



The purpose of the Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) is to communicate and consult with women in Scotland to influence public policy. Through the Convention's policy work, round table and celebratory events the SWC strives to have contact with women and relevant organisations. The SWC aims to provide an effective way of consulting with a diverse range of women in Scotland.

The Scottish Women's Convention has a network of over 300,000 women from relevant organisations throughout Scotland.

This paper provides the Scottish Women's Convention response to comment on "Extending the Women Only Shortlist."

To the Government Equalities Office:

The Scottish Women's Convention wholeheartedly endorse the proposal to extend the use of women only shortlists for a further 15 years. The provisions under the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002 allow political parties to use positive action measures in order to reduce the inequality in the numbers of men and women selected as Parliamentary candidates.

The SWC believe equality for women will only be achieved by protecting and enhancing the opportunity for women to influence and direct policy at the seat of government. Furthermore we agree with research which suggest that progress on women's representation cannot be achieved without some form of mechanism or intervention.¹ Women Only Shortlists provide just such a mechanism and it is therefore imperative the legislation is prolonged.

¹ Child, S et al (2005) Women at the Top 2005: Changing Numbers, Changing Politics? London: Hansard Society

The SWC also welcomes the proposed action being progressed well in advance of the 2015 expiry date of the current measures. It must be hoped that in this period the proposals will encourage all political parties seeking to be elected at local, national and European levels that endorsing the use of women only shortlists is the only fair and just way to ensure that decision making structures reflect the gender diversity of the population.

In this response paper we do not intend to put forward a plethora of statistical evidence which highlights the continued under-representation of women in government. This has been researched, corroborated and published efficiently by many reputable organisations over the years. Nevertheless, in 2001 it was highlighted that in the last 80 years, there had been a total of 4,500 MPs at Westminster - only 240 of them were women.² This is a dismal illustration of the level of inequity women are faced with in order to obtain anything approaching a level of parity of representation.

Despite gains in the 1997 elections which added significantly to the above total of women, the ratio of women's representation in Westminster remains at approx 1 in 5. The SWC believe this would undoubtedly decrease further if proposals were not enacted to ensure women short list options were extended beyond 2015.

Today of 645 MP's only 125 are women. Progress is worryingly slow therefore protection of long term strategies for positive action, such as this proposal offers, are needed in order to effect the level of representation women are entitled to.

Statistics show that in recent elections/by-elections the proportion of female representation is marginally down. At the current rate of progress and without more action the EOC suggested it will take up to 200 years and another 40 elections to achieve an equal number of women in Parliament.³ It could therefore be argued that the extension of measures to promote positive action should be sought for much longer than another 15 years. There should also be supporting structures systematically put in place which recognise and tackle the barriers to women's full participation in public and political life in order to redress this unacceptable level of representation.

² Wednesday, 8 August, 2001 BBC News

³ Sex and Power : Who runs Britain 2007 EOC

The SWC would therefore support:

- Restructuring of Parliamentary hours to accommodate the responsibilities of family life.
- Capacity building initiatives to increase women's confidence so that they may progress through all levels of public participation.
- Initiatives focused on black and minority ethnic women which challenges the critical lack of representation in public life by these women.
- Party commitment to women only short lists must be demonstrated by allowing women equal access to all constituencies including targeted and safe seats.
- Continued consideration and development of alternative voting systems other than "first past the post" which often discourages female political participation.

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