

John Auld

Good afternoon,

I am writing to you regarding the provisional proposals published recently. I participated actively in the last boundary review, being the only person not connected to a political party to submit a comprehensive set of alternative proposals and I also spoke at the local enquiry in Belfast in 2005.

Firstly I would like to comment on the commission's proposals themselves. By and large, the commission is to be commended for doing a reasonable job within unnecessarily tight constraints. However there are problems with some of the proposals which I would like to comment on. As a general rule, I feel that while electoral equality rules mean that in some cases splitting towns from their immediate hinterland is inevitable, this should be avoided where possible. In the case of Ballymena and Coleraine I believe that a better alternative exists and will outline this in my own submission below.

There are a couple of other issues. Firstly I am very surprised and disappointed that the Commission has scheduled a public enquiry for Monday 10 October. This is far too soon after the publication of the proposals and takes place at a time when people still have the opportunity to submit written representations. In the past the enquiries considered both the Commission's proposals and any counter proposals raised in writing. I appreciate the Commission is working to a tighter schedule this time however it would have been better to wait until the deadline for written representations had expired then hold local enquiries in the spring. This would still allow ample time for the Commission to submit final proposals by the October 2013 deadline.

Finally it seems that the Commission has interpreted its mandate as getting as close to the electoral quota as possible. While this was a requirement in the past it no longer applies. The commission should simply concentrate on producing constituencies within the 70,583 to 80,473 voter thresholds permitted and take advantage of the extra leeway given to them to produce constituencies a little below the 5% limit.

Below I have bolded each of the 16 constituencies which I propose.

#### COMMENTS ON THE COMMISSIONS PROPOSALS

1) **Fermanagh and South Tyrone**: in the 1995 review the commission proposed linking chunks of Omagh district with Fermanagh. This was rejected during local enquiries. Accordingly it would be better to extend the seat to include Coalisland. This would add the three Coalisland wards, plus Washing Bay to the seat. These wards were part of the seat until the 1995 review.

2) **Foyle**: the idea that Banagher and Claudy look more to Limavady than Derry as a regional centre or that Artigarvan looks to Derry rather than Strabane is very dubious.

Since Derry L.G.D. has an electorate of 72,573, the commission should base a constituency on that. That restores the Foyle constituency which existed from 1997-2010.

3) Mid Tyrone / **West Tyrone**: As the Commission has to respect existing local ties under the rules, rather than creating a new seat, they should simply leave the existing seat intact and add whichever wards are necessary to bring it to acceptable size. In this case adding the Cookstown LGD wards of Dunnamore, Oaklands, Pomeroy, Sandholes and the Dungannon LGD wards of Altmore and Donaghmore will produce a seat with an electorate of 71558.

4) Glenshane/**Sperrin**: this seat should be formed from the remainder of Cookstown district, the whole of Magherafelt and Limavady districts and the wards of Garvagh and Kilrea. By constructing the constituency this way, this avoids the separation of Claudy and Banagher from Derry and Agivey, Ringsend, Castlerock and Macosquin from Coleraine, in both cases keeping these six wards with the town which they more naturally look to. Finally on the name of the seat, Glenshane is rather obscure and Sperrin is a name which would probably be recognised by more people.

5) North Antrim: since the largest town is Coleraine, the constituency name is inappropriate. **Coleraine and North Antrim** would be descriptive enough (although Causeway Coast would also be possible.) A second problem is that the Commission's proposals separate Coleraine from its western hinterland. As mentioned above, I believe this seat should be comprised of 20 Coleraine borough wards, the whole of Moyle and Ballymoney districts and two Ballymena council wards. The best options being Glenravel and Craigwarren, as Glenravel has ties with the Glens of Antrim and Craigwarren has good road links with the Ballymoney district.

6) South Antrim/Mid Antrim

The commission's proposals separate Ballymena from much of its hinterland and link it with Larne, a town with which it has rather poor connections. A better solution would be to link Ballymena with Antrim, with which it has good road and rail connections. Accordingly the Commission should create a seat comprising the remainder of Ballymena and the whole of Antrim Borough. This seat would have an electorate of 73,624. While "compass point - county" names are possible I believe that the best name for such a seat would be **Antrim and Ballymena** as these are clearly the largest towns and the focus of the constituency.

