

SUSTAINABLE FUTURE INSTITUTE MEDIA RELEASE: 10 June 2010

Time for parliamentary committee to use modern media.

The Institute is concerned about the procedural limitations surrounding public notifications as evidenced by the lack of media coverage on the invitation for submissions on the Electoral Referendum Bill. Submissions closed today.

The chairperson of the Electoral Legislation Committee invited submissions on the Electoral Referendum Bill via (i) a public notification in New Zealand's major daily newspapers on 28 April 2010 in the public notices section, (ii) a listing on the parliamentary website and (iii) a media release, which may or may not have been published by individual media outlets.

The consultation process for the development and approval of bills is set out in The Cabinet Manual (7.24 to 7.45). The Cabinet Manual states 'effective and appropriate consultation is a key factor in good decision making, good policy, and good legislation' (7.24). Whilst the public have been notified, the Institute believes it is timely for the government to review these procedures in order to align them with today's modern media society, and invite participation across all age groups.

The process above limits the involvement in the policy process of a large section of our contemporary community. Newspaper readership is falling and the parliamentary website is unknown to many, however this Bill will affect all New Zealanders. Wendy McGuinness, the Institute's Chief Executive, says 'I do not believe that notification for public consultation is reaching a wide enough audience to engage with issues of national significance'.

'This Bill is the beginning of an ongoing process, aimed at ensuring we have optimal parliamentary representation in this country. Hence, Government needs to investigate a broad based strategy for public notification across a range of multimedia outlets including social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, that reach more New Zealanders.'

McGuinness thinks that effective representation in Parliament is critical to making this country deliver optimal outcomes for all New Zealanders; 'so let's make sure everyone can be involved in the policy process'.

[ENDS]

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Background to the Electoral Referendum Bill

The Electoral Referendum Bill provides for a referendum on a preferred voting system, to be held in conjunction with the 2011 general election. The referendum will include two questions:

The first will ask 'Should the current MMP voting system be retained?' the second will ask 'If there was a change to another voting system, which voting system would you choose?' A list of four options for alternative voting systems would then be given to choose from. These options would include (i) First Past the Post, (ii) Preferential Voting (iii) Single Transferable Vote and (iv) Supplementary Member.

Relevant Links

Electoral Referendum Bill – First Reading – Parliament New Zealand

http://www.parliament.nz/en-NZ/PB/Debates/Debates/9/6/2/49HansD_20100422_00000733-Electoral-Referendum-Bill-First-Reading.htm

Submissions notification – Electoral Referendum Bill – Parliament New Zealand

http://www.parliament.nz/enNZ/PB/SC/MakeSub/e/c/e/49SCEL_SCF_00DBHOH_BILL9807_1-Electoral-Referendum-Bill.htm

Information on MMP Referendum and Electoral Referendum Bill – Ministry of Justice

<http://www.justice.govt.nz/policy-and-consultation/electoral/mmp-referendum/mmp-referendum>

Campaign for MMP – News – One more week to submit on the MMP referendum bill

<http://www.campaignformmp.org.nz/node/10>

New Zealand Legislation: Bills, Electoral Referendum Bill 128-1 (2010), Government Bill

<http://www.legislation.govt.nz/bill/government/2010/0128/latest/DLM2833513.html>

About the Sustainable Future Institute

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<http://www.sustainablefuture.info/Site/Publications/Submissions.aspx>