

INQUIRY INTO THE 2013 LOCAL AUTHORITY ELECTIONS

Recommendation

We recommend to the Government that it consider amending the Local Electoral Act 2001 to provide a clear mandate to improve the facilitation of participation.

Order of candidates' names on ballot papers

In its 2010 local authority elections inquiry report the Justice and Electoral Committee of the day recommended that the order of candidate names on all ballot papers be completely randomised. Cabinet agreed to defer work on this until after the 2013 elections.

Candidate order is one of the few electoral decisions that must be made by the sitting elected members. If the elected members make no decision, the Local Electoral Act presumes names on ballot papers should be in alphabetical order. The number of local authorities using alphabetical order is declining, however. In 2013, 21 local authorities ordered ballot papers randomly, and 11 used pseudo-random order (determined by lot, with the same order applied to all ballot papers), slightly more in each category than in 2010. The main argument against random order has traditionally been cost. However, New Zealand Post, as the main printer of electoral documents, expects there will be little or no difference in 2016 between the cost of printing lists in alphabetical order and random order. We would like to see candidate names listed randomly. We consider that documents other than ballot papers need not be randomised.

Recommendation

We recommend to the Government that the order of candidate names on all ballot papers in local authority elections be completely randomised.

Multiple voting systems

The existence and effect of multiple voting systems in local elections attracted a large number of submissions, referring particularly to the potential for confusion on the part of voters. All district health board elections are conducted under the single transferable vote (STV) method, where voters rank the candidates in order of preference. Local authorities can choose between the first past the post (FPP) voting system or STV. In 2013, 90 percent of local authorities used FPP in their own elections. Therefore, voting in most local elections involved a combination of FPP and STV. We understand that generally the STV councils have a higher turnout, but the incidence of invalid voting is usually far higher in DHB elections, because people tick their preferred candidates rather than ranking them.

In 2008, the Local Government Commission conducted a post-election survey of voters; 52 percent of the respondents said that having two systems was confusing, while 46 percent said it was not. A large majority of respondents (82 percent) said they would prefer a single system.

We consider that there is potential for confusion where multiple systems are operating.

Voting methods

Some submitters were keen for at least two methods for casting votes (such as postal and booth voting) to be made available, and largely supported the introduction of online voting. There is no statutory restriction on local authorities using a combination of postal and booth voting. Nor is there any prohibition on local authorities placing collection boxes in locations other than voting booths, provided they can guarantee their security. However,