



Report 00.585

31 August 2000

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Report to Policy and Finance Committee
from Lloyd Bezett, Policy Analyst, Council Secretariat

Local Elections (Single Transferable Vote Option) Bill - Submission

1. Purpose

To consider a draft submission on the Local Elections (Single Transferable Vote Option) Bill.

2. Background

A Member's Bill to establish an optional alternative voting procedure to that currently provided has been introduced into Parliament by Mr Rod Donald. It would allow the single transferable vote (STV) system to be used for elections of members of local authorities. A copy of the Explanatory Note to the Bill is at **Attachment 1**.

The Bill has been referred to the Justice and Electoral Select Committee and submissions close on 1 September 2000. A draft submission is appended at **Attachment 2**.

3. Comment

3.1 Single Transferable Vote

This is the second such Member's Bill (the first lapsed). Comments made in this report are in line with Council's earlier submission on this matter.

The system of STV that is proposed operates by allowing electors to vote by indicating the order of their preference for the candidates. A mathematical formula - known as the "Meek Method" is used to calculate how many votes a candidate needs to be elected in a STV multi-member seat. Candidate who receive more votes than the quota requires then have their surplus votes distributed to the candidates who were the second preference. Candidates with the fewest votes are then excluded and their votes are

distributed to continuing candidates in accordance with the next available preferences.

Transfers of surpluses and exclusions continue until the desired number of candidates is elected. The Meek method, which minimises the number of “wasted votes”, is mathematically very complicated and must necessarily be carried out by computer.

STV is proposed as the form of proportional representation rather than MMP because MMP is a political party based system that discriminates against independents who have an important role, and often predominate, in local authority elections.

3.2 The Present System

Under the current First Past the Post (FPP) system each elector casts one vote and the candidate, or candidates, with the most votes are declared elected. This system has been criticised because it allows a large number of votes to be wasted and to have no impact on the result of the election. It is quite common for upward of 60% of the votes cast will be for unsuccessful candidates. In fact it is possible to be a successful candidate with as little as 10% of the votes cast, depending on the number of candidates that stand.

An example of these shortcomings can be demonstrated by a constituency/ward that has two distinct communities; one with a population many times that of the other. Should several candidates stand in the larger community it is perceivable that a single candidate from the smaller community could win. The larger the number of candidates, the smaller the percentage of the vote that is required to win.

FPP is also criticised as not encouraging accountability to the community as much as possible and that it leaves minority interests unrepresented. The proponents of STV argue that it is designed to overcome these failings by ensuring that votes are not wasted and therefore giving better effect to the wishes of electors.

3.3 Issues of Concern in the Bill

The Bill contains a number of provisions that are seen as being of concern to this Council.

3.3.1 *Clause 5 – Councils may resolve to change voting method*

With the STV system being optional or by electoral petition, the situation could arise where the territorial councils located in a region use STV procedures and the regional council does not, or vice versa.

- This would be confusing to electors, resulting in a high number of informal votes.
- It would cause logistical difficulties for territorial authorities, not only in printing and distributing two sets of voting papers, but also counting the votes under two completely different voting procedures.



3.3.2 *Clause 8 -Electors may Demand Poll*

This clause provides that electors may raise a petition, with a 5% threshold, to force a poll on whether or not to adopt STV. Such a poll would have to be conducted by the territorial authorities and carry a substantial cost.

3.4 **Proposed Local Government Electoral Bill**

It is generally accepted throughout local government that the Local Elections and Polls Act is in urgent need of a thorough review. At the recent Local Government Conference a copy of a draft Local Government Electoral (LGE) Bill, prepared by a SOLGM/Local Government New Zealand working party, was presented to the Minister of Local Government. The purpose of the LGE Bill, which is the culmination of 18 months work, is to bring together all aspects of the local authority electoral process. It is anticipated that the new legislation, structured between the Act, Regulations and codes of practice, will provide a blue print for focal authority elections for many years to come.

The introduction of STV, if it is to proceed, should be considered part of this wider review.

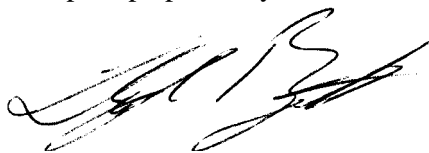
3.5 **Voter Education**

The cost of local authorities, either individually or in small groups, carrying out voter education campaigns would be extremely high. It would be appropriate for Central Government to consider contributing to the cost of explaining to electors how STV works and the advantages it has in terms of local democracy.

4. **Recommendation**

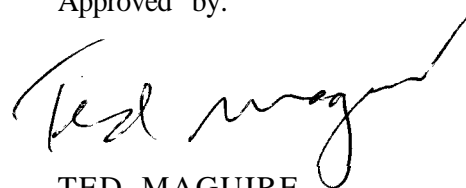
That the attached submission to the Justice and Electoral Select Committee on the Local Elections (Single Transferable Vote Option) Bill be approved

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Approved by:



TED MAGUIRE
Council Secretary

