

Report on Hornby Island Meeting on Electoral Reform

Meeting Date: September 29, 2016

To: Special Committee on Electoral Reform

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On September 29, 2016 fifteen people met for two hours on Hornby Island, British Columbia, for a public discussion on electoral reform. The meeting was structured around Fair Vote Canada's questionnaire in order to open discussion about issues that can guide choices about our future electoral system. The specific intent of the meeting was to provide feedback to the Special Committee on Electoral Reform. This report does not record the individual responses of people present in detail, but rather summarizes the direction of the conversation and highlights points that were of particular concern to those present.

1. Participants fully supported changing the current first-past-the-post system in favor of one where the number of seats corresponds to the share of the popular vote.
2. A third of the participants voted strategically in the last election. While there was some discussion about how strategic voting is likely to be part of any system, all wanted their vote to much better represent their political preferences.
3. Participants did not support the amount of power that the current system gives to the winning Party, and most went as far as agreeing that it is profoundly undemocratic. The group as a whole would prefer a system that compels parties to consult with one another, collaborate, form coalitions, make compromises and encourages politicians to take long-term policy perspectives. There was some agreement that this was essential for the very survival of our democracy, that any growth in the polarization that we currently experience is likely to make government dysfunctional. "Politicians should be creatures of compromise".
4. A theme throughout the discussion was the extent to which Parties should be the cornerstone of a future system. There was considerable distrust and dissatisfaction with the ways that Parties make decisions and policy, and the lack of access to those processes.
 - This raised concerns (distrust) about an MMP system that gives a second vote to a Party, and about how any "top up" candidates would be chosen.
 - Participants supported a system that makes it easier for independent candidates to run and that discourages the dominance of two major Parties.
 - They did not support a system that makes it easier for new Parties to form – thresholds for appearing on a ballot would need to be high.
 - Participants supported a system that would elect a more diverse group of representatives, although they recognized that much of the success of that

would rest on Parties' willingness to support women and minority candidates.

5. Participants want a new system to be as easy as possible for voters. They did not want it to significantly increase the frequency of elections.
6. The size and composition of ridings was another major theme in this discussion. In general most participants supported a system of multi-member ridings that were large enough to support proportionality. However, as residents in an already large riding where their particular interests as Islanders are not easily incorporated, people did not see how an even larger riding would help them feel represented. We discussed the possibility of using criteria other than postal codes as the basis for a riding; a "Gulf Islands" riding, for instance, might make more sense than attaching the Islands to the larger Vancouver Island ridings.
7. There was a full spectrum of opinions about the extent to which the duty of MPs is to work in the interests of their local constituents, vs. the duty to work in the national interest. Both are important, but the issue is how effectively local concerns are incorporated into an understanding of the 'national interest'.
 - That said, there was strong agreement that MPs must be able to be attentive to and represent local issues.
 - Further, MPs must also be accessible to their constituents, which is difficult in a large riding.
8. While this was a highly educated and politically engaged group, most participants did not feel well informed about proportional representation systems: MMP, STV or a rural/urban hybrid option.
 - Based on what they know now, there was slightly more support for a version of STV than any other system.
 - However, their experience with BC's referendum on STV indicates that there would need to be a substantial investment in public education in order gain sufficient understanding and support of that system.
9. Most participants supported compulsory voting, although one person was opposed.
10. Most participants thought that on-line voting was not a good idea, primarily because of the vulnerability to crashes, hacking and manipulation.

Submitted on behalf of the meeting,

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