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Subject: Boundary submission rural Ireland

Boundary submission

Dear Sirs

I wish to submit as follows in relation to rural Ireland. Please acknowledge receipt so I know you have this.

It is my belief that the huge shift in population in rural Ireland to big towns is producing a situation where rural areas are in danger of losing adequate council representation. It is my belief that urban areas are far easier to service than relatively lightly populated rural districts and as such the commission should consider and recommend representation levels in areas with large urban centres which reflect the +10 permitted variance and rural areas should trend towards the -10 permitted variance. There are a couple of very large districts in the bigger counties where effective representation may mean going beyond the -10 permitted variance, in particular Glenties, Belmullet, Kanturk, Bantry and Skibbereen. In general in these areas the representation seems to be one councillor in each small town and reduction in seat numbers may leave big areas without representation. I think doing this in a limited number of such cases would fit within your "so far as practicable" terms of reference bullet point 1.

I also feel that where rural electoral areas are next to areas with large towns, population should generally be transferred from the area with the large town to the rural district, with the rural district maintaining its representation level. For example in Laois, I think Borris in Ossory should maintain its 6 seats, with a transfer of some areas with about 1,000 people (about .30 of a seat) to the west of Portlaoise town.

I do not think the criteria of "where it may be possible to do so, of aligning local electoral boundaries with Dail constituency boundaries" makes any sense. It is of course always "possible" to do this. For example in Kerry South, the proposed new constituency would have 75,489 population and on an average population per member of 5,179, would justify 14.57 seats, which could be rounded to 15. However this would involve associating Castleisland with Killarney or Dingle, whereas it is more naturally part of North Kerry (I note a local representation saying as much). The Dail Constituencies themselves as proposed do not respect local authority boundaries in the cases of Carlow-Kilkenny (part of Carlow in Wicklow), Clare (part in Limerick City), Cork North Central, Cork South Central, Galway West, Kerry North-West Limerick, Laois Offaly, Limerick City (across 3 areas), Longford Westmeath, Louth, Meath West, Roscommon South Leitrim, Sligo North Leitrim, Tipperary North, Tipperary South, Waterford and Wicklow. When 17 of 31 rural constituencies completely ignore local authority boundaries, it is completely fatuous for the Minister to suggest that any serious cognizance be paid to them in the terms of reference. It is also the case that areas in counties are pushed around with merry abandon in Dail constituency redraws, a feature notable to the north of Cork city. This of course is because Article 16.2 of the constitution requires maintenance of fairly strict ratios, whereas no such requirement applies to local

electoral areas, apart from an arguable general constitutional requirement of fairness. I note that the Dail constituency is third in a hierarchy of criteria with that in bullet 2 and the first mentioned in 3 being clearly more important.

I would indeed submit that where the strictures of Dail boundary constitutional law requires areas to be added to places that are not their natural communities, particular effort should be made to associate those districts with their natural communities for local electoral purposes, for example the areas around St Johnstone in Donegal and Kells in Meath, both in messy arrangements for the next Dail. I should also say that it is not clear from the terms of reference whether it is the current Dail boundaries which apply or those proposed in the report of October 2007, although I presume the latter.

Connaught and Ulster

Galway

In Galway county, the current representation of Connemara, Loughrea and Tuam seems broadly tolerable and subject as below for Loughrea these areas should not be changed. However Ballinasloe is near to justifying only 4 seats and Oranmore justifies slightly more than 5. The lazy solution would be to transfer a seat from one to the other. However I think this leaves Ballinasloe as a rural division rather poorly served and Oranmore, which I suspect is a much easier area to service is perhaps slightly overrepresented for a largely more urban type of area.

I would accordingly suggest addressing three existing anomalies, being the inclusion of Portumna in Loughrea when a lot of its hinterland (Eyrecourt/Kiltormer) is in Ballinasloe, the transfer of Headford to Tuam and an attempt to address the fact that Athenry is currently split three ways by including it with Oranmore electoral area. This would leave Ballinasloe with 5 seats adding Portumna (2030 pop) and Killimor (pop 702) and a number of smaller local DED's. Loughrea also with 5 (loss of Portumna area and also Athenry (population 4,042) and adjacent area. The net result would be an Oranmore area with 6 seats. Tuam's ratio would improve with Headford (1349) added.

Leitrim

This is broadly okay except Carrick is nearer 7 seats and Ballinamore nearer 5. Suggest that some of Carrick be moved into Ballinamore (say about 700 population). This would leave each at 6 seats.

