

# Green Party Submission to the Electoral Commission

## Broadcasting funding and time allocation for this year's general election

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## 1. Introduction

The Green Party wishes to make the following submission on the allocation of time and money for the broadcasting of election programmes relating to this year's general election.

Attached please find statutory declarations confirming our membership numbers and that we will be nominating a party list at the upcoming general election.

We would like to be heard in support of our submission and will be represented by Green Campaign Manager Gary Reese and Green Co-Leader Russel Norman.

## 2. Eligibility

The Green Party is eligible for an allocation as we have been a registered political party for the last thirteen years.

## 3. Compliance with allocation criteria (section 75 (2) of the Broadcasting Act)

### a. *Number of people who voted for the Green Party and its candidates at the 2005 election.*

The Green Party contested the 2005 General Election in its own right, standing 52 constituency candidates and a Party list of 57 candidates.

We won 120521 party votes or 5.30% of the total party vote. This represents 5.37% of the effective party votes for seat allocation. Our candidates also won 92164 electorate votes or 4.12% of the total electorate vote. Overall, when split voting is taken into account, 182,288 people, or 7.97% of those who voted, supported the Greens with either their party vote or their electorate vote or both.

In general, we believe the Commission should only consider the Party vote when assessing this criterion because it is normally only the party vote that determines the number of seats won by each party and therefore the make-up of Parliament. The party vote is also the most accurate indicator of public support for a party, as opposed to support for its individual candidates. In any case it would be inappropriate to take the individual candidate vote into account given that those individual candidates are allowed to spend their own money on broadcasting under

the act. Thus the number of votes that they receive should have no influence in the broadcasting allocation for their party.

The Maori Party is a possible exception to this general position. Arguably the extent to which Maori Party seats exceed those that would be allocated on the basis of party vote is so significant as to constitute a special case.

*b. By-elections*

There have been no by-elections in this term of Parliament.

*c. Number of Green Party members of Parliament*

The Green Party has a total of six MPs.

*d. Relationships with other parties*

The Green Party has no umbrella or component relationship with any other party.

*e. Opinion polls and party membership*

Polling

In order to ascertain an indication of public support for a political party using public opinion polls, we believe that the only reasonable analysis is through observing the trends of the averages using established professional polling organisations. Molesworth & Featherson (M&F) uses a rolling average of opinion polls from TV3/TNS, TV1/Colmar Brunton, NZ Herald, and Ray Morgan Opinion Polls, the established professional New Zealand polls. Individual polls with large margin of errors for smaller parties are not accurate. However the medium to long term trends of an averaging of polls produces a more realistic figure of public support.

The Greens have consistently polled as the third party in New Zealand politics since the 2005 election. Notably, the Greens have remained above the cluster of other parties by several percentage points for most of the last three years.

Using the M&F averages, only the Green Party has polled over 5% since November 2005. This data also shows that the rolling average for the Green Party has never dropped below 5% since the 2005 elections.

