

October 7, 2016

Special Committee on Electoral Reform
Sixth Floor, 131 Queen Street
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Re: Submission from Fair Vote Canada – Greater Victoria Chapter

Our Victoria Chapter of Fair Vote Canada would like to thank this committee for their hard work and long hours. We truly appreciate what you're trying to accomplish and your diligent efforts.

The Greater Victoria Chapter of Fair Vote Canada would first like to acknowledge the work of the late **Wendy Bergerud**. Wendy was chosen as a member of the B.C. Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, where she became a committed advocate for proportional representation and electoral reform until her death in 2016. She served as the president of our local chapter and we are grateful for her knowledge, her activism, and her warmth.

Our local chapter has met every month since 2005. There are hundreds of Greater Victorians from across the political spectrum who have registered their support for our work. Our group regularly participates in community engagement activities, including organizing public forums and educational opportunities. We believe elections at all levels – federal, provincial, and municipal – should use a system of proportional representation that will make every vote count. We believe that proportional representation is the best way to achieve more effective and legitimate votes and election results, as required by the Committee's terms of reference.

As you know, the B.C. Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform recommended BC-STV, a single transferable vote system, after an extensive learning process and deliberations.

With 58% support in a 2005 referendum, the system did not meet the super-majority requirement set by the government and opposition parties.

The referendum of 2009 garnered only 39% of support for BC-STV province-wide although, due to the activism and promotion by FVC's Victoria Chapter's President Wendy Bergerud, more than 60% of Victorians voted in favour of the change in both the 2005 and 2009 referenda.

Wendy was a tireless supporter and the main driver of BC-STV in the Victoria region. More importantly, though, Wendy supported Proportional Representation regardless of the system chosen. Although her preference was BC-STV.

Our local chapter **strongly** supports the submission of Fair Vote Canada's national body and the adoption of a system of proportional representation. Our local Victoria Chapter does not recommend any one system and sees many advantages in STV, MMP and versions of the Rural/Urban Proportional model as recommended by the national body.

Overall, we want the strongest design that will bring us closest to the ideal where **'the percentage of the vote is reflected in the percentage of the seats'**. Below is a short outline of some of the advantages of these three systems along with broad comments on the Committee's terms of reference focusing on the two themes:

1. Vancouver Island's experience with first-past-the-post
2. Better elections and better politics

Vancouver Island's experience with first-past-the-post

Vancouver Island's experience with first-past-the-post in 2015 demonstrates multiple ways in which the current system ***does not uphold the principles*** referred to the Committee for consideration.

100,000 Vancouver Island Conservative voters and 100,000 Vancouver Island Liberal voters – making up more than two-fifths of the local popular vote – ***do not have a Vancouver Island MP that represents their political party***. The 2015 election returned six NDP MPs and one Green, while a proportional result would have elected three NDP MPs, two Greens, one Conservative, and one Liberal.

Better elections and better politics

In discussing the relative merits of MMP, STV and R/U Proportional our Chapter asked itself:

Would voting/seat proportionality be best served through strong political parties with clear platforms (MMP with open party lists) or through preferential/ranked ballots where individual members would be expected to represent a broader range of views because of their selection process (STV) or through the new model R/U Proportional?

Here are some of the positive aspects of each system:

STV:

A ranked ballot component would improve civility and collaboration, as candidates and parties would be less hostile to their opponents as they must court second and third preferences. Every voter gets an equal impact on the outcome, and can vote their conscience without wasting their vote. Every politician is elected with equally broad support, and none can benefit from vote-splitting. Importantly, results are proportional.

MMP:

' This mixture of electoral-system principles has now become so common that what once was an unusual variant now holds out the promise of being *the electoral reform of the 21st. century*. In the view of many electoral reformers, mixed-member systems offer the best of both worlds – the direct accountability of members to the districts (ridings) in which they are elected, and the proportional representation of diverse partisan preferences.' Page xxi - Oxford Press: Mixed-Member Electoral Systems – the Best of Both Worlds - Shugart/Wattenberg

<http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/019925768X.001.0001/acprof-9780199257683>

When choosing the regional representative, the voting method can be either FPTP or ranked ballot. And since the Liberal Government promised that 2015 would be the last election using a FPTP voting system, plus if the committee were to choose the MMP voting system, we would ask the committee to recommend a ranked ballot voting system when choosing the regional candidate.

R/U Proportional

Rural-Urban Proportional draws from the work done by our previous Citizens' Assemblies and tailors it specifically to urban and rural Canada.

- A highly proportional model – as proportional as MMP and STV.
- A simple, user-friendly ballot for everyone
- Flexible- the number of single member ridings can range from a few to up to 25%
- Flexible- the number of multi-member districts and how many MPs are elected in each can vary
- Every voter will have a choice of representatives – almost everyone will elect an MP who reflects his/her values
- All MPs are tied to local ridings and regions and accountable to voters.
- A made in Canada solution.

Candidates and parties will, of course, still publicly debate issues under proportional representation but it would encourage them to be more civil

A proportional system will satisfy the principles outlined in the Committee's mandate:

- 1. Effectiveness and legitimacy:** Proportional results are the best means to “increase public confidence” that the system will “strengthen the link between voter intention and the election of representatives.”
- 2. Engagement:** If voters know their vote will count under a proportional system, they may be more likely to go to the polls.
- 3. Accessibility and inclusiveness:** Proportional representation systems have been a part of voting systems around the world for generations. A suitable public education campaign and updated materials such as Elections Canada’s “My Voter’s Guide,” which is available in dozens of languages, would assist with any change.
- 4. Integrity:** The integrity of the election process need not change under a new voting system. Counting can be done electronically or by hand.
- 5. Local representation:** We recommend that local representatives be retained under a proportional system. MMP, STV, and rural-urban proportional all meet this test. Local representation would arguably be improved as many Canadians would find themselves with a local representative who is more aligned with their political views.

*Our Chapter supports the ERRE committee’s mandate to explore the possibilities of electoral reform, to follow its timeline and report it’s findings back to Parliament. We also expect our Liberal Government to keep their campaign promise to ‘ **MAKE EVERY VOTE COUNT** ‘.*

Conclusion:

Our conclusion is that democracy is not well served when a voting system does not represent the full diversity of opinion within a nation. A party which receives less than the majority of votes should not receive 100% of the power.

Here on Vancouver Island thousands of supporters and every single MP supports PR. Also, the young have consistently visited our Fair Vote Canada tables and asked about PR and the benefits of PR. Whether they’ve joined an environmental group, a political party, are going to University or working, the word is out about our electoral system and how it warps our society. As you well know, the youth of this country want change. Without a doubt, there is a movement underfoot that will change the way we do business and our electoral system is and plays are part in that movement.

We believe the Committee has a historic opportunity to approach electoral reform with an open mind, and to make a recommendation that will ensure fair elections and better politics for generations to come. We now live in a diverse, sophisticated society we need a voting system that reflects that diversity and sophistication.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

Rick Habgood
President
Fair Vote Canada
Greater Victoria Chapter

cc: Randall Garrison, MP, Esquimalt-Saanich-Sooke
Alistair MacGregor, MP, Cowichan-Malahat-Langford
Elizabeth May, MP, Saanich-Gulf Islands
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