



**National Council of
Women of New Zealand**

Te Kaunihera
Wahine O Aotearoa

National Office
Level 4 Central House
26 Brandon Street
PO Box 25-498
Wellington 6146
(04) 473 7623
www.ncwnz.org.nz

26 February 2001

S01.17

**Submission to the Justice and Electoral Select Committee
on the Local Electoral Bill**

Introduction

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is an umbrella organisation representing 43 nationally organised societies. It has 34 branches spread throughout the country to which women from some 150 societies are affiliated. Its purpose is to work for the wellbeing of women, families and society through research, discussion and action.

Members of the Parliamentary Watch Committee have studied this Bill and are pleased to have the opportunity to make comments based on previous submissions.

General Comments

For more than ten years NCWNZ has been working to have limits set on spending on election campaigns at both national and local levels. In 1990 membership gave unanimous support for limits on candidate expenditure prior to our submission on the petition of Timothy Richard Shadbolt. Members were anxious that the limit be set low, a high limit being likely to preclude women with much to offer but less money with which to promote their candidature. One proposal which could accommodate differences in population, area and office was that the limit on expenditure be determined as a percentage of the remuneration payable to the successful candidate.

At the 1994 Conference the following resolution was passed:

“That NCWNZ urge the Government to amend the Local Elections and Polls Act 1976 to institute a statutory limit on spending on electoral expenses by candidates and parties in Local Government elections.”

In 1996 submissions were made to the Department of Internal Affairs and to the Internal Affairs and Local Government Select Committee on limiting campaign spending in local elections. The latter asked that consideration be given to making provision for an additional allowance for those in large rural territories.

Specific Comments

Part 2

Local elections and polls
Electoral systems for elections

Clause 25 enables a local authority to change the electoral system if a resolution is passed 2 years before the next triennial election. NCWNZ supports authorities having the option of using STV (Single Transferable Vote) in local body elections.





Our members generally acknowledge that MMP has increased diversity in Parliament, and support the principle of proportionality in local authority elections, for which STV appears well suited.

Part 3

Conduct of elections and polls

Candidate profile statements

Clause 59 Candidate profile statements

NCWNZ supported the distribution of candidate information to all electors in previous submissions. It is pleasing to see that all candidates will be asked to provide the electoral officer with a profile statement of 150 words or less. It will contain information about the candidate and their policies and intentions for distribution to all electors.

Voting, processing, and counting of votes

Clause 75 Processing before close of vote

Votes may be counted before the close of voting, if determined by a resolution of the local authority. This allows the results to be declared soon after 7 pm on polling day.

In submissions on the general elections over several years, NCWNZ has supported moves to expedite the completion of the vote count. The same principle applies to local elections, and we believe the requirements to have JPs present give appropriate safeguards to ensure that early counting would not contaminate the poll.

Part 5

Electoral expenses

Clause 102 Return of electoral expenses

(1) Within 70 days after any election **every** candidate must transmit a return of expenses.

This will involve an immense increase in work for electoral officers. The amounts proposed appear generous and few candidates, apart from those standing for mayor, would spend such sums. In most areas it would probably be sufficient to concentrate on returns from all the mayoral candidates. However, candidates for city councils should submit their expenses at the first election and all the other candidates keep detailed files of their expenses. NCWNZ suggested that in order to reduce the workload 'spot checks' could be made on these candidates by those responsible for checking the expenses.

Clause 104 Maximum amount of electoral expenses

- (1) These vary from \$2,500 for any local government area with a population smaller than 5000 to \$50,000 for an area with a population of 150,000 or more.
- (2) If a candidate is standing for more than 1 position, that candidate must not exceed the highest amount permitted under (1).

These amounts should be more than enough to allow a candidate to increase their public exposure and raise community awareness and familiarity with their name, face and views during the election period. However, NCWNZ is concerned that the limits proposed are based on population only. It does not recognise the different needs of rural and urban areas. For example, candidates in densely populated areas need few billboards and can certainly expect to promote their candidacy through public meetings and the media more readily than people in a scattered electorate.



Conclusion

NCWNZ is pleased that limits to electoral expenses are to be made for candidates standing for local authorities and hope the limits set are not too high. As written in a 1990 submission – ‘a high limit is likely to preclude women with much to offer the community but no money to promote their candidature’.

Barbara Glenie
National President

Elizabeth Lee
Convener, Parliamentary Watch Committee