

CHAPTER 4 : THE NUMBER OF MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

Term of reference 3: Whether the number of members of Parliament should be increased, and, if so, how many additional members of Parliament there should be.

Introduction

4.1 This term of reference is concerned with the number of members which Parliament, our central democratic institution, needs to carry out its various functions.

4.2 After fluctuating in the 19th century, the size of the House was fixed in 1900 at 80 (including 4 Maori seats) and remained at this level until 1969. Until 1950, when the Legislative Council was abolished, there were also about 40 Legislative Councillors participating in parliamentary and Government business. A change to the Electoral Act in 1965 fixed the number of South Island seats at 25 and provided for the number of North Island seats to be determined in proportion. The size of the House has since increased gradually following each 5-yearly redistribution, by 4(1969), 3(1972), 5(1978) and 3(1984). It will be 97 (including 4 Maori seats) at the next election. Of those who made submissions to us on this topic, some proposed a further increase but many preferred the present size or even a reduction. The Labour and New Zealand Parties favoured an increase to 121 and 125 respectively, while the National and Democratic Parties supported the present formula, which gradually increases the number of members.

FUNCTIONS OF PARLIAMENTARIANS

4.3 The number of MPs needed should be assessed in relation to the various individual and collective functions of MPs and the House of Representatives:

- (a) to represent constituents;
- (b) to represent the nation as a whole;
- (c) to provide an effective Government; and
- (d) to enact legislation and scrutinise the actions of the executive.

(a) MPs as representatives of their constituents

4.4 In their capacity as constituency representatives, MPs are expected to act as advocates of local interests. They are frequently approached by organisations such as local bodies, hospital and school boards, local industries and pressure groups, who seek support in their lobbying of central Government or its agencies. If an organisation covers more than 1 constituency, the MPs concerned may work together to co-ordinate their approach to Government. Besides acting for local groups, MPs receive many requests for help from individual constituents. In some cases, the MP will need to do no more than refer the constituent

to the appropriate person or body. In others, further action will be necessary, such as an inquiry to the local branch of a Government department or a submission to the Minister. The level of such "citizens advice" work varies from member to member and constituency to constituency. The demand for help with personal problems is generally greatest from those in lower socio-economic groups while the more affluent constituents are more ready to approach their MPs on behalf of interest groups.

4.5 New Zealand MPs give particular attention to this aspect of their work. Almost all MPs maintain homes in their constituencies and return to them regularly each weekend, usually travelling home some time on Friday and returning to Wellington on Tuesday morning. They often hold "surgeries" or "clinics" where their constituents may see them; they also attend a wide range of local functions, such as school fairs or bowling club openings, as a means of keeping in touch with their constituents. They have recently been given half-time secretaries in their electorates to help them with constituency work. The evidence of MPs' diaries made available to us indicates that MPs on average spend about a third of their time on constituency-related work when Parliament is in session and more during adjournments. New MPs, or those with a precarious hold on their seats, may spend more than half their time attending to their constituencies even when Parliament is in session.

4.6 MPs made it clear to us that they place great value on constituency work as a means both of keeping in touch with public opinion and of providing tangible benefits for particular groups and individuals. Some find it the most rewarding aspect of their work. Research shows that New Zealanders have a degree of personal acquaintance and contact with their MPs which is high by international standards. Moreover, the public appears to have a more positive attitude to MPs as local representatives than it does to them collectively as parliamentarians. Thus constituency work has a wider value in keeping MPs close to the people they represent and in cementing public support for the parliamentary system.

4.7 Cabinet Ministers have a different routine from other MPs. They have houses provided for them in Wellington and their Mondays, which for other MPs are left free for constituency work, are taken up with Cabinet meetings and departmental responsibilities. The pressure of their heavy workload means that Ministers spend considerably less time on constituency business than other MPs. However, most Ministers visit their constituencies regularly and attempt to keep in touch with individual constituents and local interests. The fact that they have superior secretarial and other support services and are particularly well-known and well-established in their constituencies helps to compensate for the relative lack of time they can give to constituency work.