Mayo

Again this is broadly okay except for the three seater in Ballinrobe (which is arguably out because of the terms of reference) and the fact that on population Belmullet should lose a seat and Castlebar should gain. I believe however that an exception should be made to the tolerance of 10% for Belmullet as it is an area which is very large and justifies 4 to have proper representation. Ballinrobe is not over large for a three seater and

bits of Claremorris also being a 4 seat area and the southern end of Castlebar could produce the additional 4,000 required. I think the only practical solution is to leave it alone. There is some case for transferring rural bits of Castlebar to neighbouring areas, but given that it is predominantly urban, I don't think underrepresentation is a major issue.

Roscommon

This is one of the more difficult challenges as North/West Roscommon as currently configured, seems to be over-represented by a seat, justifying only 11 rather than the existing 12. There is also a 3 seater in Castlerea which is probably not too large in area to survive. I suspect Ballaghaderreen and Castlerea need to be merged to form a 7 seat area. Boyle justifies 4.25 seats but the area near Carrick on Shannon is split and should be put together within Boyle, leaving Boyle with 5 seats. Strokestown, Roscommon and Athlone should retain their current representation but with the boundaries of each drawn further south than they currently are.

Sligo

I don't believe any change is warranted here as all areas are tolerable. I think the Dromore 3 seater is very big by reference to the rest of the county and should be treated as an exception to the general bar on 3 seats. It could be merged with Tobercurry to form a big 7 seater, but that results in a very large area to be serviced.

Cavan

This does not merit much change except that Belturbet has .36 over 4 seats whereas Ballyjamesduff is .45 short of 7 seats. About 1000 population and a seat should move from Belturbet area to Ballyjamesduff. (possibly the Arva area with 900 population)

Donegal

This again is quite a tricky area to deal with. Both Donegal and Glenties at 5.01 and 4.75 proportion respectively are short population for one seat each. They are however very large areas and fairness suggests that they should only lose in the aggregate one seat, with a boundary change between them. If it is feasible I suggest that Glenties should remain the 6 seater (as it is an awful long way from Ardara in south Glenties to Dunfanaghy) but this will require transferring about 3,500 population from Donegal to Glenties (possibly Glencolumkille/Carrick). Inishowen is a self contained area and should get an extra seat taking it to 7. This leaves Letterkenny and the two three seaters. The three seaters are quite neat areas and are in my view entirely justifiable. However if they cannot be maintained the best solution seems to be to put Letterkenny North and Milford together and Letterkenny South and Stranorlar together, with one being 6 and the other being 5. I think comparative underrepresentation in Letterkenny is justified as it is predominantly urban.

Monaghan

No change required except some territory from Monaghan area to be moved into Castleblaney to bring Castleblaney up to the approx 14,000 population

required for five seats.

Leinster

This is the province most affected by a very significant move to urban areas, often resulting in an urban area having population big enough to justify 8 or 9 seats. I think a consistent solution should be found for this across a range of towns and I am not well versed enough to do this. This could be the Mullingar solution (4/4 or 4/5) or transferring people out so that the population justifies 7. Generally I think the commission should favour higher representation in predominantly rural areas and lower representation in big urban centres, which are easier to represent in terms of demand (and also tend to have a local TD or Senator).

Carlow

Both Borris and Muinebeag are under quota for 3 and 5 seats respectively, but as rural areas should retain their level of representation. If it is essential to abolish the Borris three seater (and no where in Carlow could be said to be "disproportionately large"), I suspect making two four seaters in this area of Carlow is the solution. Tullow is fine as is. Carlow urban justifies 8.72 seats, but should be configured around 8 (with some territory going to Muinebeag).

Kildare

There is a good submission by Dr Tony O'Donnell which seems logical. Broadly the areas seem fine as they are, except Naas is overpopulated for 5 and Leixlip and Celbridge somewhat under. If the Celbridge 3 seater has to go, amalgamation with Leixlip seems the most appropriate step, arguably with 6 seats resulting. If the Athy 3 seater is to go adding a bit of Naas or Kildare to bring it to 4 seats might be appropriate.

Kilkenny

I think the status quo should be maintained, with some territory currently in Kilkenny being transferred to Ballyragget and to Thomastown to bring them nearer to the average population. The Callan three seater is quite a large and logical area and should be retained. If it is necessary to find a fourth seat, about 2,500 population should be taken out of Kilkenny LEA

(Bennettsbridge area) with the loss of a seat there.

Laois

No change is really required here. Some territory to the west of Portlaoighise area should be transferred to Borris to balance the population. There is a need for some population to move from Port Laoighise/Emo to Mountmellick.

Longford

On strict population Longford LEA should have 8 seats. Drumlish needs a solution as it only has population for 2.56 members. An amalgamation of these two with 10 seats split 5 and 5 (or 6 and 4) might be a desirable solution. Granard and Ballymahon are fine as they are.

