

Independent Electoral Review 2023



New Zealand Council Of
Christian Social Services

Tirohanga Whānui | Overview

The New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services (NZCCSS) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Independent Electoral Review.

Kaupapa | Purpose

We fundamentally agree with the majority of recommendations made by this commission. We strongly recommend that consideration is given to addressing the following areas:

Taunakitanga | Recommendations

We raise the following points and recommendations for consideration:

Item One – Voting age change

While this may not on the surface be the most urgent of the recommendations made by the commission, it is one which now has a legal case backing it. The current major parties have signalled no intention to follow the recommendations of both an Independent Electoral Review and a Supreme Court judgement on the democratic rights of citizens of Aotearoa New Zealand, indicating that the fundamental fairness and functionality of democracy holds little importance. While it is unlikely that these major parties would openly describe their position as supportive of discrimination, per the [Supreme Court Judgement](#) this is their position. NZCCSS has previously submitted on this issue, our submission can be found here: [Submission in Support of Lowering the Voting Age](#).

Recommendation Proposal 1: Amend the legislation to allow voting for individuals of 16 years and older.

Item Two – Enfranchisement of Prisoners

Citizens of Aotearoa New Zealand, regardless of their incarceration status should be afforded the right to vote. Incarceration itself is punitive in nature. Removing further rights is an excessive infringement. Prisoners would benefit significantly from political education, as well as an understanding of the structures which have led to the incarceration of many of them.

The ability to vote has the potential to influence the lives of prisoners upon release, beginning a trajectory of political engagement which continues through generations – especially within the Māori community – who we recognise are disproportionately impacted by political and social disenfranchisement.

Recommendation Proposal 2: Amend the Electoral Act to ensure that incarcerated people who are citizens of Aotearoa New Zealand can vote.

Item Three – The one-electorate seat threshold.

The one-electorate seat threshold is inherently undemocratic. It allows for a higher influence within the House of Representatives without having reached the threshold which other parties have. This loophole allows for political gamesmanship where major parties can abandon an electorate to ensure a coalition partner is available if necessary. Within our MMP electoral system the equal access to voting power is integral to a fair democracy, and it is imperative that parties are all playing by the same rules.

Recommendation Proposal 3: Abolish the one-electorate seat threshold.

Item Four – Overhang seats

As described in the Review itself, the abolishment of the one-electorate seat rule would allow for a simplification of the rules in regard to overhang seats. These seats are not necessary where parties in the House of Representatives all enter under the same electoral rules.

Recommendation Proposal 4: We suggest the removal of overhang seats.

Item Five – A lowered threshold

The current threshold of 5% is too high to allow MMP to function at its most effective. MMP is structured to allow for more diverse perspectives, in contrast to the two-party system which governs many democracies. Where a two-party system comes to dominate politics, even with the option of voting for a smaller party which is more representative of their beliefs, voters often find themselves compelled to vote for the most representative of the two major parties in order to not “waste” their vote.

A lower percentage threshold further reinforces voters to vote according to their beliefs, as there is a higher chance that smaller parties will make entry into parliament. While entry to parliament will not guarantee a party will affect major change, it leaves open this possibility in the future, and allows this party to voice its opinions and platforms within parliament.

Recommendation Proposal 5: Reduce the party vote threshold to 3.5%, as recommended in the review.

Item Six – Protection of Māori Voting Rights

The ability of Māori to decide which voting roll they exercise their rights through is imperative to their engagement with the electoral system. Increasing the flexibility of this system to include changes of roll at any point, including on election day, would further facilitate this. Aotearoa New Zealand has an obligation to enact the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, including equitable access to the formation of government. NZCCSS agrees with the Electoral Commission that the ability to enrol on and change to or from Māori rolls should extend up to and include Election Day.

Recommendation Proposal 6: Extend the ability to enrol on and switch to or from the Māori roll up to and including Election Day.

Ko wai tātou | Who we are

NZCCSS has six foundation members; the Anglican Care Network, Baptist Churches of New Zealand, Catholic Social Services, Presbyterian Support and the Methodist and Salvation Army Churches.

Through this membership, NZCCSS represents over 250 organisations providing a range of social support services across Aotearoa. We believe in working to achieve a just and compassionate society for all, through our commitment to our faith and Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Further details on NZCCSS can be found on our website www.nzccss.org.nz.

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