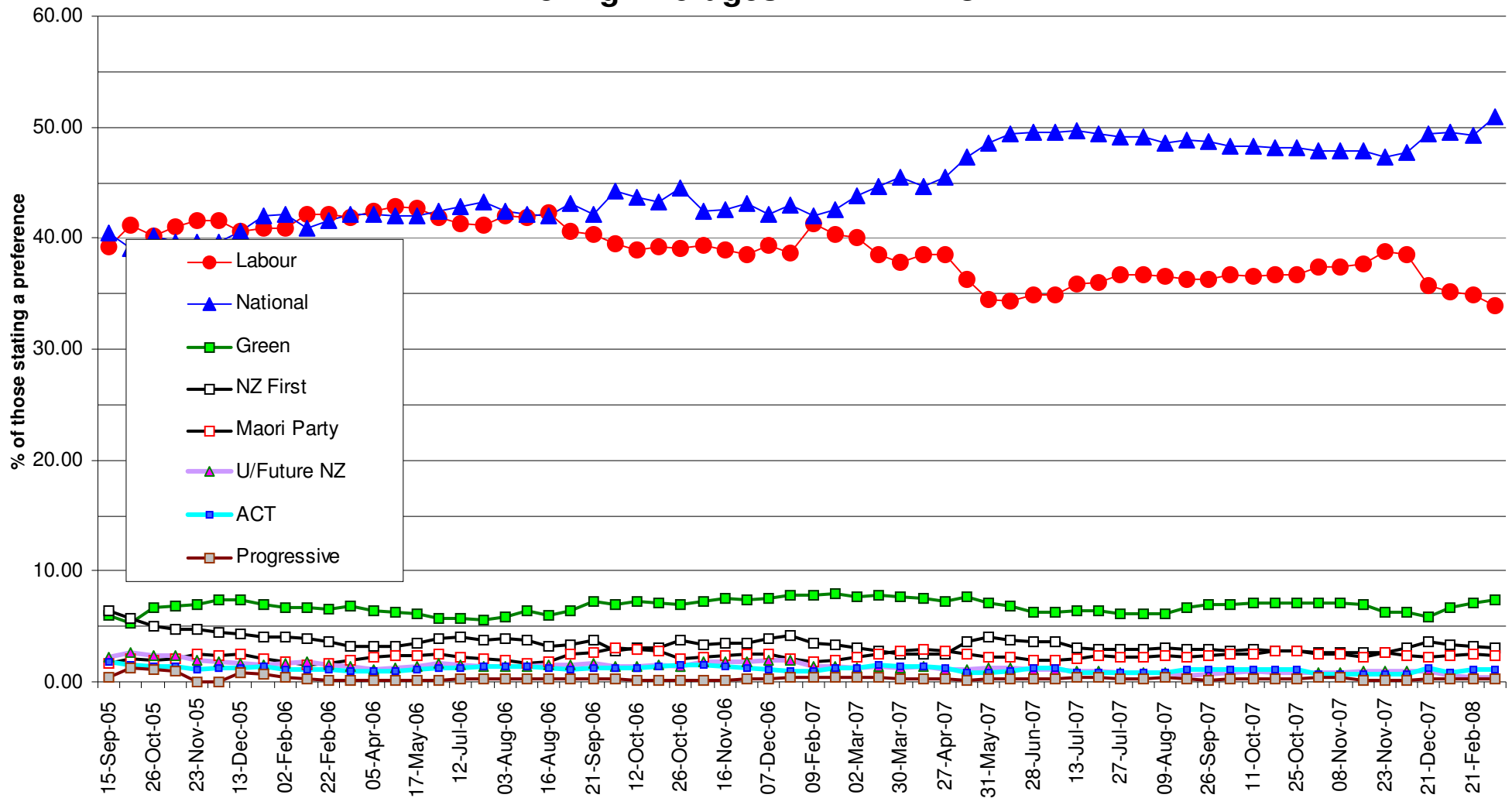
The New Zealand MMP electoral system means that whether a Party receives below or above 5% of the vote is a clear and significant determining factor. The polling averages cited above shows that the Green Party inhabits a clear category of its own, distinctly separated from and above the remaining smaller parties. These points are shown in Figures 1 and 2 on the next pages.

Furthermore:

- (i) Our average polling since the 2005 elections has not gone below 5.54%.
- (ii) Our average since the 2005 election has been 6.85%
- (iii) Our average in the last 12 months has been 6.90%
- (iv) The Greens have clearly polled as the third highest Party since October 2005.
- (v) The latest poll for the Green Party (as of 16<sup>th</sup> April 2008) is 9% in the Roy Morgan Poll on 11<sup>th</sup> April 2008.

