



**National Council of
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Wahine O Aotearoa

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**Submission to the Justice and Electoral Select Committee
on the
Electoral (Reduction in Number of Members of Parliament) Amendment Bill**

Introduction

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is an umbrella organization representing 38 nationally organized societies. It has 31 Branches spread throughout the country attended by representatives of these societies, and many other local organisations. The Council's function is to serve women, the family and the community at local, national and international levels through research, study, discussion and action. A monthly "Circular" keeps members informed about a wide range of issues; it is used to disseminate information about forthcoming legislation and discussion documents and to collect comment on proposals.

In this instance members were asked whether they supported or opposed the proposal to decrease the number of Members of Parliament, and to comment on the issue. A number of Branches and some National Organisations discussed the question and have mostly given reasons for their decision.

During the early part of the 1990s the Council was active in ensuring its members were fully informed about the issues around changing the electoral system, and during that time there was considerable discussion on the appropriate number of Members of Parliament. Opinions at that time were somewhat divided, as are the responses to the proposal in this Bill.

Specific Comment

Clause 4: Election of other members

Almost two-thirds of responses oppose the reduction in list members to limit the total number of Members of Parliament to 100.

The major reason given for this is the importance of diversity among Members of Parliament to reflect the diversity of the New Zealand population. It was considered in particular that there would be less representation of Maori, ethnic groups, and of women. The wide range of people with differing experiences, backgrounds, and opinions mean that the scrutiny given to legislation by Select Committees is more effective, and more representative of public opinion.

The number of MPs in New Zealand is not unduly high for the total population; it depends on which countries, and the nature of the form of government with which the comparison is made, i.e. one house, a federal system etc.

Some respondents noted that while the number of 120 when established in 1996, was a considerable increase over the then level of representation, it may now be the appropriate number for the current population.





It also needs to be remembered that with no Upper House, it is important that legislation be thoroughly examined at the Select Committee stage. Members of the Council's Parliamentary Watch Committee have commented that with the lower number of MPs, there were frequently only three or four members on a Select Committee.

The whole structure of Parliament is unhealthy and the antithesis of a family-friendly work-place. Decreasing the number of the Members of Parliament would exacerbate this situation.

While costs would decrease to some extent, this would not be great as a proportion of total expenditure, and it needs to be remembered that the pay for members is not high in comparison with professional pay levels.

The following issues concerned those who support the proposal:

- Opposition to list members, few of whom are known to the general public, was one of the major reasons for supporting the proposal. Such members are frequently persons who have lost their electoral seat and are now seen to have no electorate to which to be accountable. One person spoke of having four MPs in her electorate, considering this a waste of expenditure.
- Cost was a further reason given, arguing that the money could be spent in more worthwhile ways.
- This was frequently coupled with the comment that New Zealand has a much higher ratio of members of Parliament to total population than similar countries.

Conclusion

NCWNZ is, on the whole, not in favour of reducing the number of members of Parliament. It is good, however, to have been able to have this discussion, because there are many facets to the issue. There may well be matters in the nature of Parliament that need revision, but simply reducing the numbers is not the way to achieve this.

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