4.8 The suggestion is sometimes made that New Zealand should consider adopting the Swedish and Norwegian practice of appointing substitute MPs (chosen from candidates who were unsuccessful in the election) to take over the constituency role of Cabinet Ministers. Such a

practice has the advantage of allowing Ministers to concentrate more single-mindedly on their portfolios while their constituents retain the services of a backbench MP. However, this would require a sharper distinction between the executive role of Ministers and the parliamentary role of other MPs than is usual in the Westminster version of parliamentary Government. Moreover, as we have said, constituency work is highly valued by all MPs including Ministers, as a means of keeping in touch with public opinion. Giving up constituency duties is unlikely to be welcomed either by Cabinet Ministers themselves or by their constituents. We therefore do not recommend the introduction of this practice at this time. (For related reasons, we are not in favour of appointing Ministers from outside the House (para.4.15)). If, however, pressure on Ministers continues to mount, the introduction of substitute MPs could be kept in mind as one possible solution to this problem.

4.9 The present number of MPs is, in our opinion, generally sufficient to fulfil the constituency function adequately. While a substantial increase in the number of MPs might improve the service to constituents, we do not consider that more MPs are needed for this purpose. As far as the General seats are concerned, the best way to help MPs with constituency work is to increase the level and quality of support services both in Parliament and in constituencies. In the case of the separate Maori seats, however, their present size makes it difficult for the Maori members to service them adequately, even with an improvement in support services. For as long as separate Maori representation is retained, an increase in the size of the House, if it led to a corresponding increase in the number of Maori seats, would be of advantage to Maori voters.

(b) Representing the nation

4.10 One of the collective functions of the House is to be representative of the nation in the sense of expressing and reflecting the various characteristics, values and opinions in the community. In terms of their own characteristics of gender, age and social background, New Zealand MPs are untypical and "unrepresentative" of the community as a whole. The supporters of minor political parties are also under-represented. An enlarged House should provide some additional variety and diversity of opinion and occupational background in MPs. But we do not consider that size is a major factor in the unrepresentative nature of the present House. Some of the factors relate to societal influences which lie outside our terms of reference. Insofar, however, as under-representation of women and ethnic minorities depends on political institutions, the nature of the electoral system and the method of candidate selection are the most significant factors (paras. 9.26 and 9.27). Systems of proportional representation in which parties offer lists of candidates are more likely to provide a balanced composition of the House than are systems with single-member electorates (para. 2.128). While we continue to have a plurality system, a larger House could possibly lead to more minority party

representation, but only in the unlikely case that support for such parties becomes geographically very much more concentrated than it has been to date. A larger House would not significantly reduce the likelihood of a relatively small lead in votes producing a larger lead in seats (or of a major party gaining fewer votes but more seats than the other). These problems are inherent in the plurality system and can be remedied only by reform of that system. Finally, we mention that an increase in the number of women and minority representatives in Parliament will make the need for an improved Parliamentary timetable and better facilities all the greater. Over recent years steps have been taken in relation to both of these and we expect improvements to continue. In particular, facilities should be considerably improved as a result of the forthcoming rebuilding programme.

(c) Provision of an effective Government

4.11 The major function of the House as a whole is to provide a Government which has the support of a majority of members and which is capable of fulfilling the wide range of functions which the electorate expects Governments to perform. The constitutional role of the MPs who are Ministers is to introduce policy and exercise control, individually and collectively, over the various Government departments and agencies, thereby making them responsive to the wishes and interests of the electorate. In practice, however, as is well known, the size and complexity of the functions of central Government make the task of ministerial direction and control extremely difficult. One critical factor is whether there are enough Ministers to cover the wide range of Government activities. Another is whether individual Ministers, as the people's elected representatives, have the ability to run their departments or whether they will allow their departments to run them.

