

**To: The Secretary
Electoral Area Boundary Committee**

Submission on behalf of the Fine Gael Party

1. Committee's Terms of Reference

- 1.1. The Boundary Committee has been asked in the Terms of Reference to review boundaries of local electoral areas (LEAs), with the following objectives:
 - to try to achieve a variance from the average ratio of population to councillor in each council, within the range of +/-10%
 - to draw up areas with urban or neighbourhood focal points
 - to preserve natural communities or the hinterland of population centres
 - where possible, to align LEA boundaries with Dáil Constituency boundaries
 - to establish LEAs returning between 4 and 7 members, with 3 seat areas acceptable in exceptional circumstances
 - to maintain continuity
- 1.2. We suggest that it is actually impossible to meet all of these criteria in every county – and the Committee should accept that some of these requirements will take precedence over others, depending on the local circumstances.
- 1.3. With regard to the number of seats for each area, we suggest that the larger constituencies should be located primarily in urban areas where the population is most dense. Large-scale five/six/seven seat constituencies in rural areas lead to a lower level of active political representation due to the physical size of some constituencies. We contend that smaller constituencies are more appropriate in rural areas, where, by definition, areas are less densely populated.
- 1.4. In addition, whereas previously there was a practice of deliberately establishing areas with both an urban/rural mix – we suggest that this is not necessarily in the public's interest – as the needs and services required by both urban and rural communities frequently differ and an inappropriate mix of areas can lead to the needs of one area dominating the other.
- 1.5. In respect of the 'continuity' argument, we would like to bring to the Committee's attention, the developments which have taken place in terms of organisation and delivery of services by Councils, following enactment of the Local Government Act, 2001. In many cases, structures have been put in place to deliver services on the basis of Area Committees, and whereas individual LEAs may appear to require attention in terms of meeting the various Terms of Reference as stated, the Committee should have due regard to the likely consequences which may ensue, depending on their recommendations – and should put a premium value on the continuity of services to the public.
- 1.6. In relation to the requirement to attempt to follow Dáil Constituency Boundaries, we would assert that the Report of the Constituency Commission to review Dáil and European Constituency Boundaries, as published in October, 2007 should be the basis for any determinations.

And, whereas there has been speculation regarding the possibility of Dáil boundaries being reviewed again, in advance of the next General Election, on foot of publication of preliminary

Census figures, the Committee should note the reply of the Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government to Parliamentary Question Ref. No. 5690/08

“Work is underway on the drafting of the Electoral (Amendment) Bill 2008 which will, *inter alia*, provide for revision of Dáil and European Parliament constituencies in accordance with the recommendations of the Constituency Commission which reported in October 2007.

The Bill will also provide for the establishment of future Constituency Commissions on publication by CSO of the preliminary results in respect of a census of population and for the work of a Commission to be completed following publication of final population data relating to the relevant census.”

1.7. This submission will seek to observe the above Terms of Reference.

2.0 Consideration of issues arising under current boundaries

County	Recommendation
Carlow	<p>Carlow No. 1 is a three seat constituency, and has a variance of -17.3%. Carlow No. 2 has five seats, and a variance of 22.9%. We suggest that territory and a seat be transferred from Carlow No. 2 to Carlow No. 1 – to render two four seat constituencies.</p> <p>It may be necessary to transfer some additional territory to Tullow, to keep within variances, and there could be some knock on effects; however, we would argue that the level of changes required to give Borris a fourth seat would generate significant changes, which are not desirable.</p>
Cavan	<p>Belturbet LEA currently has a variance of -12.7%. We suggest the transfer of a seat from Belturbet to Ballyjamesduff. This would leave Ballyjamesduff at -1.6% and Belturbet at +0.4%.</p>
Clare	<p>Scarriff has three seats, and four LEAs have significant adverse variances – Ennis (26.5%), Ennistymon (-12.0%), Killaloe (11.0%) and Kilrush (-21.2%). Ennis is already a seven seater, and hugely under-represented; suggest transfer of territory from Ennis to Scarriff, and that a seat be transferred from Kilrush to Scarriff; marginal transfers from Ennis to Ennistymon and from Killaloe to Shannon and/or Scarriff to correct variances</p>
Cork	<p>It is difficult to make a detailed submission in this case; in the first instance, we would suggest that the LEAs newly created in 1998 should be allowed continue; following that, the exceptional situation in Carrigaline will have to be addressed, with possible transfers to Bandon and Macroom. Special attention should be given to the areas of Bantry and Skibereen – which, although seriously over-represented, are exceptional, and cover very large geographical areas.</p>
Donegal	<p>Donegal and Glenties are both over-represented, and should each lose a seat, with Inishowen and Stranorlar gaining a seat each. Transfer territory from Letterkenny to Stranorlar, to follow Dáil boundary, and justify the fourth seat. We argue that Milford should remain as is, given the geographically isolated and economically disadvantaged nature of the area.</p>
Galway	<p>Ballinasloe has five seats, but population warrants 4.1; it has a variance of -17.1%. Oranmore, on the other hand, has four seats, population for 5.1, and a variance of 28.2%. Oranmore should gain a seat, at Ballinasloe's expense</p>
Kerry	<p>Dingle is the only three seat LEA in the County – and should remain as such – given its distinct geography; each of the remaining four LEAs has adverse variances; transfer territory from Killarney to Killorglin, and from Tralee to Listowel to regularise variances.</p>
Kildare	<p>Athy is a three seat constituency, and should gain a seat, together with some territory from Naas LEA, which is currently under-represented; it is likely that Celbridge and Leixlip will have to merge, as both areas are over-represented, and the merged area will justify six seats.</p>

