

Scotland Bill

Women 50:50 Campaign Scotland

Who we are

Women 5050 is a campaigning group established in September 2014. We are a cross party group with representation from the Scottish Labour Party, The SNP and The Scottish Green Party on our steering group, as well as a number of feminist activists and women's organisations.

The purpose of Women 5050, is to campaign for fair representation of women in the Scottish Parliament, in councils and on public boards. We believe that whilst voluntary mechanisms of gender balancing have made some progress, this progress has been too slow. We are campaigning for legislation to be introduced which would require political parties to field at least 50% women candidates in Scottish Parliament and Local Authority elections.

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the collation of evidence by the Devolution Committee.

Political Representation

As a single issue campaign, our focus on the Scotland Bill is the devolution of measures relating to quotas and gender balancing of public representation.

Currently, there are 36% women in the Scottish Parliament, *down from 40% in 1999* [1]. There are 24% women in councils across Scotland and 35% women on public boards. Four public boards have no women represented on them and 10% have fewer than 20% women members [2].

Whilst gender and women's social justice has become prominent feature of Scottish politics, there is a need for the narrative to be matched with action.

The United Nation's report into women's representation found that out of the 59 countries where elections had been held in 2011, 17 countries used quotas. Women's representation in these countries was 11% higher than those failing to use positive measures [3]. Almost 60% of parliaments across the world use some form of quota mechanism to enable more women to enter politics and readdress the imbalance in representation of women [4]. Indeed, the 1981 United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Bill recommended quotas and special measures allowing countries to take action on the underrepresentation of women.

Evidence has repeatedly shown that the presence of women in parliament has a positive "role model" effect on encouraging women to become politically engaged and can have a positive effect on leading new policy debates and pushing gender equality further up the political agenda [5].

Clause 32 – Equalities

In the original Smith Commission agreement, it was stated that the ability to introduce gender quotas to public boards (and beyond) would be devolved to the Scottish Parliament. The current reading of the Scotland Bill does not accurately reflect this original agreement. Our reading of the Smith Commission agreement was to enable Scotland to take a decision on moving beyond voluntary quotas and introducing compulsory gender quotas to public boards. We believe that the Scotland Bill should more accurately and clearly reflect the original agreements regarding quotas on public board, and must go a step further by fully devolving the ability to introduce quotas for women (and protected characteristics) across all public representation (public boards, the Scottish Parliament and local authorities). We believe it is imperative to devolve this ability to enable Scotland to have a full debate on its implementation and take action on women's underrepresentation. The Equality Act 2010 already allows for temporary special measures for parties to implement all women shortlists until 2030. We believe that a strengthened extension of this should be devolved, allowing for the Scottish Parliament to introduce legislation for gender quota, without contravening equalities legislation We are calling for Clause 32 to clearly include the full devolution of the ability to introduce and legislate on gender quotas (and of protected characteristics) across all levels of public representation.

1. Democratic Audit (September 2013)
2. Scottish Government; Women on Board (April 2014)
3. UN Report on Women Political Representation (March 2012)
4. Quota Project – Country by Country Overview
5. Lovenduski, J & Norris, P (2003). Westminster Women; The Politics of Presence