

**CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON ELECTORAL REFORM**  
**ANSWERS TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS SUBMITTED TO**  
**CHRIS MOREY**

**September 11, 2004**

**From Wendy Bergerud:**

SMP assumes that we should be grouped by where we live. Why should our geographic location be our fundamental group association for election?

*Answer:*

In many parts of the province and particularly in the north where communities are separated by vast distances and have small populations, geographic grouping is not only the most obvious type of grouping it is also the simplest and most practical. Individuals grouped by northern geography oftentimes share more than space. Most of these people live in resource-based communities thereby sharing economic concerns. They also share social concerns, especially those relating to availability of and access to health, education, other social services and housing. Transportation services and infrastructure along with distance from major centers are other shared concerns; demographics; lifestyle; and, more often than not, political ideologies make geographic location a fundamental group association for election.

**From Glen Mackinnon:**

Why is there such emphasis placed on the desirability of local representation?

*Answer:*

There are two points to consider: First, clarity is important around what is actually meant by "local representation". Is it simply someone elected to represent a local area? Or is it someone local elected to represent the local area? There are significant differences between the two. In the north, this is most commonly defined as the latter. Although contradictory to a system of fair proportionality, the election of a local representative through our current plurality system has, for the most part, served the province well, especially in northern and remote areas of this province where populations are small. For all its flaws, it has indeed been the only way these areas had & have any voice at all.

The majority of British Columbians do not live in the north. For all its vastness, the north's population represents a minority voice. Life in the north and northern concerns are often very different from those of our neighbors in the rest of the province. Predominately, it has been through local representation that this minority voice is brought to the legislature and why it is imperative to have an identifiable representative in each of these ridings.

Second, not all MLAs including Cabinet Ministers are familiar with each and every region of the province. This can manifest in public policy decisions based on a 'one size fits all' approach that may benefit some areas of the province but not others. Local representatives of each of the electoral districts however do bring a more detailed level of knowledge and awareness of the unique concerns and issues facing their constituents. Even though this situation has improved in recent years, it should be a matter addressed on an ongoing basis through the electoral system rather than only on the policies of the government of the day.

**From David Wills:**

I appreciate your statement that proportionality is important to the province but Fort Nelson and the Northern Rockies do not want to see any reduction in their provincial representation.

I understand that all systems of proportional representation inevitably have some impact on local representation. I would appreciate how you view the following potential impacts of proportional representation for Peace River North:

- (a) A system with reduced local representation, perhaps by removing as many as half of the MLA's from their local constituency role, potentially balanced a corresponding increase in Regional representation.
- (b) Retaining the same number of local MLAs but have them elected in a proportional way from multi member districts which would naturally be larger than today/
- (c) In some way exclude Peace River North and similar districts from the system that is used in the rest of the province so you can retain your existing single member district. This would result in some sort of two-tier system and not provide any of the benefits of proportionality to your district/

*Answer:*

- (a) Currently, there is a Northern Caucus made up of MLAs, some are also Cabinet Ministers, from the northern ridings, who work to address northern issues in a broad sense. However, it is not seen at the individual riding level as supplanting local representation. People will still contact their individual MLA. In the northeast, which has two ridings, there are only 2 MLAs, so to reduce this representation by half, would be to place the responsibility for this huge region on the shoulders on one person. The region is simply too huge and too diverse for that to be beneficial to the people who live there.
- (b) People in my riding, especially the Northern Rockies portion of Peace River North have been very clear that they do not want to see the boundaries of the riding enlarged. To do so would reduce local representation which is one of their core values.
- (c) I believe there is merit in looking at a number of models that could achieve this while retaining some measure of proportionality. As stated previously, issues in the north are often different from those in other areas of the province and perhaps the north should have a different system, but not necessarily one that creates a two-tiered electoral system. However, there are also models that have been suggested that could be applied provincially that would still provide for local representation in each of the ridings without enlarging the riding. For example, creating ridings based on regional district boundaries is worth exploring as are mixed systems and variations thereof.

**From John Zall:**

Do you have any suggestions how a mixed or proportional system could ensure adequate representation for small northern communities or is the present system the only electoral system able to ensure such representation?

*Answer:*

When looking at electoral systems, particularly for the north, it is important to maintain the core values of the area such as the need for local representation while not expanding current boundaries. Within that context, a number of models have been suggested that could work effectively. While I believe there is potential for creating a model that will achieve this, the underpinning should be a system similar to that provided by our plurality system but topping that up with some measure of proportionality. There are a number of variations that could be applied from the models suggested that could result in a hybrid system. No matter what system is

chosen, it is imperative that all representatives are elected by the voters and not selected by other means. In other words, no closed lists.

**From Shoni Field:**

Do you feel that the current system serves local interests well? Of the other systems we have considered (AV, STV, MMP, MMM, etc.) are there others that you feel might provide equal or better "customer service", albeit in a different format, on a local level

*Answer:*

Yes, as long as the model chosen is in addition to our current defined boundary with an identifiable representative. Any additions to that must include representatives who have also been elected by the voters and not chosen by other means. It is also important that the system chosen does not result in the creation of a hierarchy of MLAs.

**From Anna Rankin:**

If the Citizens' Assembly recommends a system that forced candidates to be more accountable to the voters rather than to the party, and possibly resulted in MLAs from different parties representing one larger area, would people in rural areas be able to accept larger ridings.

*Answer:*

No. The people of my area do not want a larger riding. Our MLA has received not only the largest number of votes he has also received the popular vote. In other words, the people's choice was clear. This is also true of our MP. So the issue of accountability is also clear. Any system that may be proposed should prevent any blurring of the lines in terms of accountability and it should result in clarity in reflecting the will of the people. Although the current situation in our riding has achieved both of these aspects, a measure of proportionality should be built in to any system in the event that this changes in future. I also believe that at the present time, the north is under-represented and I would like to see a system whereby representation proportional to geographic vastness is also taken into consideration, especially if the current ratio of MLAs : population should change.

**From Sally de Luna:**

In your district, how far must some citizens travel to vote?

*Answer:*

It varies. Some people can get to the polls in 5 minutes, while others are up to 2 hours away. To counteract this, we ensure that a number of voting places are established throughout the region along the Alaska Highway. Also in the last local general election, the use of mail-in ballots (although not widely used) was available for those living far from a voting station.

In closing, the north not only wants its concerns heard and its unique needs met, northerner also want a fair and effective voice in the development of this great province of our for the common good of all British Columbians no matter what region they live in.