

Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill Remaining Stages

1 and 2 November 2010

Please note that this briefing paper comments on certain aspects of the Bill, or amendments, which the Commission believes raise significant issues of workability or policy. The note does not comment on every amendment tabled, and the absence of comment on an amendment does not imply that we support it.

PART 1 - VOTING SYSTEM FOR PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

Clause 1 – Referendum on the alternative vote system

Clause 1 of the Bill specifies that a referendum on the voting system for elections to the UK Parliament shall be held on 5 May 2011.

In our 22 July 2010 statement on the proposal to hold a UK-wide referendum on 5 May 2011 we highlighted a number of practical risks to the successful conduct of the scheduled elections and the referendum which would need to be managed. In particular we said that:

- The legal framework for the referendum must make provision for formal combination of the referendum poll with the scheduled elections, including establishing clearly which rules would apply in relation to any combined polls, so that the voting process is as straightforward as possible for voters and those who will administer the polls.

Clause 4 and Schedules 5-8 – Combination of Polls

Clause 4 and **Schedules 5, 6, 7** and **8** of the Bill contain the necessary provisions for the combination of the referendum poll with the scheduled elections. We are satisfied that the technical issues we have identified with these provisions to date have been addressed by the Government.

The Government has tabled a series of amendments to Schedules 5, 6, 7 and 8 to reflect relevant changes to the election conduct rules made by the revised conduct Orders for the May 2011 elections to the Scottish Parliament, National Assembly for Wales and Northern Ireland Assembly and local councils in Northern Ireland, which have been laid before Parliament. We welcome these amendments which seek to ensure that the combination provisions are accurate and workable.

Schedules 5, 6, 7 and 8 are very detailed and as our preparations for the referendum continue, we may identify further omissions or technical issues with the legislation that we will highlight to Government and Parliament as appropriate during the passage of the Bill.

Further information

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