4.12 Reflecting the growth in State activity, the number of Cabinet Ministers has gradually increased over the century, from 7 in 1900 to 20 in the last 2 Governments. Nonetheless, in spite of this increase, it is our view that the pressure of work on some Ministers, especially senior Ministers, is too high, and leaves them with insufficient time to concentrate on their major policy-making and executive functions. Many Ministers carry a number of separate portfolios which divides their time and energies. Time is also spent in standing in for other Ministers who are away. We think a good case can be made for a further increase in the total number of Ministers, though without enlarging Cabinet itself which, at 20, may, if anything, be too large for effective deliberation. At present, some New Zealand Ministers are assisted by a few Under-Secretaries but the number and functions of Under-Secretaries fluctuate, and they do not have the status or clear executive responsibility which Ministers have. Other Westminster systems, such as the UK and Australia, have a category of Ministers who are not in the Cabinet. We consider that replacing Under-Secretaries by a larger number of Ministers who are not in Cabinet would help to relieve the burden on Cabinet Ministers. Such Ministers could take over

responsibility for some of the less important portfolios. They could supplement the Cabinet Ministers' supervision of their major departments and deputise for them in some of the myriad duties which deflect senior Cabinet Ministers from their main functions. Ministers who are not in Cabinet could also take over from Cabinet Ministers some of the time-consuming tasks connected with deputising for other Ministers.

4.13 Whatever the number of Ministers, it is important that their individual ability should be as great as possible. Given the present size of Cabinet, the size of the House severely restricts the range of choice of which MPs are to be Ministers. The majority parliamentary party must provide from its ranks a Cabinet of about 19-20 Ministers and a number of Under-Secretaries as well as a Speaker, a Chairman of Committees, and 2 Whips. (This can be compared with a Cabinet of 7 from a similarly sized Parliament at the turn of the century.) The size of the Government caucus may be less than 50 (the lowest in recent years was 47 in 1981-4, the highest, 56, in 1984). As newly elected members are not normally considered for Cabinet office, there is often little choice about who should be in Cabinet. Research indicates that 3 out of every 4 MPs who survive for more than 1 term and whose party wins office can expect to reach either ministerial office or some other senior post such as Under-Secretary, Speaker, Chairman of Committees or Whip. An enlarged House would provide a greater pool of talent from which the parties could draw.

4.14 If Parliament increased in size and a smaller proportion of the caucus enjoyed ministerial office, the average ability of Cabinet Ministers could certainly be expected to increase to some extent. It should be remembered, however, that executive ability is not the only criterion for Cabinet selection. There is also the need to provide a balanced Cabinet, with Ministers from the various regions of the country as well as women and Maori Ministers. Ministerial office may also be a reward for long service or for loyalty to the party or its leader and there will always be some less able Ministers preferred for such reasons. We see other factors, such as the attractiveness of a political career to able people, as also being important in improving the overall calibre of Cabinet Ministers. One of our reasons for advocating MMP is that a nationwide party list would allow the parties to include a wider range of candidates of proven ability. Nonetheless, a larger governing caucus must provide a wider range of choice of Ministers and must, at the very least, reduce the chances that mere length of service will virtually guarantee appointment as a Minister. We therefore attach weight to the argument for increasing the House in order to enlarge the pool of potential ministerial talent. If the actual number of Ministers is increased, there would be a greater need for an increase in the pool of talent from which they are chosen.

4.15 One other method of strengthening the executive ability of Cabinets is to allow the appointment of Ministers who have not been elected to Parliament. This is an established practice in a number of European democracies where Ministers do not need to be MPs and in

the United Kingdom, where nominated Ministers may be brought in from the House of Lords. This is certainly a means of bringing people of proven executive and administrative ability into government. However, Ministers who were appointed without being elected could be at a disadvantage in New Zealand. In our system, Ministers, individually as well as collectively, are recognised as elected by, and responsible to, the electorate. They also have a strong involvement with their party and the development of its policies. As a result they have a status and authority which helps them to impose their parties' policies and views on Government departments and the other public agencies and institutions with which they must deal. In the New Zealand context, we think it is debatable whether Ministers who were not elected, however great their personal ability, would receive sufficient acceptance and support to be effective. Those European countries where this practice is readily accepted appear to make a sharper division between Parliament and the executive than New Zealanders do and to have a more managerial approach to government (cf. para. 4.8). We note that the Constitution Bill, at present before the House, reaffirms the principle that Ministers must be elected members of Parliament. We note also that the Government uses a range of other means to engage the ability of specialists to help develop and implement policy. Though the Commission accepts the need to attract able people into Government at all levels, we do not recommend the practice of appointing Ministers who are not elected members of Parliament. Our inclination would be to contemplate such a practice only in the context of wider constitutional changes which lie outside our terms of reference.

