CEDAW (Article 7) use representation of women in parliament as an indicator of progress.

The written submission identifies the factors seen as inhibitors to women's representation (p3):

- Selection of women
- Political culture
- Cost of being a candidate
- Family unfriendly environment
- Media scrutiny

While these may also be factors for male candidates, they are even more detrimental to female candidates.

Our submission provides some actions to address barriers to women's representation:

- Legislated or voluntary quotas
- Representation on selection panels
- Gender and family friendly parliamentary processes and environments
- Training, mentoring, support groups
- Legal and substantive equality

Formal legal equality is not sufficient to achieve women's de facto equality with men. Substantive equality requires equality of outcome.

Questions

Jacqui Dean (Chair) commented that several of MPs present had a particular interest in the current under-representation of women in Parliament. She added that it is an issue that concerns the wider Pacific region. She asked Beryl to outline how a more equitable gender balance could be brought about.

Beryl described how the late hours Parliament keeps are not conducive to a normal work-life balance. There is a real need for everybody to have a good balance between the hours spent at home and at work, even members of Parliament.

Parliament needs to provide some form of child support facilities. She suggested Select Committee members checked NCWNZ's written submission (S15.10) for more details.

The culture within Parliament and in political parties is generally seen to be male focussed. The political environment is not seen as conducive to how women operate. There is a definite feeling that it is seen as an old boys' network. Parliamentarians and the media often seem to focus on the individual rather than on the issue.

Louisa Wall (Labour) commented that equity of representation should be the goal. She asked how NCWNZ thought we could achieve this.

Beryl talked about the goal for an equitable representation. One option is the 40/40/20 percentage rule. She suggested that difficulties often occur during the selection process for candidates. She recommended that each party should have a specific goal to improve the number of women candidates. She acknowledged that New Zealanders generally do not like quotas but suggested that each party should have X percentage of men and women. However, Beryl stated, NCWNZ is not suggesting that there should be designated parliamentary seats for males and females.

Russel Norman (Green Party) reported that the Greens follow the 40/60% rule and it's a very straightforward process. It is harder to do this for individual Parliamentary seats but easy to do for the Party List. This is what the Green Party does.

Beryl told the Select Committee members that NCWNZ believes that every political party should have the ability to select its own candidates.

At this stage, there was a bit of banter among the Select Committee members about the so-called "man-ban" where the Labour Party briefly considered in 2013 whereby some safe electorates should support women seeking selection as a candidate. The banter concluded with **Jacqui Dean** declaring that it should be up to the voters to choose their MPs, and that it was is called democracy!

Beryl suggested that there should be gender balance in the party candidates and this should be reflected in all aspects of Parliament including on Select Committees.

There were no more questions.