As a result, the **East Antrim** constituency would remain intact and while losing the Moyle wards which it now contains, would gain the five wards of the Ballyclare DEA. This seat would have an electorate of 71,073.

7) Belfast: while the Commission has made the correct decision in reducing the number of Belfast constituencies, the proposed south west and south east seats still have a rather artificial feel to them. No one in Belfast speaks of living in "South East Belfast" and it is doubtful that that name is one which residents of Belmont, Stormont and Botanic will identify with.

The city has traditionally been divided into four quadrants. Local Belfast people speak of North, South, East and West Belfast. Consequently I believe a better solution would be to use each quarter as a building block for a constituency. **Belfast North** should cede the wards of Crumlin and Woodvale to Belfast West and should then be extended further into Newtownabbey, gaining the wards of Burnthill, Carnmoney, Mossley, Ballyduff, Hawthorne and Mallusk wards. These wards are largely an extension of urban North Belfast and the residents are far more likely to work in North Belfast than they are in Antrim town. Furthermore the Mallusk ward contains a number of industrial areas which provide work for the residents of North Belfast. The electorate of this seat is 75,739 or 1.2% below quota.

**Belfast West** should gain the Crumlin and Woodvale wards from North Belfast, thus uniting the Shankill area in one constituency. The seat would also gain the Finaghy and Musgrave wards. The seat would have an electorate of 72,685.

The South and East quarters should be combined into a new **South and East Belfast** seat. This seat would comprise the remaining 22 wards of Belfast city council, plus the wards of Cregagh, Downshire, Wynchurch and Lisnasharragh. These wards have been part of Belfast constituencies for many decades and have strong ties with the city. This seat would have an electorate of 77,207, which is within 1% of the quota.

8) **Lagan Valley:** this constituency should regain the Glenavy ward. However the commission's proposal to add the Aghagallon ward was one made last time and rejected at the local enquiries. Instead, the constituency should regain the two Carryduff wards. These wards were part of the constituency from 1983-1997.

9) **North Down:** I support the commission's proposals for this constituency.

10) **Strangford:** firstly as Strangford Lough is no longer the focal point of the constituency, the name should be changed to **Mid Down**. Secondly the proposals weave through the streets of Castlereagh, following no identifiable boundary. Instead the commission should form the Mid Down from the remaining 17 Castlereagh wards, the Ards wards not in North Down and the Down LGD wards of Saintfield, Derryboy and Killyleagh. This seat would have an electorate of 74856.

11) **South Down** would then regain all the wards it lost in the last review to Strangford, particularly in the Ballynahinch area, a town which looks more naturally to Downpatrick than to Newtownards. This seat would have an electorate of 78,089. These proposals would also restore the boundaries which existed from 1997-2010.

12) **Newry&Armagh and Upper Bann**

In the 1995 review, the commission proposed moving the Loughbrickland ward to South Down. This was rejected at a local enquiry. In the 2005 review, the commission proposed moving the Loughbrickland ward to South Down. This was rejected at a local enquiry.

Why therefore does the commission persist in making a recommendation that has been consistently rejected?

Since Upper Bann is within acceptable range of the quota it is best to leave it as it is. Similarly since Newry&Armagh is of an acceptable size, the Tandragee ward should remain in that constituency which should remain unchanged. The Tandragee ward has been in Newry and Armagh since the seat was created and was in the predecessor constituency of Armagh for many decades before that. Moving that ward would unnecessarily break local ties.

I believe overall those proposals would be better. Two constituencies are left completely unchanged while a further 8, Fermanagh and South Tyrone, West Tyrone, Foyle, East Antrim, Belfast North, Belfast West, Lagan Valley and South Down receive only such minor changes as are necessary to bring them within quota range.

On a final note, regrettably the review takes place based on outdated ward boundaries drawn 20 years ago and due to the review of public administration, this means that many wards which the current review is based on will no longer exist by 2015 or will be split between constituencies. While this is an issue beyond the Commission's control, they should take this into account and be open to the possibility of splitting wards where necessary. Derryagh is one case where this is currently done. Another possibility would be Loughries. Currently the ward makes a salient into the North Down constituency and it would probably be better to place the rural areas in North Down and the urban parts in the east of Newtownards town in the Mid Down (Strangford) constituency.

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