

Dear Sir,

I write to you in response to the Commission's provisional proposals contained in the Sixth Periodical Review, in specific relation to the proposals for Mid Antrim and South Antrim constituencies. While I recognize that the new, more restrictive, guidelines within which the Commission is required to work made the task of this review more exacting than in previous years, I cannot help but conclude that the proposals contained for the proposed Mid Antrim constituency are very unsatisfactory. While the necessity of separating Ballymena from its North Antrim hinterland is undesirable but perhaps necessary under the circumstances, the decision to join Ballymena with Larne and Carrickfergus makes no sense at all, and is counter to local patterns of travel, commerce, and affinity. Ballymena has little enough in common with Larne, given the mountain separating the two towns, but even these two towns have more in common than Ballymena and Carrickfergus, whose connections are practically non-existent.

It strikes this observer that an all-together more satisfactory revision to the boundaries would be the creation of a South East Antrim constituency and a South West Antrim constituency, the latter linking Ballymena with the much more natural twin of Antrim, and the former connecting Larne and Carrickfergus with Doagh and Ballyclare.

My very rough and quick (though admittedly probably fallible) calculations suggest this can be achieved through the creation of a South East Antrim constituency with an electorate of 73,657 by removing from the Commission's proposed Mid-Antrim constituency the LE wards falling within Ballymena LGD with the exception of Glenwhirry, and adding the Newtownabbey LGD wards of Doagh, Ballyclare North and South, Ballynure, Ballyrobert, Jordanstown, Monkstown, and Rostulla, the Antrim LGD ward of Parkgate, and reuniting the three Carrickfergus LGD wards of Knockagh, Greenisland, and Gortalee with the rest of the Borough in the new South East Antrim constituency.

South West Antrim would consist of the proposed South Antrim constituency minus the wards mentioned above, and with the addition of the Ballymena LGD wards currently proposed for Mid Antrim, with the exception of Glenwhirry. This would give an electorate of 73,774. Although removing Glenwhirry and Parkgate from the rest of their borough is less than optimal, Glenwhirry has natural connections with Larne, and Parkgate with Doagh and Ballyclare, and is a small price to pay to avoid the unnatural and illogical connection of Ballymena with Carrickfergus. It is also compensated for in the reunion of the three Carrickfergus LGD wards of Gortalee, Greenisland, and Knockagh back with the rest of Carrickfergus.

I hope my proposal will be a useful contribution to the Commission's deliberations.

Yours faithfully,

Dr. Chris Connolly