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Submission to the Justice Select Committee on the Electoral Amendment Bill 152-1

Introduction

1. The National Council of Women of New Zealand, Te Kaunihera Wāhine o Aotearoa (NCWNZ) is an umbrella group representing around 60 affiliated organisations and 200 individual members. Collectively our reach is over 200,000 with many of our membership organisations representing all genders. NCWNZ has 13 branches across the country.
2. NCWNZ's vision is a gender equal New Zealand and research shows we will be better off socially and economically if we are gender equal. Through research, discussion and action, NCWNZ in partnership with others, seeks to realise its vision of gender equality because it is a basic human right.
3. This submission has been prepared by the NCWNZ and the Parliamentary Watch Committee after consultation with the membership of NCWNZ.

Part 1: Amendments relating to donations and loans

Subpart 1—Amendments relating to donations

4. NCWNZ members support proposals to increase transparency and place a limit on donation amounts. These changes are seen as important for ensuring confidence in the people and parties voted to represent us in Parliament and maintaining Aotearoa New Zealand's reputation for little corruption.
5. Some members suggest proposals could be strengthened, such as requiring every transaction to a political party to be recorded and publicising information about donations in national newspapers, not just in government documents. There is concern about donations from the same business being broken down into smaller donations in order to try to avoid attention to the large amounts coming from particular business interests.

Part 2: Other amendments

Subpart 1—Amendments relating to disqualification from registration of persons outside New Zealand

6. NCWNZ members largely support *Clause 19 - Section 80 amended (Disqualifications for registrations)*, although many members believe the 3-year absence limit should be removed entirely rather than extended. Members believe that there are many reasons why people may not be able to return home, including financial barriers and COVID-19 travel restrictions, and that to deny a citizen the right to vote in their home country because they have not been in it is to deny their rights as a citizen.
7. Aotearoa New Zealand citizens who are overseas will maintain a vested interest in voting on government policy here for a range of reasons, including that they have family here, investments and assets here, are paying tax or a student loan, and that they plan to return to live here in the future. The connections sustained by expatriate New Zealanders can positively impact our foreign relationships and trade. Continuing to recognise people as voters will facilitate these connections and make it more likely people will return to fill vacant positions and contribute to Aotearoa New Zealand's development. This is important given how many highly skilled New Zealanders emigrate.
8. Members support that this change would facilitate greater participation in democracy. They believe that those with experience living overseas may provide a wider viewpoint on some issues being considered during an election.
9. Members acknowledge that there is a risk that people living overseas for an extended period may not be informed about the current political environment in Aotearoa New Zealand and that increased overseas voting will lead to increased administrative costs. However, it is believed that advances in digital technology minimise these risks and that anyone who wishes to vote is likely to be engaged in, and informed about, New Zealand politics. It is also noted that most other countries do not have residency requirements to vote.

Conclusions

10. In general, NCWNZ supports the Electoral Amendment Bill 152-1. Members are supportive of the extension of absence limits for citizens who are overseas, and measures to increase transparency and place a limit on donation amounts.



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