(d) Enacting legislation and scrutinising the executive

4.16 The other main functions, or set of functions, of the House concerns its role as legislature. Though executive power and initiative are firmly in the hands of the Cabinet, it must work through Parliament, seeking parliamentary authority for its legislation and funds and answering to Parliament for the administration of its policies. Parliament must therefore provide effective mechanisms whereby the executive is answerable to the electorate and subject to influence from the people it serves. There are 3 main arenas in which these processes of scrutiny and accountability are facilitated, in caucus, parliamentary select committees and the debating chamber.

4.17 **Caucus.** Ministers, both individually and collectively, are subject to many pressures from the community through working with their departments and with the great network of interest groups which surrounds the operation of Government. Within the context of Parliament, however, the main pressure comes from daily competition with the Opposition and the need for the majority party to maintain its political dominance. In this respect, Ministers are part of their party's parliamentary team, the caucus. Through the caucus and contact with back-benchers, who are closer to the public and less caught up in

departmental administration, the Government is kept in touch with the electors and their concerns.

4.18 The small size of the caucus, it is often suggested, weakens this channel of influence. The members of the Cabinet, together with Under-Secretaries and the Whips, now usually have a majority in caucus. Many Government back-benchers are relatively inexperienced. They can all have reasonable expectations of ministerial office in due course and may therefore be unwilling to damage their career prospects by unpopular disagreements with the party leadership in caucus. For these reasons, it is claimed, Cabinet Ministers easily dominate their own caucus and Government back-benchers have little influence. If there were more back-benchers, it is argued, they would not be so easily overridden. They would have more votes in caucus; some of them might prefer to forgo any prospect of a ministerial career and become, from choice, independent and outspoken back-benchers, a role more developed in other, larger Parliaments and relatively rare in New Zealand.

4.19 Experience from other parliamentary democracies with larger governing parties, such as Australia and the United Kingdom, suggests that while this argument carries some weight, it needs to be treated with some caution. Parliaments in those countries certainly exhibit much more open divisions between Ministers and back-benchers, but open opposition may be as much a symptom of impotence among back-benchers whose views are being ignored by their colleagues in Cabinet. The close personal relations between members of a New Zealand caucus, often cemented during years in opposition when there is significantly less difference in status or role between "front-bencher" and "back-bencher", mean that Cabinet Ministers usually have a very good understanding of what their caucus colleagues will tolerate. They will, therefore, often anticipate the possible reactions of caucus in such a way that the actual process of consultation may become a formality.

4.20 In general, we consider the intimacy of New Zealand caucuses helps rather than hinders the responsiveness of Governments to the public. On the other hand, we recognise that intimacy may stifle discussion and the airing of alternative views. Some enlargement of the governing caucus would not unduly threaten the beneficial effects of intimacy, while it could provide greater encouragement for back-benchers to adopt a more independent role and thus increase their influence on party and public policy.

4.21 Another respect in which an increase in back-benchers could well help to strengthen the power of both the Government and the opposition caucuses, is by enhancing the work of caucus committees. The system of caucus committees has developed rapidly over the last 2 decades as back-benchers have become increasingly interested in investigating policy alternatives. These committees are serviced by the party research units and allow back-benchers to examine aspects of policy from their own party's point of view. They can thus provide an additional political input to help counteract the official views of public

servants and their departments. In this way, Government back-benchers can help to check executive power, not so much by opposing their party colleagues in Cabinet as by helping them to impose a political, and therefore electorally accountable, slant on Government policy. At the same time, Opposition caucuses can develop alternative policies which are likely to appeal to the electorate and which will form the basis of their party's policy when it returns to power. On both sides, caucus committees can supplement and strengthen the system of select committees by making individual members more informed about particular areas of Government.

