



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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The Commission Secretariat
Room CG.07
The Scottish Parliament
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Dear John,

Thursday 26th January 2017

Thank you for your recent briefing in Parliament which my colleagues and I found very helpful.

As discussed, I have enclosed my submission to the commission which I hope you will find useful.

Mike Rumbles MSP

Reforming the voting system to improve the engagement between the Scottish Parliament and the People of Scotland.

The use of the Additional Members System (AMS) for the election of MSPs to the Scottish Parliament has had a significant impact on the way that the Scottish people engage with their Parliament and the Parliamentarians that represent them. Though this system is arguably more democratic than the "First Past the Post" (FPTP) system used for elections to Westminster, it creates two separate problems. Firstly, though equal in status in the Parliament, there is a "two tier" distinction in the public's mind between constituency and regional list MSPs. Secondly, the rural and remote regions are far too large for regional list MSP's to realistically represent the whole area.

There is a perception among some members of the public that Regional List MSPs are frequently said to have obtained their seats by "creeping in the back-door", as most list candidates will also have stood as constituency candidates. This reflects the design of the system to compensate parties that do not win constituency seats, but creates a "second class" MSP as far as many people are concerned. Many constituents will approach their constituency MSP first as a matter of course and will not consider approaching a regional list MSP when seeking assistance from a Parliamentarian, when either may in theory be approached and both are certainly equally competent. This perception may further lead to conflict between MSPs, where workloads and interests overlap.

Rural Scotland accounts for most of Scotland's land mass and nearly a fifth of its population. As a consequence, the electoral regions of the Scottish Parliament can be vast and unmanageable, with the North East Scotland, South Scotland and Highlands and Islands regions being particularly large. As such, regional members are forced by necessity to concentrate their efforts in particular areas, which is a disservice to many of their constituents.

To resolve these problems, it is necessary to reform the system used to elect MSPs to the Parliament. Elections conducted by Single Transferable Vote (STV) in larger multi-member constituencies without electoral regions, in exactly the same way as Local Authority elections, would address the issues outlined above. Though larger than the conventional constituencies currently elected by FPTP, these multi-member constituencies would be considerably smaller than the current regions and a more reasonable size for MSPs to represent. All members would be elected to the Parliament by the same system and would therefore be on an equal footing in public perception as well as in practice.

Research conducted by Prof. John Curtice on behalf of the Electoral Reform Society Scotland, published in 2013, demonstrated that the public felt more comfortable with the system after its second outing in 2012. STV is about to be used for the third time in local elections in May this year. Prof. Curtice states that STV allows people to express a more nuanced political choice, demonstrating degrees of support as well allowing them to express a preference for one party candidate over another (in situations where each party is running more than one).