

New Zealand First Submission re Broadcasting Allocation 2008

New Zealand First would like to make a submission in relation to the broadcasting allocation for the 2008 General Election.

We accept that making the final decision, based on fluctuating polls and other factors, is an exercise requiring the wisdom of Solomon and the patience of Job! We are sure the Electoral Commission has these qualities in abundance and hope that the following will be of assistance.

Our submission is in two parts – the criteria which we believe will not change before the election and those which are likely to change.

At the 2005 General Election New Zealand First received 130,115 party votes or 5.72% of those cast which entitled the party to seven list MPs. That number has remained constant since 2005. New Zealand First is Parliament's third largest party and has been in that third position after three of the four MMP elections to date. In fact, New Zealand First is the only party apart from Labour and National to pass the 10% mark since the advent of MMP in 1996 and has achieved this twice – in 1996 and 2002. This has created the situation that it is perceived as the “third” party in New Zealand politics following Labour and National.

New Zealand First has been part of governing arrangements with both Labour (2005-2008) and National (1996-98). The party is therefore capable of working in a governing relationship with either Labour or National.

New Zealand First has a strong, longstanding, nationwide membership base of well over 10,000 members.

Poll results are a volatile and problematic means of assessing support. We suggest that the Commission take several factors into consideration when assessing New Zealand First's support according to poll results.

Since the 2005 election New Zealand First's poll results have ranged between 2% and 6% across major polls. However the party leader, Rt Hon Winston Peters, has consistently polled above 5% as preferred Prime Minister across these same polls. He is the only party leader, outside Labour and National, to do so.

Regular poll watchers would be aware of the strong correlation between support for a party leader and the impact of this on support for the party he or she leads. This demonstrable popularity of the leader, Rt Hon Winston Peters, is a striking difference between New Zealand First and all the other parties outside Labour and National. Indeed, his consistent popularity has been resilient to the various fluctuations of the party's support.

This is important because during election campaigns there is generally a “marrying up” of the party's support with the support for the leader (although not always exact) and it also demonstrates another dimension of the party's potential support. The polling and voting patterns since the party was formed fifteen years ago amply illustrate these points.

Another dimension of New Zealand First's potential support lies in recent polling on core New Zealand First issues. Recent polling on core issues clearly branded to New Zealand First highlights the potential of our vote given the means to effectively communicate our views.

New Zealand First is now an established political party and brand, which has demonstrated that when given a fair opportunity to explain and promote its policies it is able to successfully generate support for these views.

The Commission has in the past tended to group all other parties in parliament, outside of Labour and National, into one tier when allocating broadcasting funds. We would recommend that New Zealand First should qualify for more funding based on a demonstrable track record as parliament's third largest party, with enduring and strong support, with a leader who stands alone among others as being singularly capable of generating party support and with strong public support for core New Zealand First issues.

We therefore believe that New Zealand First should be afforded a funding tier between Labour and National and the other smaller parties in parliament.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

George Groombridge
Party President
New Zealand First