

News statement

for immediate release

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Combining polls – the referendum on the Euro and the devolved legislature elections

While The Electoral Commission recognises that a decision on the timing of a referendum on the single European currency is a matter for the Government, it does have concerns about combining it with other major polls in May 2003.

The Commission's primary concern is the interests of the voter. Although there might be a beneficial effect on turnout generally, such a combination would have a number of disadvantages:

- As there may be cross-party campaigning on a fundamental referendum of this sort, this could cause significant confusion amongst the electorate if combined with normal party election campaigning.
- There is a risk that the dominance of the referendum issue would influence other polls to an extent that may compromise the electorate's will in those other polls.
- Not all of the electorate would experience the same conditions for considering a major referendum issue if other polls were conducted in different parts of the UK at the same time.
- The difficulties relating to the application of regulatory controls and of administering a combination of polls, such as those due in May 2003, are considerable.

Referendums on fundamental issues of national importance should be considered in isolation. The Electoral Commission is therefore of the view that a referendum on the single European currency should not be held at the same time as the Parliamentary and local government elections in Scotland, and the Assembly elections in Wales and Northern Ireland due in May 2003.

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Notes to Editors:

1. The Electoral Commission was established on 30 November 2000 by the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act. It is independent of Government and aims to ensure openness and transparency in the financial affairs of Britain's political parties, and to increase public confidence and participation in the democratic process.
2. The Electoral Commission's responsibilities for any referendums are laid out in Part VII of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. For details visit the HMSO website at <http://www.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts2000/20000041.htm>

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