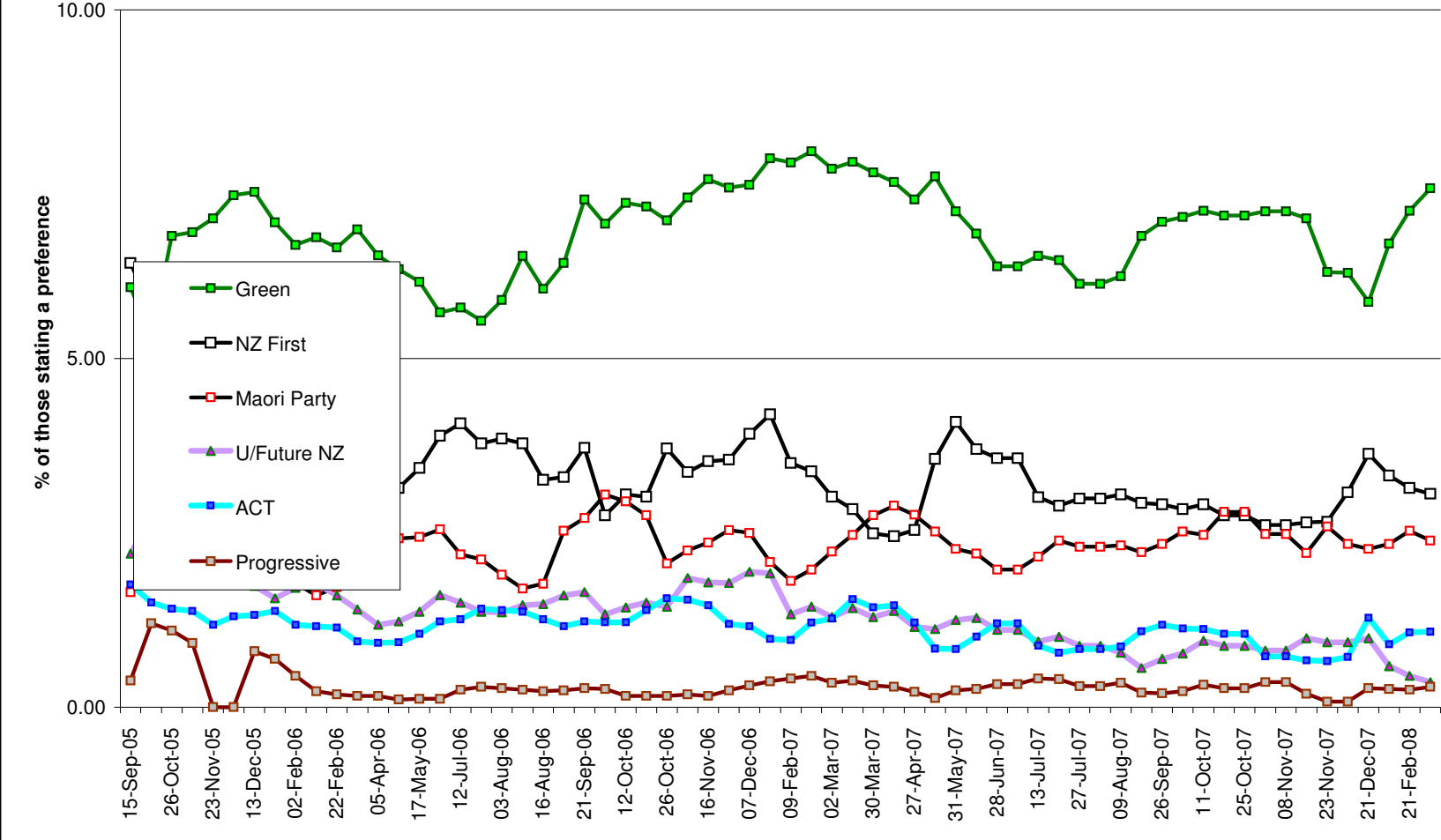
Except for short periods, the Greens have consistently been the third most popular political party for the last eight years. For a large part of that time, especially in 1999-2002 and in the last three years, we have held that position by a significant margin.

## Molesworth & Featherston Opinion Poll Rolling Averages – PARTY VOTE



**Figure 1 All Parties Rolling Average Vote 2005 election to present**

**Molesworth & Featherston Opinion Poll  
Smaller Parties Rolling Averages – PARTY VOTE**



**Figure 2 Smaller Parties Rolling Average Polling 2005 Election to present**

We would however note that opinion polls underestimate the true level of support for the Green Party specifically, and possibly for third and minor parties. The Green Party polls very strongly amongst youth voters and hence a significant proportion of our voters use cellphones rather than landlines.

Further most polling organisations do not prompt voters with a list of parties to choose from. Voter behaviour when polled is therefore not consistent with election behaviour where voters have the benefit of the ballot paper listing all parties. The Commission should therefore weight this criterion in favour of the third and minor parties.

### Membership

We are in the process of a major update of information systems. The Green Party membership under our old system was 4,050 (of which 3,451 were financial, and 599 had yet to renew) as of 23rd November 2007. . Following our annual membership renewal, and using our new system, our membership as of 16<sup>th</sup> April 2008 is 3,902 members, of which 2,970 were financial, and 932 had yet to renew. A statutory declaration to this effect by the Secretary of the Party is attached to this submission. The number of financial members is expected to rise steadily over the remainder of the year.

