

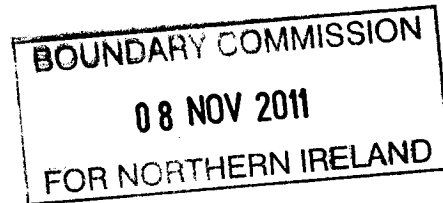
7th November 2011

Liz Benson
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Dear Liz Benson

Re: Sixth Periodical Review of Parliamentary Constituencies Publication of Provisional Proposals Report

WSN is a consultee under the provisions of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which is to assess the impact of policy on specific groups regarding equality. WSN comments on policy development in the area of equality between men and women, while contributing to consultations in other areas. With regard to gender issues, the following are key points of policy the absence of which indicates a disadvantage to women.

Given this review of parliamentary, we wonder why the under-presentation of women is not tackled as part of this? There is a major deficit of women MPs, especially in Northern Ireland with women sitting in only two out of its 18 Westminster seats. This is a major democratic deficit considering women constitute more than half of the population, which includes constituting more than half of other disadvantaged groups, indicating multiple disadvantage for women in those groups.

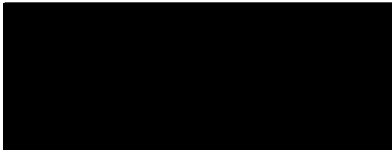
The process of boundary change, together with the reduction of seats, has the potential to affect the number of women in parliament. For example, if established MPs lose their seats through the reduction it could increase pressure on the selection of candidates for winnable seats. This is likely to reduce the opportunity to increase the number of new female MPs, therefore the bill must include measures to assess the impact of all reform processes and policies on the number of women in parliament.

Women's under-representation in all aspects of life is clearly seen on Page 16 of the Provisional Proposals Report where out of a total of 9 posts held within the Boundary Commission Membership and Constitution, only 1 is filled by a woman.

Women continue to be poorly represented in Northern Ireland's post conflict society and on gender justice grounds it is not acceptable for women's needs to be marginalised. The Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002 allows political parties to take special measures to tackle the deficit in women's representation within their parties, yet parties refuse to take advantage of this measure. Positive action measures must be introduced to improve the balance of female and male MPs.

If you require any further information please get in touch.

Yours sincerely



Ellen Finlay
Policy & Research Co-ordinator