

18 April 2008

Dr Helena Catt
Chief Executive
Electoral Commission
WELLINGTON

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Dear Dr Catt,

ALLIANCE PARTY

SUBMISSION ON DISTRIBUTION OF BROADCASTING ALLOCATIONS

Further to the notification of qualification for broadcasting allocation dated 11 March, the Alliance Party makes the following submissions in respect to the allocation of the same:

1. The considerations for the allocation are as set out in section 75(2) of the Broadcasting Act 1989.
2. Of greatest importance in the allocation process is section 75(2)(f), namely the:

“need to provide a fair opportunity for each political party to which subsection (1) of this section applies to convey its policies to the public by the broadcasting of election programs on television”.
3. As the Commission correctly noted in its 2005 allocation, this requires a base amount to all registered parties so that all parties have a fair opportunity to convey its policies to the public.
4. Where the Alliance argues that the Commission erred in its 2005 allocation is in respect to quantum. Accepting the banding as applied in 2005, the baseline of \$10,000 was insufficient to ensure such a fair opportunity. Parties in the lowest band received only \$10,000 with the second to bottom band achieving \$20,000. The largest parties received close to 1 million dollars.
5. The Alliance submits that as a minimum all parties should receive \$25,000. This may slightly reduce monies for the largest parties but the Alliance submits that

these large parties have most of the news media attention. For a small, non-parliamentary party, election time is the height of their relevance and they should be able to promote their message which is in most cases never heard during a parliamentary term as they have no parliamentary presence.

6. If New Zealand wishes to truly promote variety in political opinion and policy, non-parliamentary parties need that extra assistance to get noticed. Election coverage largely centres on the two main parties and, for example, the difference to Labour between \$1.1 million and \$1 million is less important than the difference for a bottom band non-parliamentary party between \$10,000 and \$25,000.
7. Accordingly the Alliance submits that that the bottom band parties should receive as a minimum \$25,000.
8. Having said this, the Alliance Party submits that the Commission was correct in 2005 in placing it in the second to bottom band (i.e. the top band for non-parliamentary parties).
9. This is justified by the Alliance Party's previous presence in Parliament and its previous involvement in Government. Whilst there has indeed been a change of leadership and personalities since those days, the party's policies and underlying policies have largely remained the same.
10. Addressing the five remaining considerations in section 75(2):
 - (a) **Votes in previous elections.** The Alliance accepts that 2005 was not a successful campaign, receiving only 1,641 party votes. This however place the Alliance Party 4th out of the 11 non-parliamentary parties. As noted, the absence of a parliamentary presence severely if not fatally restricts a party's profile therefore making election funding all the more critical if a fair and free political party regime is to be promoted.

Despite the low voter support, the Alliance did stand approximately 20 electorate candidates and a list of 30 in Election 2005.

- (b) **By-elections.** Not applicable.
- (c) **Number of MPs.** Not applicable.
- (d) **Relationships with other parties.** Not applicable.
- (e) **Membership & poll support.** The Alliance Party membership has stayed steady at between 500 and 600 members. Despite leadership changes/schisms and a lack of parliamentary presence, maintaining the membership above 500 is a credit to the Party and some indication of its

public support.. As to polling, the Party registered 0.5% support in a Herald Digipoll in the end of 2007.

Conclusion

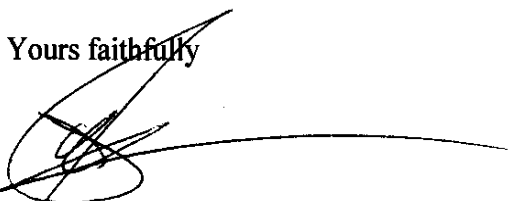
As a party formerly in parliament and out of parliament for the last 6 years, the Alliance Party, unlike most other parties, appreciates the importance the "*oxygen of publicity*" and a parliamentary presence in order to remain in the public eye. It can correctly be stated that minor parties are at their strongest in the election period as the public turn their mind to voting and often to which minor party they may support.

The Alliance Party submits that promotion of our electoral democracy (the Commission's most important and overall goal) requires a hand-up to those minor, especially non-parliamentary parties. The difference for them between \$10,000 and \$25,000 is profound in relation to the difference to Labour (for example) between \$1.1 and 1 million.

The Alliance party believes that the bottom band parties should receive \$25,000 as a minimum to discharge the section 75(2)(f) requirement, with second to bottom band parties, such as the Alliance Party, receiving \$40,000.

The Alliance Party thanks the Commission for its consideration of the above and does not seek to enlarge upon these submissions orally to the Commission.

Yours faithfully


Tom Dowie
General Secretary
Alliance Party