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Subject: Electoral area boundaries - Co Cork

Submission re electoral boundaries Cork Co Council

It is my submission that Cork needs to be treated on a somewhat different basis than any other county under this review. This is because

1. Cork has the worst example in the country by far (based solely on population) of a significant loss of seats in rural areas and the migration of those seats to big urban centres, which in all other cases affect one or two seats. The average population per member in Cork County is 7,539 and a 10% deviation from this would produce a lower limit of 6,786 and a higher limit of 8,293. I would submit that those areas which are predominantly urban, primarily Blarney and Carrigaline but to a lesser extent Midleton and Bandon should trend towards and perhaps beyond the upper end and those areas which are predominantly rural with small towns, should trend towards and perhaps below the lower end.

2. Cork has an established structure of three areas Cork North, (Fermoy, Mallow and Kanturk), Cork South (Bandon, Blarney, Carrigaline, Macroom and Midleton) and Cork West (Bantry and Skibbereen). These areas are I understand akin to fully functional county councils and should be respected, if possible by each of them retaining their current seat allocation. I suspect that the fact that no one of the three areas has an absolute majority in number of members is a critical issue in terms of how the county is administered and that interfering with this balance will have serious consequences. I believe Cork in this respect has a lot in common with Tipperary, which is formally divided into two councils and the current allocation should be respected to some extent.

Against that background I would submit as follows.

1. The combined population of the current Cork North area is 80,769. This at the lower representational level is about 12 seats. However the areas are very large and in particular the Kanturk area with its mixture of small towns and heavy identification with local councillors merits the retention of the fifth seat. If it is felt necessary to add additional area to justify the retention of the seat complement in this Cork North area, it would be possible to add a string of DED's immediately to the south of this area which are largely within the Boggeragh and Nagle range of mountains

(from Slieveveagh DED to Glenville DED). It is probably better that these largely rural areas be associated with Cork North than be subsumed into largely quasi-urban electoral areas further south. I therefore submit that the area should remain Fermoy 4, Mallow 4 and Kanturk 5 with the possible addition of those DED's.

2. There is clearly a significant lack of population in the current Cork West area to justify its existing complement of 12 seats. However reducing it to 8 or even 7 on the basis of strict application of population criteria would be a savage blow for this very large area. In particular I would strongly submit that the Bantry area should have a high level of representation retained. It is a very long distance from Mizen Head to Allihies or Dursey and three councillors (as suggested by strict population criteria alone) would not be adequate to serve such a far flung area. There is also a serious risk if the area were reduced to three seats that the Beara peninsula with a population of 4,146 would be left without representation, with the more highly populated area around Bantry returning two and the Skull rural area returning 1. Giving Bantry high representation would also eliminate an obvious need to introduce a new 3 seater. The deviation would be more than 10% but I think these are "highly exceptional circumstances". It is also the case that in the past these areas have probably been over represented in accordance with their population. A similar case can be made for Skibbereen.

3. In the predominantly urban districts around Cork city, I would note that the Carrigaline electoral area is too large in population to remain as it is. The clearly logical solution is to move Ballincollig DED with 16,308 people elsewhere. Given that there is a 3 seater in Macroom and that 3 seaters are not allowed, the logical place to move it is to Macroom with the Macroom area being increased by two seats. If some areas to the south of Macroom electoral area, which are more naturally in the hinterland of Bandon are moved there, this could create a 4 seat Macroom area, largely being the villages and towns in the Lee valley, all being on the N22. This also has the advantage of meaning that areas currently in the Cork North West constituency are in the same local authority area. I would submit as stated above that all of these areas should trend towards and perhaps beyond the 8,293 average population. I do not believe it is practicable to achieve fair representation in rural Cork unless that is done.

4. I do not think it is a good idea to follow the Dail constituency boundaries. Two of the five constituencies are already across two local authorities and there have been frequent minor shifts between the others. The scheme proposed does largely observe the pattern of Dail boundaries except that the Bandon area roughly straddles two constituencies.

General

I have made other submissions in which I have argued strongly that natural communities and hinterlands should be kept together and this is clearly the second criteria in your hierarchy of

criteria. It is clear from reading submissions about a number of areas that this is a common concern and comes out in relation to areas as diverse as rural Carlow, Swords, Ballinrobe. In the case

of the Dail, it does not to my mind much matter whether one is in constituency A or B as it is a forum primarily (but not exclusively) for national issues, which are the same wherever you live.

Conversely local authorities deal with the very local issues which are of huge practical impact on an individual level and it is really important to be in the right area with the decision making on

the issues which concern you. This I believe is why this term of reference is so important and I think you must in making your decisions reflect this as far as possible. My own experience in

residents associations tells me that areas which are split for both Dail and local electoral purposes (and have the added burden of being on a county boundary) are disadvantaged and need fair consideration from your committee. You might please draw this paragraph to the attention of the cities committee.

Brendan Heneghan