The Electoral Commission is required to consider such things as membership when ascertaining public support. Green Party membership is a paid membership that also requires a written commitment by each individual to our Charter principles. Our membership has shown steady growth over the last three election cycles. This further demonstrates that support for the Green Party is consistent and widespread.. We ask that the Electoral Commission consider closely all membership claims of political parties.

### Conclusion

The consistency and strength of the Green Party averaged polling over the last three years combined with our consistent and strong membership demonstrates that we are the third political Party in regards to public support at present.

#### *f. Fair opportunity to broadcast*

The Green Party believes it is important for all registered parties to have a fair opportunity to convey their election messages through the broadcast media. We acknowledge this will give smaller parties than ourselves a larger proportion of the appropriation than they would have

received based solely on the other criteria. This is desirable in order to balance the limited access smaller parties have to other media opportunities such as televised leaders' debates.

We therefore suggest that the smallest registered parties (eight in 2005) receive the same minimum allocation they were given last time but believe that only parties polling on average above 2% or with recognised Members of Parliament should be given opening and closing addresses.

#### 4. Recommendation

The Green Party supports the broad categorisation that the Commission applied at the last election. We would suggest that Labour and National occupy an approximately equal position at present and deserve equal funding.

We suggest that the Commission recognise the role of third parties as distinct from minor parties. The Green Party now occupies a unique position as third party and this needs to be recognised in allocations of funding for broadcast time and opening and closing addresses. No other Party is in the same category as the Green Party when all key required factors are considered.

The New Zealand First Party had a similar number of 2005 votes and MPs. However it has not displayed this same level of public support since the 2005 elections.

The Electoral Commission is required to consider the following factors in its Broadcast allocation:

- the number of persons who voted at the previous general election for that party and for candidates belonging to that political party; and
- the number of persons who voted for the party's candidate at any by-election held since the previous general election; and
- the number of members of Parliament who were members of that political party immediately before the dissolution or expiration of Parliament; and
- any relationships that exist between that political party and any other political party; and
- 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; and

- the need to provide a fair opportunity for each eligible political party to convey its policies to the public by broadcasting election programmes on television.

The key criteria therefore, in considering the Green Party's place in relation to those parties placed above or below us for 2008 are:

- a. 2005 Vote for party and candidates
- b. Number of MPs
- c. Polling since 2005
- d. Membership.

We believe that if the Electoral Commission consider all of these factors in a genuine way, considering our averaging polls over the last 3 years and genuine level of membership, then the Green Party would occupy a category of its own below Labour and National. That the Green Party would be categorised one place above the next level of other smaller parties due to a strongly differentiated level of public support since the 2005 elections and our steady growth in genuine party membership.

## 5. Other Matters

### a. *Opening and closing addresses*

- Within the constraints of the total amount of time allocated by TVNZ and RNZ for the opening and closing addresses, and in relation to the 2005 categorisation of parties, we believe that the split for the opening addresses at the last election was appropriate i.e. 12 minutes for each of the two major parties, 7 minutes for significant third parties and 4 minutes for minor parties. Regarding the closing addresses, we also consider the split from the last election was appropriate i.e. 6 minutes for the major parties and 3 minutes for significant third parties.

The order of the addresses should be in order of the size of broadcasting allocation for the opening addresses and in reverse order for the closing addresses.

### b. *Existing Funding formula*

The 2005 broadcasting allocation was reasonably fair to the Green Party. However the current allocation method led to a wide variability of broadcasting funding in relation to actual performance, with Labour receiving \$0.85 per vote and National receiving \$1.01 per vote at one extreme while United Future received \$3.28 per vote and, Christian Heritage \$7.09 per vote and the Alliance \$12.18 per vote at the other extreme.

We believe the current allocation system should be replaced by a more equitable system of funding political parties to enable them to participate in the democratic process. We would suggest a model similar to the Australian one, in which parties receive funding immediately after an election based on their share of the vote at that election. We do, however, support the maintenance of a cap on the dollar value of parties' electronic broadcast advertising. We request that the Commission makes recommendations to the Government along these lines

There should also be a thorough investigation into whether parties should be allowed to spend their own funds on electronic broadcasting up to a spending cap in order to remove the extraordinary advantage currently enjoyed by the two main parties due to the much larger financial allocations they receive from the Commission. We request that the Commission conduct such an investigation.

ENDS