



GORDON COPELAND
Independent MP

30 April 2008

Geoff Bascand
Government Statistician
PO Box 2922
Wellington

Dear Mr Bascand,

Re: Citizens Initiated Referenda – Petition of Sheryl Savill

I refer to your letter dated 23 April 2008 to Mary Harris, Clerk of the House of Representatives, in relation to the above petition.

I have lent my support to this petition from its inception and, together with my wife, have personally participated in the collection of the 324,511 signatures which were submitted to the Clerk's Office at Parliament at the end of February.

In any event, I seek your explanation concerning the conclusion outlined in your letter that "the number of valid signatures in the petition is about 267,000". I do so for the following reasons:

1. In accordance with the Citizens Initiated Referenda Act 1993, a sample size of 1/11th was decided upon, which meant in practice that each 11th signature was selected for checking, by the Electoral Enrolment Centre. As you know, that turned out to be 29,501 signatures out of the total count of 324,511.
2. Of those signatures, the Electoral Enrolment Centre ascertained, in accordance with your letter, that 25,754 were valid i.e. that they were the signatures of people who are registered on the Electoral Roll.
3. Accordingly, if that sample was representative of the whole (which is presumably the reason for checking each 11th signature in the first place) the number of valid signatures would have been: 25,754 x 11 which equals 283,294. Since the number required to trigger a referendum is 285,027, this indicates a shortfall of just 1,733 signatures.
4. However you have said that your best estimate is just 267,000 valid signatures or a shortfall of 18,027; 16,294 **greater** than the 1/11th sample would indicate.

Accordingly I now seek from you an explanation of why the signatures of 16,294 voters, who are validly enrolled on the Electoral Roll, have been set aside?

This is a matter of vital importance to the functioning of our democracy. Every eligible elector who has signed the petition deserves to have their signature counted and therefore signatures should only be discounted in circumstances where they are **clearly** invalid. For example Section 15(2) of the Act states that signatures are not to be rejected even if the full name, address, or date of birth requirements are not complied with. This surely indicates that Parliament meant that an effort should be made to **validate** as many signatures as possible.

By contrast, your calculations seem to proceed from the other direction. Although the Electoral Enrolment Centre has put in the many many hours of work to check each individual signature against the Electoral Roll, valid signatures are nevertheless set aside from the final count through an 'estimator'.

I also believe that as a matter of principle, a check on the count needs to be made available, in a transparent manner, to the public.

Please bear in mind that literally thousands of hours have been put in to the collection of the 324,511 signatures and the determination, unless it is accurate, verifiable and transparent, risks nullifying that enormous effort. Such an outcome would, in my view, be contrary to the intent of the Citizens Initiated Referenda Act 1993. Section 19(4) requests you to assist the Clerk of the House to make her determination and to go beyond that, however well intentioned, is surely a supererogation?

With all good wishes,

Yours sincerely,

Gordon F. Copeland M.P.