

Progressive Party Submission for Broadcasting Allocation of funding and time for the 2008 General Election

1. Electoral Commission Practice

1.1 The Progressive Party supports the practice of the Commission of dividing eligible parties into categories relating to the extent to which each party satisfies the criteria set out in s75 (2) of the Broadcasting Act.

1.2 The Progressive Party submits that based on the results of the 2005 General Election the eight successful parties can be ranked in three categories for the purposes of an initial consideration for the funding and time;

Category 1 Labour Party (41.10% of the party list vote) and National Party (39.10%)

Category 2 NZ First (5.72% of the party list vote) and Green Party (5.30%) and

Category 3 United Future NZ (2.67% of the party list vote), Maori Party (2.12%), ACT (1.51%) and Jim Anderton's Progressive (1.16%).

2. Progressive Party in relation to the statutory criteria for the allocation of funding and time

2.1 The number of persons who voted at the immediately preceding general election for that party

2.1.1 The electorate candidate vote for the Progressive Party at the 2005 General Election was 36,638 votes or 1.64 % of the total candidate votes cast. Of this total less than half, 15,961 votes were in the party leader's electorate of Wigram. The party list vote for the party was 28,441 or 1.16 % of total list votes. Of this total, only 2,191 votes or 7.70 % were cast in Wigram, this proportion shows that the party attracted support on a nationwide basis.

2.2 The number of persons who voted at any by-election held since the immediately preceding general election for any candidate belonging to that political party.

2.2.1 No by-election has held since the 2005 General Election.

2.3 The number of members of Parliament who, in the case of a general election, were members of that political party immediately before the expiration or dissolution of Parliament.

2.3.1 There is one member of Parliament for the Progressive Party.

2.3.2 It is noted that no difference in weighting in relation to this criterion appears to

be given by the Commission in relation to whether the MPs are constituent or list MPs.

- 2.3.3 This criterion appears to be based on the fact of the number alone but it is submitted that when considering the number of MPs specifically of a small party, more weight should be given to whether an MP is a constituent MP or not. This is because if the party does not reach the 5% threshold MMP itself gives more weight to the vote of a constituent MP, in that one MP can get him/herself into Parliament for the party, regardless of the party vote.

2.4 Any relationships that exist between a political party and any other political party.

- 2.4.1 There is no relationship existing between the Progressive Party and any other political party, which would give rise to any “double dipping” situation, which is how the Commission has interpreted this criterion in the past. However the relationship of parties in a coalition government can work against a junior coalition partner in relation to continued public awareness of that party. A submission relating to this is made below.

2.5 Any other indications of public support for that political party such as the results of public opinion polls and the number of persons who are members of that political party.

- 2.5.1 In 2005 the Progressive Party understood the Commission took into account the public opinion poll results published between March 2004 and March 2005 and on this basis the party assumes a timeframe between April 2007 and April 2008. The Progressive Party has registered between 0% and 1% of the party list in this period. At every election that the Progressive Party has participated in the actual election result has always been significantly higher than the averaged polling results before the election.
- 2.5.2 In respect of polls recording electorate votes the results for the Progressive Party in the period April 2007 and April 2008 showed similar results as the polls for the party list.
- 2.5.3 The party also submits that the Commission should take into account the relationship of the junior coalition partner in government in this criterion. In this term of government, as in previous one the senior coalition partner’s practice of calling this a Labour-led government in and outside the House of Representatives and the practice of the media to report government action in the same way works against the Progressive Party in relation to public awareness. This therefore has had a detrimental effect in terms of public recognition as reflected in the opinion polls. The junior coalition partner party is in a unique position as compared with other parliamentary parties. It is the only party affected in this way and the Progressive Party asks that this detrimental effect be given some bearing when the poll results are considered.

- 2.5.4 The party has worked hard to ensure stable and effective government, at the expense of being submerged as a separate party by the media and by all other parties. This submerging of profile appears to be a dominant pattern in New Zealand under the MMP system. A study of the 2002 General Election showed that when the public support a government, small parties disappear into the sidelines. (Vowles, Aimer, Banducci, Karp, & Miller, 2004, p. 194).
- 2.5.5 A separate statement on the membership, the current financial membership, and the membership of supporters of the party is attached to this submission as suggested by the Commission, to ensure the confidentiality of this information – see Appendix A.
A statutory declaration on the current membership will be made available to the Commission at the hearing on this submission.
- 2.5.6 It is assumed the Commission will be considering only current financial members of each party as defined by the Electoral Act 1993. If that is the case the Progressive Party submits that parties where membership renewal is on a two or three yearly cycle, will not have as robust a membership list as those parties with an annual membership renewal. The Progressive Party has an annual membership renewal cycle and asks the Commission to take this into account because if it does not, it advantages those parties with less robust membership information.
- 2.5.7 The Progressive Party submits that the Commission might consider taking into account opinion polls asking the “Preferred Prime Minister” question for the period April 2007 to April 2008. It is a reasonable contention that public support for a party in this country can be correlated to the leadership. This has been shown in past MMP general elections results. The leader of the Progressive Party has had a consistent presence in the preferred Prime Minister polls and the party seeks the Commission to take this into account when giving consideration to indications of public support.

2.6 The need to provide a fair opportunity for each political party to convey its policies to the public by the broadcasting of election programmes on television

- 2.6.1 The Commission has stated that this criterion is of a different quality than the others. It applies to each party eligible to be considered for allocation because it was registered three months before the dissolution of Parliament i.e. a party with a party list. The Commission has also noted that it views a “fair opportunity” as one that is fair or equitable in all the circumstances, which include the extent to which the party satisfies the other criteria.
- 2.6.2 The Progressive Party agrees that “fair opportunity” is one that is fair and equitable in all the circumstances and that the extent to which a party satisfies the other criteria should be given significant weight.
- 2.6.3 Whilst the pool of funding from which the allocation is to be made was increased in 2005 the number of parties that are applying for this has also increased. The weight given to the extent to which criteria are fulfilled is as

important as before the funding increase and the Progressive Party would be most unhappy to see funding or time being allocated to new parties which do not register in any opinion poll being considered, with no recorded previous general election vote and no Member of Parliament at the expiration of Parliament.

2.6.4 The Progressive Party submits that the arguments made by party in relation to the public opinions criteria should have some bearing under the criterion. Under the MMP system the stable junior coalition partner in government does not gain the public profile by helping to put into place the government's legislative programme, which could be expected from such a constructive partnership. Instead the senior coalition gains the profile. In considering this criterion therefore, the Progressive Party again asks the Commission to take this into account.

3. Time Provided by TVNZ and RNZ for opening and closing addresses and the order of opening and closing addresses

3.1 The Progressive Party supports the Commission's system used in 2005 for the allocation to each category, of time for opening and closing addresses. It also approves of the way in which the Commission determined the order of opening and closing addresses in 2005. The party therefore submits it should be allocated time for and order of opening and closing addresses as per category 3 indicated in 1.2 above.