



**PUBLIC PETITION NO.**

**PE01514**

### **Name of petitioner**

Norman Bonney

### **Petition title**

Making Time for Reflection representative of all beliefs

### **Petition summary**

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to ensure that each year its weekly Time for Reflection fulfils its ambition of being representative of the diversity of religion and belief in Scotland by limiting representatives of religious denominations to one half of the presentations and ensuring that twenty five per cent of all sessions are presented by atheists.

### **Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition**

I have published research which demonstrates that Time for Reflection over-represents Christian denominations and other religious traditions and under-represents the 37 per cent of the population that has no religion according to the 2011 census as well as the 26 per cent of Scots who are atheists who 'do not believe in god or gods or any higher spiritual power'.

This research entitled 'Proportional Prayers: Time for Reflection in the Scottish Parliament' was published in the academic journal *Parliamentary Affairs* in 2013 and can be accessed via the link in the following blog;  
<http://www.normanbonneypublications.blogspot.com>

The findings of this research, and its relevance to the conduct of Time for Reflection, has been drawn to the attention of MSPs but no corrective action has heretofore been implemented.

2011 census results, and other recent social survey findings, indicate the need for changes in current practice by the Parliament since the pattern of contributions is so discrepant with the pattern of beliefs of the Scottish people.

### **Petition background information**

Motion S1M-131 approved on 9 September 1999 proposed that Time for Reflection 'will follow a pattern based on the balance of beliefs in Scotland'.

However, contributions since then have heavily over-represented religious denominations. Although only 56 per cent of Scots indicated in the 2011 census that they had a religion, the respective contributions by religious denominations to Time for Reflection in the previous three parliamentary sessions from 1999 to 2011 were 98 per

cent, 87 per cent and 86 per cent.

The 37 per cent of the population that recorded that it had no religion in the 2011 census have conversely been greatly under-represented.

And while only a handful of atheists and humanists have made contributions to Time for Reflection in the over fourteen years existence of the Parliament, a recent 2013 survey for the Westminster Faith Debates indicates that 49 per cent of Scots state that 'I would not describe myself, or my values and beliefs, as spiritual or religious'.

Also, 26 per cent of Scots stated in this survey that there is 'definitely not a god or some higher power':

[http://cdn.yougov.com/cumulus\\_uploads/document/mm7go89rhi/YouGov-University%20of%20Lancaster-Survey-Results-Faith-Matters-130130.pdf](http://cdn.yougov.com/cumulus_uploads/document/mm7go89rhi/YouGov-University%20of%20Lancaster-Survey-Results-Faith-Matters-130130.pdf) (p1 and p4)

### Unique web address

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/GettingInvolved/Petitions/equaltimeforreflection>

### Related information for petition

The most detailed study of Time for Reflection can be accessed by clicking the appropriate link for the article entitled 'Proportional Prayers: Time for Reflection in the Scottish Parliament' at:

<http://www.normanbonneypublications.blogspot.co.uk>

Detailed evidence on the 2011 Scotland census findings on religion can be found at British Religion in Numbers at:

<http://www.brin.ac.uk/news/2013/scottish-religious-census-2011/>

Social survey information on the religious, spiritual and moral beliefs of Scots (2013):

[http://cdn.yougov.com/cumulus\\_uploads/document/mm7go89rhi/YouGov-University%20of%20Lancaster-Survey-Results-Faith-Matters-130130.pdf](http://cdn.yougov.com/cumulus_uploads/document/mm7go89rhi/YouGov-University%20of%20Lancaster-Survey-Results-Faith-Matters-130130.pdf) (especially pages 1 and 4)

### Do you wish your petition to be hosted on the Parliament's website to collect signatures online?

YES

### How many signatures have you collected so far?

0

### Closing date for collecting signatures online

16 / 04 / 2014

### Comments to stimulate online discussion

Do you think that it is right that the overwhelming number of contributions to Time for Reflection are from religious representatives?

Since the 2011 census showed that only 56 per cent of Scots declared a religious affiliation, and since then the downward trend in attachment to religious denominations

has probably continued, do you think that it is appropriate that representatives of religious denominations in Time for Reflection should be limited to one half of all contributions?

Do you agree that atheists, who compose about one in four of the Scottish population, should get one quarter of the time slots available for Time for Reflection?