4.22 Parliamentary select committees. The quality of legislation and the degree of public scrutiny of executive action is affected to a major extent by the performance of parliamentary select committees. We place considerable weight on the need to strengthen the select committee system as the best means, consistent with our constitutional tradition, of providing a parliamentary check on executive and administrative power. The increased activity of select committees over the last 15 or so years is, in our view, the most significant recent development in the role of Parliament and provides the most powerful argument for an increase in its size. A generation ago, very few Bills were referred for further consideration by a select committee. In the early 1960s the Public Expenditure Committee began to enhance Parliament's scrutiny of Government spending. Standing Orders now require all Bills other than money Bills to be considered by a select committee and public submissions are routinely heard. Moreover, the committees have recently been given authority not only to scrutinise legislation and consider estimates but also to conduct their own investigations into Government administration. In order to develop specialisation and expertise among committee members, each MP is now in general a member of only 1 committee instead of sitting on several as previously. At present, Ministers do not sit on committees, a measure designed to encourage the committees' independence from the executive. The research and clerical support for select committees has also been increased. The committees are thus better able to gain access to Government information and help inform both MPs and the interested public. Indeed it is becoming increasingly apparent that the possession of information is of crucial importance to the Ministers and back-benchers of the governing party, the members of the Opposition and the public. Power and information are closely linked and select committees can greatly enhance the flow of information both from and to Government. They are becoming increasingly important organs of political scrutiny and public information, distanced to a certain extent from Government, though the Government caucus still retains a majority on each committee.

4.23 The size of the House has not, however, kept pace with these developments. Though significant improvements have been achieved, the committee system is still hampered by lack of members. In our view,

an increase in the number of MPs is necessary before the committees can realise the full potential of their expanded role.

4.24 There are 13 subject committees, each covering a major area or areas of Government activity: commerce and marketing; communications and road safety; education and science; finance and expenditure; foreign affairs and defence; Government administration; internal affairs and local government; justice and law reform; labour; Maori affairs; planning and development; primary production; social services. There are also several special purpose committees, for example, on Regulations, Standing Orders and Electoral Law. There are many fewer committees than portfolios, and some committees, such as Foreign Affairs and Defence, Social Services, Communications, and Road Safety deal with the activities of at least 2 major departments or Government agencies. They are unable to cover their areas adequately. In particular, they have little or no time left, after examining legislation, for the important work of investigating administration. There is therefore a case for more subject committees.

4.25 The number of members on each of the 13 subject committees is 5, 3 from the Government and 2 from the Opposition. There is also a case, in our view, for increasing the size of at least some committees, from 5 to 7. Having 7 members instead of 5 would encourage greater specialisation among individual members and allow the committees to develop more continuity and collective experience. It would also lessen the disruption caused when individual members are unavoidably absent and their place taken by substitutes from the same side of the House.

4.26 There are problems, too, in giving representation to a third party on a 5-person committee. As the Government must maintain its majority, a third party must take 1 of the 2 Opposition places, thus reducing the major opposition party to only 1 place. At present, the 2 Democrat MPs are on 2 special purpose committees which still have more than 5 members—Electoral Law and Standing Orders—and have been effectively barred from the major policy committees. Any change to the electoral system which tends to increase the likelihood of minority party representation would increase the pressure to enlarge the size of select committees.

4.27 There is a particularly strong case for increasing the size of those committees which cover a number of important departments. The size of committees is, however, related to their number. Having more committees would lessen the need to have larger committees. Conversely, having larger committees may lessen the need to have more committees. In either case, however, there is a clear need for more MPs. (The number of MPs is not, of course, the only critical factor in the performance of select committees. It will also be necessary to continue to improve the level of parliamentary support services, such as research staff, and to encourage participation of interest groups and the public.)

4.28 We therefore consider that the full potential of the select committee system cannot be achieved without an increase in the number of MPs. At present, the committees are unable to develop the

specialised expertise or to find the time necessary adequately to examine Government legislation, scrutinise expenditure and investigate the administration of Government departments. Much has been achieved within the present system as it has evolved over the last decade or more. But if there were more MPs with collectively more time and specialised knowledge, a great deal more could be achieved.

