



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN OF NEW ZEALAND

TE KAUNIHERA WAHINE O AOTEAROA

4 April 2012

S12.07

Submission to the Electoral Commission *Review of MMP*

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is an umbrella organisation representing 51 nationally organised societies and national members. It has 23 branches throughout the country attended by representatives of those societies and some 150 other societies as well as individual members. NCWNZ's function is to represent and promote the interests of New Zealand women through research, discussion and action.

This submission has been prepared by the Public Issues Standing Committee after consultation with the membership of NCWNZ. It has been peer reviewed by the Parliamentary Watch Committee.

What thresholds or hurdles should parties have to cross to qualify for an allocation of list seats in Parliament?

The majority of responders preferred the threshold to remain at 5%. A few thought the threshold should be lower at 3 or 4 percent, and a few believed it should be higher, as much as 7 or 10 percent.

Most responders preferred the threshold to relate to the party vote only, ie winning one seat should not count towards the proportion of seats in Parliament unless the party vote was over the threshold.

Should a list MP be able to stand as a candidate in a by-election?

Nearly all respondents felt that a list MP should be able to stand as a candidate in a by-election. One response preferred that the list MP should resign from Parliament if they were to stand in a by-election, and not be able to return in the current Parliament should they be unsuccessful.

Should a person be able to stand as a candidate both for an electorate seat and on a party list?

Most respondents want the status quo to continue, ie candidates should be able to stand for an electorate seat and be on the party list.

Those who were against dual candidacy indicated that candidates should not be in Parliament when they were not elected to a seat in which they stood and that communities cannot get rid of poor performing MPs. They believed that list members should be people who have gained extensive expertise in a particular area, be it business or professional, and this makes them a valuable asset to governing New Zealand.

Who should decide the order of candidates on party lists? Political parties only, or voters?

Nearly all respondents favoured the order being determined by the party. They indicated that membership of a political party is the only effective way for people to be involved with the development of a party list. Also, allowing voters to rearrange party lists would introduce an element of complexity that isn't needed.

There is a feeling that the lists should be promulgated earlier than currently to enable a longer period for scrutiny by voters and the media.

Some indicated that there should be a requirement for party lists to be gender balanced, whereas others felt the balance within the list was the prerogative of the party.

What should happen when a party wins more electorate seats than it would be entitled to under its share of the party vote?

Respondents were accepting that overhangs will occur, and that there is no need to change the status quo. They are seen as part of the democratic process. A few however felt that there should be no more than 120 members of Parliament.

Changes in population will affect the proportionality of Parliament over time. At what point do changes in the number of electorate seats resulting from population change so affect the ratio of electorate seats to list seats that our voting system could no longer be described as proportional?

There was a diversity of response to this question:

- Proportionality could be improved by increasing the number of list MPs, increasing the number of electorates, reallocating boundaries, or increasing the number of MPs.
- Those who wished to keep the number of seats at 120 suggested that the number of people per seat be increased, particularly where the population is more concentrated, eg in Auckland. The cut-off point/cap that currently justifies boundary changes should be more flexible and MPs should represent more citizens as population growth occurs, until a higher cap is met, making boundary changes less frequent.
- Increase the number of MPs – the representation per person is less than in other countries.
- To maintain proportionality at least one third of MPs should be list MPs.

Other issues

A number of respondents were adamant that MPs should not be allowed to swap parties (change from the party via which they were elected to Parliament). They agreed that if an MP resigned from their party, they should have to resign from Parliament. This was not a unanimous viewpoint.

Parties with a single seat in the House have more power and influence than larger parties. This makes it disproportionate representation.

A concern was raised about the low youth voting at the last election. It was felt that there is a need to make politics important and necessary to those between the ages of 20 and 35 years old.

There needs to be a review the chronic under-representation of women in Parliament. The principle of 40:40:20 was suggested where there is requirement for political parties to select 40% female candidates, 40% male candidates and a mix of either gender for the remaining 20%.

Elizabeth Bang
National President

Beryl Anderson
Public Issues Standing Committee Convener