

Q&As - Changes to election broadcasting

Why are changes being made to election broadcasting?

Change to the opening and closing election broadcasts has been called for by the Justice and Electoral Select Committee, following its routine inquiry into the 2014 General Election.

Broadcasters Television NZ and Radio NZ have also expressed support for changes to the current requirements for opening and closing addresses.

What are the changes that are being made?

The Broadcasting (Election Programmes and Election Advertising) Amendment Bill removes the current requirement for political parties' opening and closing addresses, which are broadcast at the start and at the end of the election period. It removes the requirement for TVNZ and Radio NZ to provide time for these.

Political parties will be able to purchase equivalent broadcasting time. While not in the Bill, the Government has agreed to an increase of \$0.750m in the funding which parties already receive for election broadcasting. This offsets the removal of around two hours of television time, and two hours of radio time, for the opening and closing addresses.

Parties will now also be able to spend their funding allocation on advertising in online media, rather than only on television and radio. This reflects that voters increasingly get their information through the Internet, rather than through traditional broadcasting. Prior to this, parties were able to spend their own money on online advertising and they remain able to do this on top of the funding provided by the Electoral Commission.

Why are the opening and closing addresses being removed?

The Justice and Electoral Select Committee recommended reform to the opening and closing addresses.

The addresses are an outdated format. The law currently requires these to be broadcast at prime-time, as two blocks which usually take around an hour each. This format is losing relevance and is no longer as effective at engaging voters.

When the opening addresses were shown in 2014, TVNZ had 25% fewer viewers than they would usually get, on average, in that time slot.

These addresses, which are often much longer than short 'ads' are also expensive for parties to produce. This means money used in their production cannot be used by political parties for development other, more effective, types of advertising.

Why is the funding increasing by \$0.750m?

Removing opening and closing addresses means in total parties lose around two hours of airtime on television and on radio. To offset this, the Government will increase the amount of funding that parties already receive, for their other television and radio election advertising. This is to ensure registered political parties can still communicate their messages and policies effectively at election time.

This increases funding from \$2.855m to \$3.605m.

Will parties still be able to broadcast their messages at election time?

Yes, political parties that receive an allocation of funding will still be able to use that money to broadcast on television and radio as the current regime allows. The Bill will also give these parties the flexibility to use their allocation on online media.

By removing compulsory addresses, parties will be able to make better use of their allocation to place advertising in more relevant, engaging ways to communicate to prospective voters.

What limits will there be on election advertising and broadcasting?

The amount of money given to political parties will remain the limit that they can spend on advertising on television and radio, and they can only do so in the election period (roughly the month before an election).

Parties will continue to be able to spend their own money on production costs and on advertising in media other than television and radio, including online advertising.

While the money parties receive for advertising will now be able to be used online, it is strictly for election advertising and will not be able to be used on other campaign expenses such as travel.

The Bill does not make changes to other election campaigning and expenditure rules and safeguards, such as expenditure limits, which all remain in place.

What else does the Bill do?

While the policy changes in this Bill are limited to those discussed above, all of Part 6 of the Broadcasting Act 1989 has been updated to use modern language and make the law more accessible and readable. Although it will look different, these other aspects of the law will still have the same meaning.

What was the Justice and Electoral Inquiry into the 2014 General Election?

The Justice and Electoral Committee carries out a routine inquiry after every general election to look into the delivery of the election and determine any potential improvements that can be made. The Committee then recommends changes. One of

the recommendations to the Government, included in their report on the 2014 General Election, was to consider reforming the current opening and closing address requirements.