



PROPORTION OF ELECTORATE SEATS TO LIST SEATS

Under MMP, maintaining the proportionality of Parliament requires there to be sufficient list seats available to compensate for the disproportional results of the electorate contests.

In 1996 the ratio was 65 electorate seats to 55 list seats. For the 2011 general election, the ratio was 70 electorate seats and 50 list seats.

Changes in population growth means the number of electorates will continue to increase and the number of list seats will decrease. This is because, in brief, the number of South Island seats is fixed at 16. The population size of South Island electorates therefore becomes the basis for the calculation of the number of North Island and Māori electorate seats that may be required.

Parliament has asked at what point the number of electorate seats would be so great there would be insufficient seats to ensure proportionality and when will this point be reached?

What submitters said—

The issue of the proportion of electorate seats to list seats was raised in 2,149 submissions.

Many submissions addressed this issue from the perspective of what the ideal ratio should be between list and electorate seats, and often used it as an opportunity to comment on the size of the House, or express dissatisfaction about the existence of list seats.

The submitters who addressed the issue directly raised concerns about declining proportionality. However, the majority suggested the situation is not one that requires immediate action and should be revisited in 10-15 years.

COMMISSION'S PROPOSAL

- ❖ Consideration should be given to fixing the ratio of electorate seats to list seats at 60:40 to help maintain the diversity of representation and proportionality in Parliament obtained through the list seats.





Comments and themes from the full submissions on the ratio of electorate seats to list seats.

Political parties

Parties acknowledged proportionality as being the key element of the MMP system and agreed the distribution of seats in Parliament should broadly match the distribution of party votes cast by electors. However, they also noted the increasing size of some electorates, particularly in the South Island — National suggested the electoral tolerance be increased to plus/minus 10% as recommended by the Royal Commission.

The Green party suggested there be a fixed ratio of list seats to electorate seats in order to protect proportionality. ACT and Mana both submitted this is an issue that does not need to be addressed in the short term. As this problem arises from slowly developing demographic trends, they submitted the problem can be reviewed in 25 years time.

What other submitters said—

As noted above, the majority of submissions on this issue discussed what the ideal ratio between list seats and electorate seats should be — this ranged from no list seats to a ratio of 2/3rds electorate seats to 1/3rd list seats.

The majority of the submitters who commented specifically on the issue of declining proportionality suggested it is not likely to be a problem for many years to come. Others recommended a fixed ratio be established now to avoid diminishing proportionality.

- The ideal solution would be to fix the number of list seats as equal to the number of electorate seats, and Parliament's size would increase with increasing population.
- Based on the statistics presented, if proportionality won't be affected until beyond 2051, it is not likely to be a problem for many years to come. On the whole so many things will change over the next 40 years that we cannot really predict what NZ will look like at that time.
- This is a problem. Under the current system, MMP will gradually look more and more like SM - which the voters overwhelmingly rejected. Or a massive nightmarish overhang. At its limit, the current system will in fact revert back to being FPP.
- This will not be a problem until the number of electorate seats reaches 65% of the total seats (i.e. 78 seats in a 120-seat Parliament). Once it crosses that threshold, then it may be a problem.





- This is a long-term problem. Either it is fixed now or in the future. It will be better to fix now because otherwise we will have future Parliaments weighted heavily in favour of electorates. The ratio of electorate seats to list seats should be fixed.
- This may be a problem by 2051 but voters may have different views then. It would not be popular but with an increasing population there is an argument to increase the number of MPs.
- Increase the number of list seats to 70 (to match the current number of electorate seats) and then EITHER add a list seat every time a new electorate seat is created, OR cap the number of seats at 140 and simply expand the number of people within each electorate.
- This will become an issue and we may have to accept a need to fund a slowly growing number of electorate MPs if the drift north continues. Some future Commission will need to do a further review to ensure proportionality is maintained when electorates reach around 75.
- It is important for list seats to be available to guarantee MMP remains proportional. There should be at least 40% list seats in Parliament, and increases in population should result in electorates being resized/renamed/moved rather than new electorates being created. The number of electorate seats should not continue to increase.
- The calculation of the proportion of list seats to electorate seats should remain as is. It will take many years before population grows to the point where it subverts the proportionality of MMP.
- We need to keep enough list seats to keep proportionality. They are currently being eroded every five years when new constituency seats are added it is now 50 /70. At some time in the future, Parliament will need to be enlarged to maintain proportionality and to accommodate population growth or the electorates made bigger or some other system. It would be appropriate that a country that much bigger should have a bigger Parliament.

Declining proportionality has other consequences

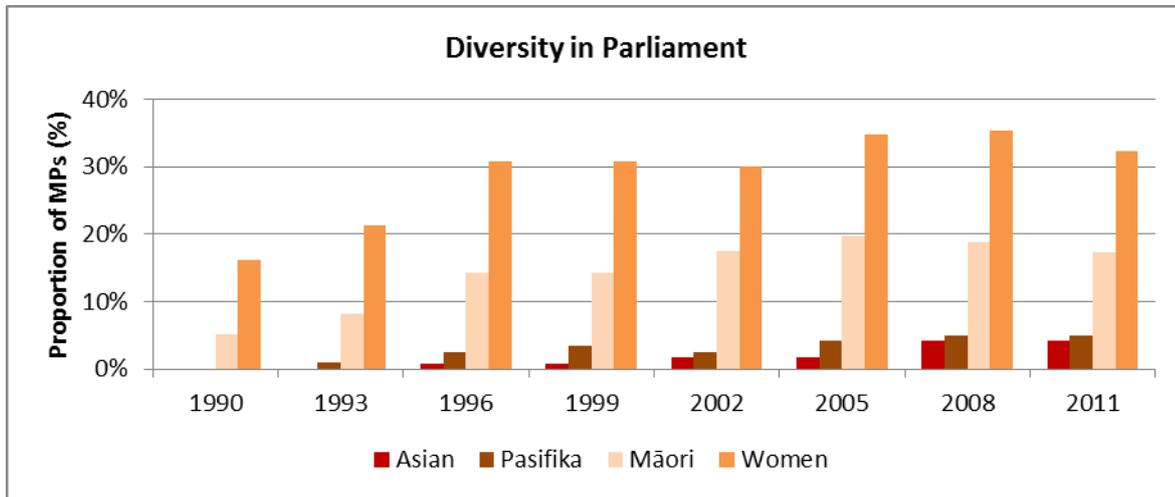
The gradual reduction in list seats over time is not the only issue of concern. While a ratio of 75/45 would not necessarily affect proportionality between parties too greatly, it would, however, have an impact on the diversity of representation.

It was expected that more women, Māori and minorities would be elected to Parliament under MMP, and more specifically, through the party lists. Figure 1 below confirms the increased diversity of parliamentary representation under MMP.





Figure 1: Diversity in MMP Parliaments 1996-2011 compared with the last two FPP Parliaments



This diversity has indeed come predominantly from party lists (see figure 2 below). Under MMP more women and Māori have been elected to Parliament, the majority as list MPs despite there being more electorate MPs overall. Of all MPs elected to Parliament from party lists, 43% have been women. By contrast, only 24% of MPs elected from electorates have been women. More Māori are elected from party lists than electorates, even with the existence of the Māori seats. That is, 21% of all list MPs have identified as Māori compared with 14% of all electorate MPs – Māori and general electorates. Only 5% of general electorate MPs identified as Māori.

Figure 2: Showing that diversity is achieved primarily through the party list

