

Public Presentation to
Commission on Electoral Reform
Promoting the Centralization of Population

Submitted by Philip D. MacDonald
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Cardigan, Prince Edward Island

My name is Philip MacDonald. I am here as an individual. I ask that you bare with me; as a university student I may think more with my heart than with my head.

I would like to congratulate Judge John McQuaid and the commission for their efforts and very well considered distribution of the Island's electoral districts. I would like to thank you for your open consultation with the public throughout the entire process. It showed a true recognition for the importance that these reforms are to the Island political landscape.

We've heard from a number of individuals all sharing their views on the commission's report. We've all heard the guidelines, legislation, and legal interpretations which the commission followed and many of us have reviewed previous consultation, editorials, and the differing opinions shared by Islanders.

It is quite obvious that the reforms are more easily accepted by urban Prince Edward Island but are drawing hesitation from rural Prince Edward Island. Whether we use the justification that we should have an equal number of electors for each district or that the numbers should be out trumped by regional communities of interest, there is no definitive answer. The true importance for the reform's results is that Prince Edward Island be governed properly as a whole and not sacrificed by interests of individual districts.

What I am concerned about is what is happening to the population patterns of Prince Edward Island and the effects that the proposed reforms will have on these population shifts. Islanders are migrating to the larger urban centers from rural regions of Prince Edward Island. The population is becoming increasingly centralized. This growth of urban Prince Edward Island has drawn much demand for greater representation in government from these areas. Whereas rural Prince Edward Island is losing its residents and power in governance.

The problem that I see is that the proposed reforms, by following the demand of urban growth patterns, will only promote further centralization in the future.

The commission has done a great service in determining the boundaries of our provincial electoral districts. I understand that it is not the commission's mission to deter population trends but I hope that our government will take consideration in sustaining and developing our rural areas through political presence.

Our rights as voters is to proper and equal representation in government, to ensure the greater good of Prince Edward Island as a whole. I believe that encouraging settlement in our rural areas is of vital importance to the province and I fear that allowing our government to centralize around urban regions is a great threat to the long-term sustainability of rural Prince Edward Island and therefore not in the best interest of the province.

The commission has decided that population carries a more significant weight in distributing electoral boundaries than we are accustomed to; rural Prince Edward Island has been beaten by the numbers. With the reforms currently proposed by the commission over on quarter of the government will be elected from one municipality.

The government has an open window to alter the commission's distribution if they wish to consider the effects that the boundaries will have on our population patterns.

There is flexibility for our government and this commission where they are able to manipulate the districts as a means of slowing this centralization and possibly reinvigorate the industries and settlement of rural Prince Edward Island.

As long as we use our current electoral system it is impossible to definitively determine if one's vote has been diluted in comparison to another. We elect members of our legislature not to benefit our district, but to effectively govern the Island as a whole. By electing more rural members I believe we can better combat centralization and promote the development of our less fortunate regions.

I urge that when these reforms are considered in our provincial legislature that our government consider changes to benefit, not rural Prince Edward Island, but the province as a whole in deterring current population trends by creating greater presence in our rural regions than is offered in this report. I ask that when completing your report less attention be paid to the population numbers and more on the interests of communities.

Thank you.