



**National Council of
Women of New Zealand**

Te Kaunihera
Wahine O Aotearoa

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S10.16

**Submission to the Electoral Legislation Committee on the Electoral Referendum Bill
(128 – 1)**

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is an umbrella organisation representing 46 nationally organised societies. NCWNZ has 26 branches throughout the country attended by representatives of those societies and some 150 other societies. The Council's function is to serve women, families and the community through research, study, discussion and action.

This submission has been prepared by the Parliamentary Watch Committee of NCWNZ following consultation with NCWNZ members and a review of NCWNZ policy. It has also been reviewed by a member of the NCWNZ Board.

General comments

The overall approach of the Electoral Referendum Bill is supported by NCWNZ as it provides for a sound review of the electoral system and public input into this process. NCWNZ has been a long-standing supporter of Referenda on questions of social importance.

The Bill enables an indicative referendum to be held at the next general election to allow voters to express opinions on the preferred system of voting. The conduct of such a referendum is also specified.

Election spending

While a spending cap has not been imposed, such as in citizen-initiated referenda where all groups have their spending limited, there are provisions which cover advertising for or against the referendum options. The provisions outlined in Part 3 of the Bill should ensure that those who intend to spend over \$12,000 during the regulated period will need to register with the Electoral Commission and that the Commission will publish a full list of registered advertisers and their contact details. This should ensure that those who wish to mount expensive and high profile advertising campaigns will be easily identified. NCWNZ supports transparency.

The referendum process

The questions outlined in Schedules 1 and 2 of the Bill are supported by NCWNZ as the current wording provides for a clear process through the 2 part sections. The proposed voting paper is



contained in Schedule 1 of the Electoral Referendum Bill and Schedule 2 of the Bill provides a description of the voting systems which are referred to in Schedule 1. The detail of the various voting systems is covered in detail in three and a half pages in the Bill. While it is important that the information provided to voters enables them to have an understanding of the systems described, care should be taken to have the information clearly stated.

In a 2000 submission (S00.35) to the Justice and Electoral Select Committee on the Inquiry into MMP, NCWNZ noted that a significant number of comments from members addressed the importance of proper preparation for, and conduct of, any future referenda. These comments remain relevant and have continued support in 2010. There was particular concern expressed for the public education should address both the issues and the process and for the public education programme to be adequately funded.

The plans outlined for the independent review of MMP, if the voters elect to retain it, should ensure that there will be an independent process aimed at improving the current electoral system.

The impact of MMP on women

The introduction of MMP has resulted in an increased number of women in Parliament. In 1993, prior to the introduction of MMP, there were 14 women – two women in Cabinet, one outside Cabinet and just over 21% of Parliamentarians. In 2010 there are 38 women Members of Parliament or 31% of Parliamentarians including six women in Cabinet and two outside.

The increased number of women in Parliament has enabled a broader range of views to be contributed to the decision making process.

Conclusion

NCWNZ supports the Bill. The current wording of Parts A and B in Schedule 1 offers clear voting choices. The information provided to voters should enable them to make informed decisions. The provisions in Part 3 should ensure that election spending is transparent and major funding providers are clearly identified. The referendum proposed will give a clear indication of voter preference.

NCWNZ is grateful for the opportunity to comment on this Bill.

Elizabeth Bang
National President

Dr Judy Whitcombe
Parliamentary Watch Committee