



*FAIR VOTE COMOX VALLEY* ✓

**Submission to the B.C. Public Consultations for a  
Referendum on Proportional Representation**

# ***Who we are***

Fair Vote Comox Valley is a group of civic-minded professionals, retirees and community members committed to replacing B.C.'s antiquated First-Past-the-Post system with a new, proportional system customized to meet the needs of B.C. citizens.

The membership of our local organization is diverse. Some of us have been involved in political campaigns and B.C.'s previous two referendums to change our electoral system. For others, this is a new experience. Some of us are members of political parties and others are not. Many of us come from different walks of life and have different perspectives. But we all share the belief that B.C.'s First-Past-the-Post system no longer serves citizens' best interests.

## ***Our recommendations***

We propose three key recommendations we urge the provincial government to adopt as B.C. prepares for a referendum on proportional representation.

- 1) **Ballot Question:** The ballot should include a specific question requesting a public mandate to adopt proportional voting that is linked to a transparent public process to choose a specific proportional system.
- 2) **Timing of Referendum:** The referendum campaign should not overlap with the fall municipal election campaigns.
- 3) **Campaign Finance and Third-Party Advertising Regulations:** The referendum should be subject to regulations that limit the influence of big money.

## ***Detailed Recommendations***

### **Ballot Question**

Fair Vote Comox Valley believes the referendum ballot should include a specific question requesting a public mandate to adopt a proportional voting system, and we believe that question should be clearly linked to a subsequent, transparent process to choose a specific voting system.

B.C. voters should be asked to express support either for a) the province's proposal to move to a system of proportional representation for our provincial elections, or b) the continued use of our single member plurality system. We believe this will ensure that the question is as fair

as possible and goes directly to the core choice B.C. voters will have to make.

We concur with the recommendation of Make Every Voter Count Society that in order to reassure voters that a new electoral system is chosen and implemented with the public interest foremost in mind, the referendum question should include a preamble.

This preamble should be explicitly printed on the ballot and commit the province to delegate to Elections BC, or a similar independent entity, responsibility for a post-referendum system selection process that would involve significant public input and engagement. The preamble should specify that any system selected in this process must satisfy certain key criteria:

- Proportionality
- Preservation of local regional representation
- No reduction of seats in any region of the province
- The ability to vote directly for specific candidates

The preamble should also rule out system options that few, if any, in B.C. are advocating for, such as closed lists systems, province-wide lists, non-proportional systems, etc.

Voters also deserve reassurance that the selected system can be refined in the future to ensure that it is working in the public interest. The referendum should specify that the selected system would be subject to a mandatory review process led by Elections BC and a confirmatory referendum after a minimum of two election cycles under the new system.

### **Timing of Referendum**

Fair Vote Comox Valley believes a fair, transparent referendum should avoid conflict with the fall municipal elections. The period during which the mail-in ballots are available to the public should not overlap with the campaign period for the fall's municipal elections, which runs from September 22 to October 20. We favour a referendum close date prior to September 22, or a mail-out date that takes place after October 20.

### **Campaign Finance and Third-Party Advertising Regulations**

Fair Vote Comox supports making sure that big money does not influence either side of the referendum question. Rather, we want as much opportunity as possible for a vigorous, honest public debate on the issue. We urge the province to take steps so that this debate truly belongs to the people of the Comox Valley, Vancouver Island and the rest of B.C., and not to special interests.

In addition to ensuring that proponent and opponent campaigns are subject to the same

campaign financial disclosures as they would be in a provincial election, we support:

1. The creation of one umbrella proponent group and one umbrella opponent group, each of which would be funded by a maximum public contribution of \$500,000;
2. An allowance for each group to raise \$500,000 in additional funds from individual contributors to a maximum of \$1200 per person, in line with the spirit of Bill 3; and
3. Equal time and space obligations for public debate in the media.

Fair Vote Comox Valley also concurs with the recommendations of Make Every Voter Count Society on this matter, specifically that:

- Campaign finance and third-party advertising regulations should take effect the same day the legislature adopts the referendum question(s).
- Proponent and opponent groups should be subject to spending limits of no more than \$0.50 per registered elector.
- Third-party advertisers should, at a minimum, be subject during the campaign period to the existing regulations in force for non-electoral organizations during a provincial election.
- Provincial political parties, as private entities with a clear vested interest in the referendum question, should not be permitted to dominate the campaign discourse. We therefore recommend that political parties should be subject to either: third party advertising regulations that apply to other organizations who participate in the referendum; or the same regulations applied to proponent and opponent campaigns.

Thank you for taking the time to read our submission.

Sincerely,

Fair Vote Comox Valley steering committee