



## Proportion of electorate seats to list seats

### *How population growth affects the number of electorate seats*

Since 1965 when the number of South Island general electorates was fixed at 25 (and now, under MMP, at 16), the number of North Island general electorates has increased after every five yearly census (and the number of Māori electorates increased with the introduction of MMP and after the 1996 and 2001 censuses).

This is due to the disproportionately faster population growth of the North Island compared to that of the South Island. The table below shows this increase under both the previous First Past the Post voting system and MMP.

Assuming this trend continues there will come a point in time when the number of list seats will be too small to continue to be compensatory and thus may not guarantee proportionality.

*Table 1: Showing the number of South Island and North Island general electorate seats, and Māori electorate seats at each election since 1966 and, from 1996, the corresponding decrease in the number of list seats*

Year	No of SI seats	No of NI seats	No of Māori seats	No of list seats	No of list overhang seats	Total no of seats
1966	25	51	4	—	—	80
1969	25	55	4	—	—	84
1972	25	58	4	—	—	87
1975	25	58	4	—	—	87
1978	25	63	4	—	—	92
1981	25	63	4	—	—	92
1984	25	66	4	—	—	95
1987	25	68	4	—	—	97
1990	25	68	4	—	—	97
1993	25	70	4	—	—	99
1996	16	44	5	55	—	120
1999	16	45	6	53	—	120
2002	16	46	7	51	—	120





2005	16	46	7	51	1	121
2008	16	47	7	50	2	122
2011	16	47	7	50	1	121

### ***When might proportionality be affected?***

In 2000 the Department of Statistics provided a table<sup>1</sup> projecting the total number of electorates to the year 2051. Using projections for population growth over 50 years, the maximum number of electorates was estimated to reach 77 for both general and Māori electorates (and the number of lists would reduce to 43).

A formula used to estimate when the number of list seats will no longer be sufficient to ensure proportionality is when the ratio of the proportion of a party's electorate seats to the proportion of party votes exceeds the ratio of the total seats in Parliament to the total number of electorate seats. On this basis, proportionality will probably not be affected by a 77/43 mix of electorate and list seats.

### ***How the number of electorates is determined in New Zealand***

Sections 35 and 36 of the Electoral Act 1993 require the division of New Zealand into general seats between the North Island and the South Island. Section 45 of the Act provides for the Māori seats to be determined in a similar way. This division takes place after each census.

The Representation Commission is the body responsible for this division. The following steps must be taken:

- The South Island is to have 16 general electorates;
- The South Island general electoral population is divided by 16 to give the South Island quota (the general electoral population for each electorate);
- The North Island general electoral population and the Māori electoral population is then divided by the South Island quota to give the number of North Island general electorates and Māori electorates (a figure of .5 or above is rounded up);
- The North Island general electoral population is divided by the number of North Island electorates to give the North Island quota;

<sup>1</sup> Advice provided to the 2001 select committee review of MMP.





- The Māori electoral districts must each contain an equal number of members of the Māori electoral population;
- No general electorate is to be partly in both the North and South Islands;
- Electoral boundaries are drawn taking into account the existing boundaries and communities of interest, facilities of communication, topographical features and any projected variation in the electoral population of those districts (and, additionally for Māori electorates, tribal affiliations).

The table below shows how this worked in practice after the 2006 census.

*Table 2: Electorate determination step-by-step*

Steps	Electoral population	Number of electorates
South Island general electoral population (SI-GEP)	920,999	
Divide the SI-GEP by 16	57,562	16 (determined by law)
North Island general electoral population (NI-GEP)	2,690, 437	
Divide NI-GEP by 57,562	46.739	47 (46.739 rounded up)
Māori electoral population (M-EP)	417,081	
Divide M-EP by 57,562	7.245	7 (7.245 rounded down)
Total electorates		70
In a 120 seat Parliament, 50 list seats are required. (list seats equals $120-70=50$ )		