County	Recommendation
Kilkenny	Kilkenny is under-represented, but is already a seven seater – so it will have to lose territory; however, it is felt that the changes required to bring Callan to four seats would not be justified, and it should remain as is.
Laois	Portlaoise and Mountmellick each have variances, so a limited transfer of territory from Portlaoise to Mountmellick is warranted.
Leitrim	A minor adjustment to the boundary between Ballinamore and Dromhaire to reflect the new Dáil boundary should be sufficient to address the variance in Ballinamore.
Limerick	Bruff is currently under-represented, having population for 7.7 seats, whereas Rathkeale is short of population for its five seats; recommend a transfer from Bruff to Rathkeale, (possibly Adare) with no change in seats. Part of Bruff will also be transferred to Ward 1 in Limerick City. An additional transfer from Castleconnell to Kilmallock would correct adverse variances.
Longford	Drumlish has three seats, and a variance of –14.3% whereas Longford LEA has a similar, but positive variance of 14.3%; suggested that territory be transferred from Longford to Drumlish, and that Longford loses a seat to Drumlish also.
Louth	Drogheda East is the only area with an adverse variance, and we suggest a transfer of territory from Drogheda East to Drogheda West to adjust.
Mayo	Castlebar has surplus population for its current six seats, and should transfer territory to Ballinrobe – which would probably become entitled to a additional seat. However, the source of this additional seat would depend on whatever other transfers are made, and particularly, if Belmullet is to attract additional territory, to retain its four seats.
Meath	The situation in Meath is complicated by the nature of the Dáil boundaries, and the fact that the two constituencies also include parts of neighbouring counties. On current boundaries, Dunshaughlin and Slane should each gain a seat, and Kells could lose one. The second seat would come from Trim, unless there was an adjustment of boundaries between Dunshaughlin and Trim.
Monaghan	Castleblaney has a variance just outside the 10% recommended; it could be tolerated, or addressed by a small transfer of territory from Carrigmacross or Monaghan.
Offaly	Tullamore currently has seven seats, but is under-represented, with a variance of 11.6%; we suggest a transfer territory from Tullamore (Clara?) to Ferbane to bring both areas in line with the acceptable variances; minimal transfer from Ferbane to Birr may be required.
Roscommon	Transfer territory from Roscommon to Athlone, making it a six seater, leaving Roscommon with five seats. Consider merging Castlerea and Ballaghaderreen, to make a six seater (net reduction of one seat) – and adjust boundary between Boyle and Strokestown, to support existing five seats in Boyle.
Sligo	Dromore has three seats, but all other areas meet criteria as they stand; recommend retention of Dromore as is, in the interest of continuity, and given exceptional economic circumstances, and geographical isolation.
Tipperary NR	Borrisokane has three seats, and a variance of –13.2%; Nenagh has too much population for its existing seven seats, and Thurles has 6 seats, with population for 5.5. Recommend that a seat be transferred from Thurles to Borrisokane, and territory from Nenagh to Borrisokane to adjust variances as appropriate.
Tipperary SR	Cashel has a variance of 12.4%; suggest transfer of territory from Cashel to Tipperary, with no change in the number of seats in any area,
Waterford	Kilmacthomas and Suir each have three seats; Tramore has six, but population for seven; Lismore has a variance of –12.8%. A number of solutions could be applied, involving the merging of Kilmacthomas and Suir, resulting in either a five or six seat area, depending on whether Tramore retains six, or gains a seat. The Lismore variance can be addressed

by a limited transfer from Dungarvan.

County	Recommendation
Westmeath	Coole currently has three seats, and Mullingar East has a variance of 13.8%; we suggest existing Coole and parts of Mullingar East and West be made into a five seater, with a seven seater being put in place centred on the town of Mullingar.
Wexford	The arrangement of constituencies in Wexford has been established for a long time – and we are not making any proposals for significant change.
Wicklow	Baltinglass is a three seat LEA, and should be retained – given the particular geographical features which separate it from the rest of the County, and given that the other areas appear to meet all criteria.