

NEW BRUNSWICK COMMISSION ON LEGISLATIVE DEMOCRACY



December 19, 2003

Premier Lord announces the Commission

Wide ranging mandate includes reform of :

the legislature

electoral boundary drawing

fixed election dates

voter turnout

government appointment process

direct democracy

party democracy

enhancing public participation generally

a new electoral system

- *Principles and Values*

both:

generic and abstract

and

associated with a particular place and culture

- General values Commissioners identified early on to be reflected in New Brunswick's electoral system:
 - proportionality
 - local representation
 - substantial opposition
 - fairness for small parties
 - voter choice
 - efficient/effective government
 - representation of women, aboriginals, regions

- Commission ultimately narrowed these down to four central - values:

local representation

fair representation

equality of the vote

effective government

Values contextualized to the New Brunswick experience

local representation:

- approximately one-third of NB'ers live in unincorporated districts. Their MLAs take on many roles normally assumed by municipal councilors.
- Election of MLAs from counties until 1970. We heard that movement to single member districts provided better local representation.

Local representation:

- “In our view, it is important for voters to have a strong tie with their representatives, and this is facilitated through relatively small electoral districts.”
- Multi member districts have the advantage of increasing the likelihood that each local area is represented in government caucus.

Fair representation:

- Multi member districts offer greater possibilities for election of members from under represented groups.
(Only 12 % of NB legislature was female)
- Multi member districts increase the likelihood of non-territorial interests being represented
(election of MLAs not tied to parochial interests)
- Multi member districts ensure major parties have representation from all regions within their elected caucus
- Multi member regions must be crafted to ensure equitable representation of language communities

Equality of the vote:

- Small parties being penalized under SMP,
NDP receiving 10% of the vote and usually one or zero seats
- Too many wasted votes,
1987 – Liberals win 60% of vote and 100% of seats
- Too much ‘regionalized’ partisan representation,
resulting from disproportionality

Effective Government:

- SMP provides stability of majority governments
- Need for a substantial opposition in Legislature

*In four elections between 1987 and 1999
opposition parties received between 40 and 53%
of vote but never more than 20% of seats in the
legislature.*

NB MMP

- A system designed to meet the democratic needs and aspirations of modern New Brunswick



36 single member constituencies

20 party list seats
elected from 4 regions

Aim for proportionality within each region

Two votes – one for preferred party and one for constituency candidate

Province wide threshold of 5 per cent

Closed party lists (BUT prohibition of leader appointment of candidates, require open vote of party membership)

Prohibition on dual candidacies (can't run both in a constituency and on a party list)

- **HOW NB MMP MATCHES UP WITH OUR VALUES**

Local Representation

- * voters continue to elect a single MLA from their local area
- * local communities will likely have representation both in government and opposition caucuses

Fair Representation

- * broad proportionality between votes and seats
- * smaller parties will have a better chance of winning seats IF they have modest province wide support
- * the major parties will have representation from all parts of the province in their caucuses
- * provide opportunity to increase representation from underrepresented groups

Equality of the Vote

- *all votes count equitably in determining election outcomes, the number of wasted votes is minimized
- *with two votes, voters can express their real preferences both for a government and for a local representative
- *election results determined by voters and not the electoral system

Effective Government

- *a more balanced legislature, more opposition members to keep government accountable
- *a more balanced legislature, coupled with minority and coalition governments and legislative reform, may encourage parties to work together more
- *life span of the legislature should continue to average in the 3 year range