

# Convention on the Constitution report on Dáil electoral system submitted to Government

## Supports Changing PR-STV, Larger Dáil Constituencies and External Ministers

**27<sup>th</sup> August, 2013:** The Convention on the Constitution has today formally laid the report of its fourth plenary meeting on Dáil electoral reform in the library of the Houses of the Oireachtas.

The Convention met over two weekends in May and June to report recommendations to the Houses of the Oireachtas on possible amendments to the Dáil electoral system.

After a wide-ranging and rigorous discussion over four separate days, members were presented with a number of choices.

On the first question, members were offered the option of retaining the Proportional Representation – Single Transferable Vote (PR-STV) system in its current form, changing the current PR-STV system or adopting a new Mixed-Member Proportional Representation (MMP) system (like they use in New Zealand and Germany).

On this question, Convention members decided to recommend to:

- Change existing PR-STV system - 54% YES, 45% NO, 1% no opinion
- Replace our existing PR-STV system with MMP – 79% NO, 20% YES, 1% no opinion

Delegates were then asked what form amendments to the current PR-STV system should take. Following discussion and member feedback over the process, delegates were given options of voting that the amendments be made to:

- Allow for larger constituencies ( with the smallest being 5 seaters )
- Changing the alphabetical order of candidates on the ballot paper

On these matters the Convention decided:

- On larger constituencies – 86% YES, 13% NO, 1% no opinion
- On alphabetical order on ballot paper – 67% YES, 16% NO, 17% no opinion

On the matter of changing the number of members of Dail Eireann, the Convention decided:

- YES – 37%

- NO – 59%
- No opinion – 4%

In regard to other electoral system related changes to be considered, the Convention voted as follows:

- The establishment of an Electoral Commission – 97% YES, 1% NO, 1% No opinion
- Extending polling hours / days – 89% YES, 11% NO
- Great access to postal voting - 91% YES, 8% NO, 1% No opinion
- Improving the accuracy of the electoral register – 100% YES
- The introduction of methods to improve voter turnout – 95% YES, 0% NO, 5% No opinion

On the matter of non-parliamentary Members of Government, the Convention voted as follows:

- Should Dáil Eireann be permitted to appoint non-members of the Oireachtas as Ministers? – 55% YES, 42% NO, 3% No opinion
- Should members of the Dáil be required to resign their seats as following appointment to Ministerial office? – 59% YES, 40% NO, 1% No opinion

On the question as to whether ‘direct democracy’ (i.e. citizens initiatives ) with adequate safeguards be introduced, the Convention voted as follows:

- 83% - YES
- 16% - NO
- 1% - No opinion

In that the Convention votes in favour of direct democracy, it was decided that this would apply as follows:

Placing items on, or removing them from, the legislative agenda – 80% YES, 19% NO, 1% No opinion

Requiring constitutional referenda to be held – 78% YES, 17% NO, 4% No opinion

The results of the ballot followed four days of debate on the Dáil electoral system where members of the Convention heard expert analysis of the current system, international systems and detailed evidence of the implications of various electoral system amendments.

The Government has committed to responding within four months of the report being published by way of a debate in the Oireachtas and if it agrees with the recommendation to amend the Constitution, to include a timeframe for a referendum.

Chairman of the Constitutional Convention, Mr Tom Arnold, said:

“The Convention decided decisively in favour of keeping the current PRSTV electoral system but in a modified form, in particular by increasing the size of constituencies and changing from the alphabetical order of candidates on the ballot paper. Members also recommended a series of measures to improve voter turnout at elections, from the establishment of an Electoral Commission to the an enhanced education programme in schools. I believe these results give a very clear message of the regard in which the current PR-STV electoral system is held but equally of a strong demand for changes to it, as part of a more substantial agenda of political reform.”

**ENDS**