

SUBMISSION ON N.IRELAND BOUNDARY COMMISSION'S CONSTITUENCIES` PROPOSALS

1. INTRODUCTION.

I send a further submission on the N. Ireland boundary commission`s provisional proposals for Westminster constituencies. It extends the arguments spoken & documents I delivered at Belfast`s Public hearing & contains a new proposal. I repeat my strong complaint about the serious absence of explanation of the method used to select the constituencies.

2. COMMISSION'S METHOD & PROCEDURE

I concentrate on Chapter 4 of the commission`s report because this claims to set out the method it used. However, it does not state it`s method, never mind explain it. This is what that report said in paragraph 1: "the commission modelled a number of options" (which) produced a similar overall pattern". On the method used to delineate constituencies it merely said "transfer of 7 wards would be required in 9 (existing) constituencies"* – which had large electorates. These were large (but not the largest constituencies) & presumably "transfer" meant TRANSFER IN of wards to them from small constituencies. Statement * above infers (but does not state) that the Commission`s method was to start with the largest constituencies & add wards from nearby small constituencies. That method was required by the Parliamentary Voting System & Constituencies Act 2011, Schedule 2 (para. 8(2) but, as I show below, you did not do that. Why not? Finally you say in paragraph 3: "the starting point for the review should be in Belfast". That is incredible & contradicts your inferred method (in paragraph 1) of starting with the largest constituencies. Belfast`s largest constituencies are Belfast North (7th) & Belfast South (16th) – the largest being Upper Bann; Newry & Armagh; & N. Antrim.

3. THE ACT'S ALLOCATION METHOD FOR SELECTING CONSTITUENCIES

The N. Ireland boundary commission is bound by the Parliamentary Voting System Act, named above. Each Commission in the U.K. In particular is required to use that Act`s "allocation method- para. 8 (2) & (3)" – which states (2) "the first constituency shall be allocated to the part of the U.K. with the greatest electorate" & (3)"the second & subsequent constituencies shall be allocated in the same way". This method, i.e `start with the biggest constituency` is required by the Act & was used in England, Scotland & Wales. Examples of this method`s use in Scotland saw the large Edinburgh East constituency taking in smaller Edinburgh South. But that method, incredibly, was NOT USED IN N. IRELAND! Why not? Has the N. Ireland Commission avoided its statutory obligation? Further, N. Ireland`s commission`s decision to start constituency delineation in Belfast is random, illogical & unexplained. It starkly contrasts with England`s commission`s report on the method & procedure it used. It`s paragraph 32 says: "BCE intends to have regard generally to existing constituencies as far as possible. It does not consider it would be appropriate to start from a blank sheet of paper" +. Yet that seems to be what N. Ireland`s commission did.

4. THE PROPOSED 3 BELFAST CONSTITUENCIES.

In the context of the required `start with the biggest constituency`, I try to assess the method used in Belfast. Belfast`s existing 4 had these electorates: North (66825); South(60726); West(60520) & East (60050). Though I disagree (as it is unproven) that the review of N. Ireland`s constituencies should have Belfast as its starting point, Belfast North &

Belfast South are the largest. Using the required method, they should take in parts of the smaller West & East constituencies. If there were to be 3 constituencies – Belfast East with the smallest electorate should have been subsumed into the other 3. That this was not done is illogical &, I must say, suspicious.

Paragraph 3's statement that "the geographical layout of the city around Belfast Lough argues against combining elements of Belfast North with Belfast East" is not valid or acceptable. This seems to be the only use of Rule 5's discretionary Factor "special geographical Considerations". But geographically, easy access between the 2 constituencies is provided by 3 bridges across the Lagan, while North's Duncairn ward touches East's Island ward. In England in London, new constituencies, Chingford & Richmond crosses rivers.

5. SECRECY OF N. IRELAND'S COMMISSION'S WORK COMPARED TO ENGLAND & SCOTLAND.

N. Ireland's failure to explain the method It used has been shown above. England's openness is proved by its paragraph 32(+ above) in the 2nd last sentence of paragraph 3 above. Scotland's website regularly published the minutes of it's Commission's meetings, which cited the reasons for its methods & procedures.

6. ALTERNATIVE METHOD PROPOSED.

Because of (a) the Commission's failure to use the Statutory "allocation method" (paragraph 8(2) & 8(3) of the Act, & (b) it's failure to explain its method & major decision ("review's starting point will be Belfast") I am forced to propose an alternative method for delineating constituencies here. The House of Commons Library Paper "Size of Constituency Electorates" ranks all existing 650 constituencies by electorate size. N.Ireland's ranged from Upper Bann (29th) to Belfast East (609th) with Belfast West (606th). As N. Ireland must lose 2 of its 18 constituencies, it is logical that our top 16 – Upper Bann down to Belfast South – should, under the statutory allocation method, be the starting point for selection of constituencies. The wards of the bottom 2 above should, therefore, be attached to their nearby constituencies. To do this delineation & to strengthen N. Ireland politically against the rest of the U.K., we should use the Act's Rule 7's (para. 6) discretionary electorate quota of 70,583 - 80,473. I believe this alternative to the Commission's proposals is fairer to all & is justified by it's use of the statutory method for constituency selection. I attach a map of the existing 18 constituencies.

I wish to hear arguments why the Commission's proposals should proceed, while this alternative should not.

Thank you for your work.

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