4.29 **Parliamentary debates.** As far as debates are concerned, the average New Zealand MP is called on to speak in Parliament much more frequently and on a wider range of topics than his or her counterpart in most other parliamentary democracies. The quality of debate accordingly tends to suffer. Admittedly, the number of MPs is not the only factor affecting the standard of debate. It can be argued that the total time spent on debates is too long, leading to tedious and repetitious argument and reducing the time available for the important work of committees. Moreover, the traditions of the House encourage MPs to adopt a style of debate which concentrates on partisan attack and what often appears to the public as little more than petty point-scoring. Having more MPs would not necessarily make debates less partisan; it would, however, enable MPs to be better prepared and informed when they speak. An expanded role for select committees would provide opportunities for MPs to specialise more in particular areas of Government policy and administration. Thus, when they came to speak in debate they would be able to draw on more specialist knowledge and experience. In this way, parliamentary debates would better be able to fulfil their functions of calling Government to account and informing the public. At the same time, the public reputation of Parliament could be enhanced.

CONCLUSIONS

4.30 We support an increase in the number of MPs. Our principal reasons for making this recommendation are to make the system of parliamentary committees more effective, to enlarge the pool of ministerial talent and to allow for an increase in the number of Ministers. We also consider that an enlarged House could provide more independence in caucus and improve the quality of parliamentary debate. We have reached this conclusion independently of our consideration of the electoral system in general, and we support an increase in the number of MPs whether or not the present plurality system remains.

4.31 The cost of having more MPs must be carefully weighed. The Clerk of the House has provided the Commission with a qualified estimate of the direct cost of each additional member. On the basis of projected expenditure for 1986/87 this cost would be about \$142,000 per MP per year. The figure covers salary and allowances, postal and travel costs, secretarial salaries, and electorate office expenses. Not included are indirect costs such as those that would arise from the need for extra support staff and for accommodation within Parliament Buildings. As to accommodation, plans are under way already to deal

with the problem of cramped conditions in the present buildings. These involve a new building to house Parliament temporarily, while the existing Parliament House is strengthened and refurbished. Additional space for more MPs could be incorporated.

4.32 If the case for a larger House is established, how large an increase should be contemplated? This is not a question which can be answered precisely. To achieve the maximum benefit it would be desirable to increase the number of Ministers, including non-Cabinet Ministers, to about 30 (an increase of about 4), to increase the size of about half of the committees from 5 to 7 members (a further 12-14 MPs) and add about another 4 committees (about 24 further MPs). This suggests an ideal size for the House of about 140 members. Such a size would provide a Government caucus of at least 70, which would enlarge the pool of ministerial talent and increase the independence of the back-benchers.

4.33 However, we recognise that such an increase is likely to face some public resistance and we have therefore sought to establish a level of increase which would be more acceptable to the public but which would provide at least some of the advantages we have outlined. We have decided to recommend an increase to 120, an increase of 23 members in the House after the 1987 election. Such an addition would enlarge the pool of talent to a certain extent and allow the appointment of some non-Cabinet Ministers. It should be sufficient to increase several of the select committees from 5 to 7 members (or, if preferred, to establish more 5-person committees). In terms of the costs given above, the additional annual cost of 23 more MPs would be \$3,266,000. There would also be extra costs if some of the additional members were appointed as Ministers and to cover support staff and accommodation. Nonetheless, the additional cost would not be excessive, given the present total annual expenditure on Parliament, including Ministers' salaries and services, of \$50,091,000 (1986/87 estimates).

4.34 We must stress that, in our view, an increase to 120 is the minimum necessary to help Parliament meet the demands that will be made of it during the next generation. We also stress that our MPs have a vital role in our system of government and are not an extravagant charge on the taxpayer. We would hope that, if an increase to 120 MPs is implemented and its benefits recognised, the need for further enlargement would become apparent. At that stage, Parliament could conduct a further review of its size, either itself or through an independent Commission, and an increase of up to or closer to our preferred size of about 140 could be implemented.