Louth

Drogheda justifies 10 seats with the existing Dundalk justifying 11. See comment on large urban areas above. Ardee should stay as is.

Meath

Strict adherence to population trends suggest that each of Slane and Dunshaughlin should gain a seat at the expense of Kells and Trim respectively. Continuing the existing arrangements with movements of people out of Slane (to Kells) and Dunshaughlin (to Trim) might be desirable. I would strongly suggest that the Dail boundary criteria be ignored as the proposed new constituencies do not respect them (with a messy area around Kells) and they are bound to be moveable feasts going forward. The average population in Trim and Kells should be at the lower end.

Offaly

Ferbane and Birr justify one less seat than their current allocation, but this perhaps might be best remedied by taking some population from Tullamore, leaving it at 7. Edenderry area is in order.

Westmeath

On strict population, Mullingar justifies 10, but there is no obvious area that should lose a seat. The Coole 3 seater has no obvious solution for its abolition and is quite a large area to be covered, so its retention may be justified on that ground. The optimum solution may be the current set up but with minor boundary adjustments.

Wexford

Clearly New Ross should lose a seat and Gorey should gain one

Wicklow

No change is needed here. It is very difficult to abolish the Baltinglass three seater as it is a self contained area to the west of the Wicklow mountains, and is quite large, by comparison with the rest of the county.

Munster

Clare

It is clear that West Clare does not in population terms justify the existing allocation of 13 seats. However they are comparatively large areas and need a high allocation of councillors. I would submit that Kilrush should lose one seat with a small transfer of people to Ennistimon, which should remain at 6. Ennis on population justifies 8 seats which is not permissible and probably needs to be split to two 4 seaters. Ennis will be slightly underrepresented but I think this is justifiable in largely urban areas. Killaloe and Scarriff should be joined into one 7 seater to deal with the non allowance of 3 seaters, although I think this solution probably won't be helpful to representation in Scarriff.

Cork

As this is the most difficult county, I will deal with it separately.

Kerry

On strict population trends, Killorglin should cede a seat to Killarney and Listowel should cede a seat to Tralee. I would however submit that the fairest solution is to transfer about 2,000 population from Killarney to Killorglin and 2000 from Tralee to Listowel and leave seat allocation intact. It is difficult to see how the Dingle 3 seater can be abolished without substantial redrawing elsewhere. The solution formerly tried I think of having an area running to Castleisland produces an over large district, with the two principal urban centres Dingle and Castleisland being 45 miles apart. The only merit of this (rather dubious) is to align the boundaries to the new redraw of the constituencies. I think Dingle should be retained with 3 seats on the disproportionately large criterion.

Limerick County

Again on population trends, the areas of Bruff and Castleconnell should each gain a seat at the expense of Newcastle and Rathkeale. However in the case of each that would produce 2 8 seaters, which is not permissible with the need to divide each of the areas into two fours. The best solution is a boundary redraw between the areas moving the Newcastle boundary into Rathkeale, the Rathkeale boundary into Bruff and some adjustments between Bruff and Castleconnell. I believe Rathkeale currently goes to the Kerry border, but I think a solution which moves the area around Glin (to be moved to Kerry North/Limerick West) will deprive the relatively sparsely populated area there of council representation so is not desirable.

Tipperary North

Population trends suggest that Nenagh should have 8 seats, with each of the three other areas beneath the population required for their existing allocation. However I think a small transfer of population out of Nenagh so as to rebalance the other areas is the best solution. The 3 seater Borrisokane area is problematic but is quite geographically large. I favour its retention, but if it has to be fixed, it should be fixed by transferring a seat from Nenagh.

Tipperary South

This is one of the few areas where no change is required, except perhaps a small transfer (say 1,200 people) from Cashel to Tipperary to remedy a slight imbalance in those two.

Waterford

The main issue here is dealing with three seaters as both Suir and Kilmacthomas are currently such and Lismore is slightly nearer three than four. I favour retaining Lismore at 4 however. The two three seaters are both justifiable, particularly Suir which unites a lot of sparsely populated rural areas with no significant town along the Tipperary boundary and I fear those areas will lose representation if the two areas are amalgamated. The far less satisfactory solution is to amalgamate the two into a six seater. Tramore on population justifies 7 rather than 6 seats, but I think as a predominantly urban area, it is justifiable to leave it with 6, perhaps with some of it moved into Kilmacthomas. If the logic for retaining the Suir area is accepted, a possible solution is to split Kilmacthomas and Tramore into a 5 and 4 seat area.

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