

Dr Nicholas Whyte  
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12 December 2021

**Northern Ireland Boundary Commission Consultation**

Dear Commissioners,

1. I am a long-term observer of your work, a Visiting Professor at the Faculty of Social Science in Ulster University, and have been part of the BBC's telecast commentary team for every Northern Ireland election since 2010.
2. Nonetheless, I am writing to you purely in a personal and private capacity, not on behalf of either Ulster University or the BBC, or of any other body. I have absolutely no objection to my name being associated with my remarks below.
3. Thank you for publishing your recommendations for the current review. It is a thorough and well-explained piece of work and I have in fact only one minor amendment to propose.
4. I will however present some arguments in **support** of some of your proposals, as I know that this will make a difference in the deliberative process.
5. Your work has been made considerably easier than was the case in the previous aborted reviews by the fact that Northern Ireland will retain its current number of 18 parliamentary seats. This has meant that for a number of constituencies, alignment with the required quota has been achieved by adjusting the parliamentary boundary to coincide with the new ward boundaries, and/or by transferring a ward or two between neighbouring constituencies. The results are not always elegant but they are sufficient.

**Rule 7**

6. I have consistently argued that the Commission should not be shy about invoking Rule 7. The Court of Appeal unfortunately quashed the most recent review partly because of the use of Rule 7.
7. I would observe that the Court's judgement calls attention particularly to the Commission's obligation to explain its reasoning in relying on Rule 7 in detail, and I think that even a sympathetic observer (such as myself) would have to concede that the Commission did not explain its adoption of Rule 7 at length in the last review process.
8. The lesson for me is that the Commission should still be ready to use Rule 7, but if it does so, it must also be ready to explain why at some length, even to the extent of publishing potential alternative arrangements that do not use Rule 7 and analysing why they do not satisfy the other Rules in the way that a Rule 7 map would.

9. Fortunately this time around, this is a largely academic argument, as it seems that satisfactory maps can in fact be generated without resort to Rule 7. But the issue will not go away, especially if, as is likely, Northern Ireland's number of seats changes for the next review.

### **Belfast**

10. Although the additions to **South Belfast**, expanding it to **South Belfast and Mid Down**, look rather drastic on the map, in fact the areas in question are closely linked to Belfast and it makes sense to include them in the constituency.
11. The same argument cannot really be made for Garnerville and **North Down**. Garnerville looks to East Belfast, not Holywood let alone Bangor. But I accept that moving it to **North Down** minimises the need for change elsewhere.

### **Downpatrick / Strangford and Quoile**

12. I support the proposed transfer of the Downpatrick wards to **Strangford**, and the proposed renaming of the constituency to **Strangford and Quoile**. Both the **Strangford and Quoile** and **South Down** constituencies will be more compact. It can be argued that Downpatrick does not particularly look to Newtownards or Comber, but it does not particularly look to Warrenpoint either.

### **Dungannon / Mid Ulster; North Armagh / Fermanagh and South Tyrone**

13. More reluctantly, I support the proposed transfer of the Dungannon wards to **Mid Ulster**. The result is to leave an awkward salient of **Fermanagh and South Tyrone** wards extending well into the north of County Armagh. But disruption elsewhere in the West is thereby minimised.
14. In particular, it must be admitted that Dungannon is no more closely linked to Enniskillen than to Cookstown. It is a 15-minute drive from the Thomas Street roundabout to Chapel Road in Cookstown; to get to Enniskillen takes almost an hour, if traffic and roads are good. For their part, travellers heading east from Fermanagh have been able to avoid Dungannon since the M1 was built in 1967 (and most have done so).

### **The Loughries / Carrowdore border between North Down and Strangford and Quoile**

15. I agree with and support the principle of the Commission's decision to keep the existing north-south boundary between **North Down** and **Strangford / Strangford and Quoile**, between Six Road Ends and Ballyblack. The area to the east of this line has been in the North Down constituency since it was created; the population to the west lives mainly around Newtownards. The local government re-warding process unfortunately and unrealistically put these two different populations together.

16. However, it is quite important in general to minimise the departures of the parliamentary boundaries from the local government ward boundaries. There is no reason not to align the next section of the boundary, essentially transferring the



townland of Ballybuttle from **Strangford / Strangford and Quoile** to North Down. The number of voters cannot be very many.

17. On the other hand, it is sensible to keep the easternmost part of the boundary where it is; the boundary between the Loughries and Carrowdore wards runs right through the middle of Millisle, and it will be disruptive to inhabitants to put them in different constituencies.

### **Conclusion**

18. I live and work in Belgium, so unfortunately it is very unlikely that I will be able to participate in any public hearings in this review.
19. Nonetheless, I wish the Commission well in their work, and hope that they will take seriously the arguments in favour of the minor amendment I suggest to their proposals. I look forward also to reading other submissions.

Nicholas Whyte  
12 December 2017