

Martin Bell supports the SNP

Former BBC correspondent and Independent MP Martin Bell said on Monday that he supported the SNP's proposed court action to ensure the final election leaders' debate hosted by the BBC in Birmingham this Thursday is fair and balanced.

Mr Bell, who worked for the Corporation for 35 years and was Independent MP for Tatton from 1997 to 2001, said the exclusion of the SNP and Plaid Cymru from the UK debates was "profoundly unfair", and called on broadcasters to ensure the parties are properly included in any debates in future Westminster election campaigns.

Commenting Mr Bell said

"I believe the election leaders' debates have been a great innovation, and are helping voters engage in the democratic process.

"But at the same time, the exclusion of the SNP and Plaid Cymru has been profoundly unfair to those parties – especially given the way the TV debates are so clearly dominating all media coverage of the election.

"And I believe that in future a better balance will have to be found to make sure that these parties are included and not squeezed out, as they have been in this campaign.

"I support the action being taken by the SNP in relation to the party's proposed legal challenge, as the issue is one of such fundamental democratic importance."

Welcoming Mr Bell's support, SNP Westminster leader Angus Robertson said:

"Martin Bell's backing for our action to ensure Scotland is properly represented in the final UK leaders' debate is extremely welcome.

“As a former senior BBC broadcaster and an Independent MP, his reputation for fair play and impartiality is second to none.

“We want this week’s BBC leaders’ debate in Birmingham to be broadcast across the UK on a fair basis, with Scotland properly represented in line with the Corporation’s duty of fairness, and that is the basis of our planned action at the Court of Session.

“This issue is not just simply about the inclusion of the SNP and Plaid Cymru in these debates but also about the voters of Scotland and Wales being excluded from having the opportunity to question the leaders of the London-based parties.”