

I would like to thank the Committee for this opportunity to present my opinions on something which should matter deeply to all citizens – the strength and quality of our democracy. While I have no specialist expertise in electoral systems, I do have experience of Single Transferable Vote, both as a voter and as an elections officer (while resident in Britain – both for European Parliament elections and for Cambridge University Students Union elections). On the basis of that experience – and of observing MMP elections in Wales and Scotland – I find any claim that proportional systems are “too complex” to be ridiculous and an insult to the voters.

The government’s decision to open up this question is a great opportunity to get things right. In my opinion that means:

- A system in which the proportions of seats in parliament correspond to the proportions of votes. It is grossly unfair that 39% of the vote can yield 55% of the seats and 100% of the power. Democracy should mean that everyone is represented, not just those who voted for the largest party.
- A system in which everyone’s vote matters. In our current FPTP system, elections are largely determined by the outcome in a relatively small number of marginal seats. Seats which nearly always elect the same party get much less attention in the framing of party policies. Again, the present system fails to fully and equally represent everyone’s interests.
- A system which enables truthful voting – voting for what you really believe in, not merely for the candidate who you think will beat the party that you most despise or hate. I have observed well-publicised nationally-orchestrated tactical voting campaigns during the last two federal elections, and I believe they have significantly distorted the outcome of the vote. The result is that important voices are silenced because they are less likely than some others to prevent the “wrong” party from forming government.<sup>i</sup>
- A system which encourages continuity and stability of policy in dealing with long-term challenges. One reason that Denmark (just to take one of many available examples) has been so much more successful than Canada in making an orderly (and profitable) shift away from fossil fuels – and make credible plans for a complete transition to renewables – is that a proportional system has forced parties to find parliamentary consensus on a positive way to address the climate crisis. This has made longterm planning possible. The periodic flip-flops of power which Canada experiences seriously impede our ability to do this.
- A system where each elector – including those in a minority in their riding – has a reasonable chance of having an MP who can genuinely represent them. Over the years, under FPTP systems first in the UK and now here, I have had several experiences on writing to MPs of their failing to respond, replying with non-sequiturs, or making their opposition to my case quite plain. While I write from my

own experience, I am sure that this is encountered wherever an MP – of whatever party – is presented with concerns which run counter to their ideology or their party instructions. This can only be addressed by ensuring that constituents have more than one MP to whom they can appeal – such as is possible under STV, MMP or some hybrid proportional system.

- A system where parties are incentivised to run good quality candidates everywhere. Canadians deserve intelligent, capable and hard-working MPs who can represent them well in parliament. Under the present system there is no great incentive to select for quality in “safe” seats.

For all of these reasons, I consider it important that Canada shift to a proportional system. It should, however, be a system in which local representation is maintained. I consider both STV and MMP to both meet these criteria, provided that special arrangements are made for the most remote communities. Personally I would favour a hybrid system, with STV operating in multi-member urban and high population density rural ridings, single-member ridings elsewhere, and a number of “top-up” seats filled as per MMP. I would be totally opposed to a change to another winner-takes-all system (such as ranked ballots in single member constituencies).

One thing is, however clear. Last year people approved change when over 60% of electors voted for parties which support change. The government has a mandate to change the system. It does not need a referendum to get public approval – indeed to call one would be to break an election promise. Given that those calling for a referendum have not sought one on other matters affecting the quality and powers of our democracy (the TPP? CETA? the size of the PMO?), it is difficult for me as a member of the public to see this call as sincere.

I wish you well with your deliberations

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<sup>i</sup> The late Douglas Adams provided an excellent commentary on this phenomenon in his comic novel, *So Long and Thanks for all the Fish* (Pan books, 1984):

*"It comes from a very ancient democracy, you see..."*

*"You mean, it comes from a world of lizards?"*

*"No," said Ford, who by this time was a little more rational and coherent than he had been, having finally had the coffee forced down him, "nothing so simple. Nothing anything like so straightforward. On its world, the people are people. The leaders are lizards. The people hate the lizards and the lizards rule the people."*

*"Odd," said Arthur, "I thought you said it was a democracy."*

*"I did," said Ford. "It is."*

*"So," said Arthur, hoping he wasn't sounding ridiculously obtuse, "why don't people get rid of the lizards?"*

*"It honestly doesn't occur to them," said Ford. "They've all got the vote, so they all pretty much assume that the government they've voted in more or less approximates to the government they want."*

*"You mean they actually vote for the lizards?"*

*"Oh yes," said Ford with a shrug, "of course."*

*"But," said Arthur, going for the big one again, "why?"*

*"Because if they didn't vote for a lizard," said Ford, "the wrong lizard might get in. Got any gin?"*

*"What?"*

*"I said," said Ford, with an increasing air of urgency creeping into his voice, "have you got any gin?"*

*"I'll look. Tell me about the lizards."*

*Ford shrugged again.*

*"Some people say that the lizards are the best thing that ever happened to them," he said. "They're completely wrong of course, completely and utterly wrong, but someone's got to say it."*

*"But that's terrible," said Arthur.*

*"Listen, bud," said Ford, "if I had one Altairian dollar for every time I heard one bit of the Universe look at another bit of the Universe and say 'That's terrible' I wouldn't be sitting here like a lemon looking for a gin."*