

Proportional system favoured by voters

By Brock Harrison
Whig-Standard Staff Writer

ONTARIO'S ELECTORAL SYSTEM IS IN dire need of at least some proportional representation, to include women and minority groups, a panel of citizens exploring electoral reform heard last night.

The province's first citizens assembly on electoral reform, made up of one representative from each of Ontario's 103 electoral districts, has begun the second phase of its mandate – consulting with the public on what type of electoral system Ontario should adopt in the future.

The assembly will incorporate public input when it considers what recommendations it will make to Democratic Renewal Minister Marie Bountrogianni. Its report is due by May 15.

If the assembly recommends a change to the system, it will then be put to a provincewide referendum before or in conjunction with the provincial election on Oct. 4.

Many citizens who presented to a group of six members of the assembly last night at the Kingston Public Library on Johnson Street suggested a

mixed-member proportional representation system, similar to the one New Zealand recently adopted.

"I've often thought, 'why vote?' Nobody I've ever voted for has won," said Deb Wells, who urged the assembly to recommend a mixed-member proportional representation system.

Commonly referred to as MMP, such a system combines elements of the current system and proportional representation, in which a political party's share of seats is equal to its share of the popular vote.

In an MMP system, parliament seats are divided into seats won through direct elections as we currently have and also seats filled proportionally according to the popular vote.

Those seats, also called "adjustment seats," are filled out by candidates listed in order of preference by political parties. For example, if a party wins 15 per cent of the popular vote but only eight per cent of the seats, it will be given enough adjustment seats filled by listed candidates to bring its representation up to 15 per cent.

The proportion of adjustment seats in parliament varies between countries. Germany allocates half of its

seats for listed candidates.

"MMP maintains the benefits of constituency representation by allows for proportional adjustment," said Eric Walton, a former provincial candidate for the Green party in Kingston.

Max Rubin, a Queen's University politics student, said he favours an MMP system because it makes every vote count.

"Right now, only the votes the winner gets count," he said. "This way, your vote would still count for the proportional seats."

A former Kingston member of provincial parliament also spoke in favour of MMP.

"Most of us may feel comfortable with the fairness of the election itself, but we may question the fairness of the outcome," said Gary Wilson, the NDP MPP who served Kingston in Bob Rae's government. "It only makes sense to change the rules."

Barry Koen-Butt, spokesman for the citizens assembly's secretariat, said MMP has been a popular suggestion at the public consultations.

"But we remind the assembly that MMP is favoured only by the people who show up," he said.