4.35 If an increase to 120 MPs is agreed to, the present procedure of adjusting the total number of seats at each 5-yearly distribution could be discontinued. This procedure was introduced to arrest the progressive decline in the number of South Island seats and is strongly supported by South Island residents (cf para 5.41). It is, however, an unsatisfactory method of determining the total size of the House. If the House is increased to 120 it would be possible for the seats to be

divided among the 2 Islands in proportion to their respective populations. If the plurality system remains, the number of South Island seats, based on present population figures, would then rise to about 30. The Commission would not wish to see the long-standing guarantees of representation for the South Island in any way reduced. Thus, the Electoral Act should require that the present number of seats (25) should remain as a guaranteed minimum number of seats for the South Island. That is, if the proportion of 120 seats due to the South Island fell below 25, the total size of the House should be increased to allow the South Island to have 25 seats with the North Island seats being of similar population size (i.e. a return to the present system). On present population trends, this position will not be reached until about 2010, by which time a further increase in the total size of the House may well have been implemented. It is important to note that these provisions would not change the balance of representation between the North and South Islands, which would remain proportional to population as it is now. Moreover, the number of South Island representatives would initially increase above the present level and could not fall below it.

4.36 If the proposed MMP system is introduced, the number of constituency seats will be 60. Again, the present guarantee accorded the South Island in relation to the North Island should continue. An appropriate guaranteed minimum number for the South Island is 15, i.e. a quarter of the constituency seats. (In compiling their national lists, parties would also aim to maintain a regional balance; there would therefore be additional South Island MPs returned via the lists.) Given the basic proportional character of MMP and the greater tolerance in boundary-drawing permissible, the South Island population could fall significantly below a quarter of the total population while retaining a quarter of the constituency seats. However, once the South Island's relative population fell below a point where it justified 15 seats on a $\pm 10\%$ tolerance, it would be necessary to increase the total number of constituency seats and therefore the total size of the House accordingly. This position could be reached about the turn of the century.

4.37 It is worth noting that if our House were increased to 120, or 140, it would still be small in comparison with Parliaments in similar countries.

While a number of countries listed in Table 4.1 have less favourable ratios of population to parliamentary seats, none have Lower Houses of smaller total size. This supports the conclusion that the New Zealand House may have enough MPs to service constituency work adequately, but would benefit from an increase in members to perform the collective parliamentary functions of the House as a whole, particularly provision of an effective Government, enacting legislation and scrutinising the executive. The comparative difference in size becomes even more striking when it is noted that several of the countries listed in Table 4.1 have federal systems with an additional tier of state Parliaments and state representatives and some have an Upper House as an additional source of ministerial and parliamentary personnel. By international

standards, then, we are committing fewer people and other resources to our central democratic institution, Parliament. This could be a source of satisfaction if Parliament were clearly fulfilling all its functions adequately. But when it has deficiencies which could be remedied by an increase in members the economy must be considered false.

Table 4.1: Sizes of some democratic Parliaments in relation to population

	No. seats in Lower House	No. seats in Upper House	Estimated population (millions)	Population per Lower House seat	Overall population per seat
Australia*	148	76	15.5 (1984)	104,730	69,196
Canada*	282	104	24.1 (1984)	85,461	62,435
Denmark	179	-	5.1 (1984)	28,492	28,492
Finland	200	-	4.9 (1984)	24,500	24,500
West Germany ¹	496	41	59.4 (1984)	119,758	110,615
Republic of Ireland	166	60	3.5 (1984)	21,084	15,487
New Zealand	97	-	3.3 (1986)	34,021	34,021
Norway	157	-	4.2 (1985)	26,752	26,752
Sweden	349	-	8.3 (1984)	23,782	23,782
United Kingdom	650	1178 ²	58.1 (1984)	89,385	31,783

Source: *The Europa Year Book 1986*, London, 1986.

*Federation

¹Excluding West Berlin

²All those entitled to take their seats in the House of Lords, though many do not do so or do not take an active part in proceedings.

Recommendations:

- **8.** The number of members of Parliament should be increased to 120 (para. 4.33).
- **9.** The minimum number of members for the South Island should be set at 25 so long as plurality continues, or 15 under the Mixed Member Proportional system (paras. 4.35 and 4.36).