

**THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL**

**THURSDAY 6<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2008**

Agenda Item	
Report No	

**FIRST REVIEW OF SCOTTISH PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES**

**Report by the Chief Executive**

**Summary**

The Report advises the Council of the provisional proposals of the Boundary Commission for Scotland for the 3 Scottish Parliament Constituencies in the Highland Council area. The Council is asked to make representations (either in support or objecting to the proposals) by 14 March 2008. It is recommended that the Council object to the Commission's provisional proposals for 3 Constituencies in Highland on the basis outline in Section 4 above.

**1.0 Background**

- 1.1 The law concerning electoral arrangements for the Scottish Parliament is set out in Schedule 1 of the Scotland Act 1998, as amended by the Scottish Parliament (Constituencies) Act 2004.
- 1.2 The 1998 Act as amended determines that there are 73 constituencies for the Scottish Parliament. The Act also defines that there are 8 regions which return members to the Scottish Parliament.
- 1.3 The 1998 Act as amended includes a number of rules to be applied when designing constituencies, and a number of rules to be applied when designing regions.
- 1.4 Each constituency returns a single member to the Scottish Parliament. The rules define the electoral quota to be the number obtained by dividing the total electorate for Scotland, excluding Orkney and Shetland, by 71, which is the number of constituencies outside Orkney and Shetland. In simple terms, the electoral quota is the average electorate per constituency. For this review, the electoral quota is 54,728.
- 1.5 Rules 1 and 2 specify that, so far as is practicable, the Commission must have regard to the boundaries of local authority areas, and that the electorate must be as near to the electoral quota as is practicable. The Commission may depart from the strict application of rules 1 and 2 if special geographical considerations, including in particular the size, shape and accessibility of a constituency, appear to them to render a departure desirable.

- 1.6 The Commission agreed principles to use when creating its provisional proposals for constituencies:
- constituencies will be wholly contained within a single council area wherever practicable;
  - the Commission will try to recognise existing community ties;
  - local geographies of the area will be taken into consideration (for example transport links, electoral wards and existing constituency boundaries); and
  - special geographical considerations will be considered where appropriate.

## 2.0 **Provisional Proposals**

2.1 The Commission's provisional proposals are as follows:-

<b>Existing Constituency</b>	<b>Proposed New Constituency</b>	<b>Comprising Wards</b>	<b>Electorate (2007)</b>			
<b>Caithness, Sutherland &amp; Easter Ross</b>	<b>North Highland</b>	Ward 1 - North, West and Central Sutherland	<b>56,170</b>			
		Ward 2 – Thurso				
		Ward 3 – Wick				
		Ward 4 - Landward Caithness				
		Ward 5 - East Sutherland and Edderton				
		Ward 7 - Cromarty Firth				
		Ward 8 - Tain and Easter Ross				
		Ward 10 – Black Isle				
		<b>Ross, Skye &amp; Inverness West</b>		<b>West Highland</b>	Ward 6 - Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh	<b>55,900</b>
					Ward 9 - Dingwall and Seaforth	
Ward 11 - Eilean a'						

	Cheò	
	Ward 12 - Caol & Mallaig	
	Ward 13 - Aird and Loch Ness	
	Ward 14 - Inverness West (part)	
	Ward 22 - Fort William & Ardnamurchan	
<b>Inverness East, East Highland Nairn &amp; Lochaber</b>	Ward 14 - Inverness West (part)	<b>61,690</b>
	Ward 16 - Inverness Ness-side	
	Ward 15 - Inverness Central	
	Ward 17 - Inverness Millburn	
	Ward 18 – Culloden & Ardersier	
	Ward 20 - Inverness South	
	Ward 19 - Nairn	
	Ward 21 - Badenoch and Strathspey	

2.2 The Commission is proposing a whole number of constituencies exactly covering the Highland Council area. It had considered, but, rejected, various options which combined the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar area with the Highland Council area.

2.3 As an exercise in allocating the existing 22 Wards to 3 Constituencies around the electoral quota of 54,728, the Commission has produced a solution. The proposals have resulted in only 1 Ward being split – Ward 14 (Inverness West) – where the Caledonian Canal has been used as a Constituency boundary.

2.4 The proposal which has created the most controversy is the inclusion of Ward 10 (Black Isle) in the North Highland Constituency. The Cromarty Bridge has created the transport link which permits the addition of the Black Isle to its northern neighbours. The proposed Constituency electorate is within 2.6% of

the electoral quota.

2.5 The proposed West Highland Constituency is similar to the UK Parliamentary Constituency of Ross, Skye and Lochaber, although the whole of Ward 13 (Aird and Loch Ness) will be in the same Constituency, and excluding the Black Isle. The proposed Constituency electorate is within 2.1% of the electoral quota. West Highland is, geographically, largest proposed constituency extending to some 13,962sq.km – 17.7% of the Scotland landmass and 53% of Highland Council area.

2.6 The proposed East Highland Constituency matches the UK Parliament Constituency of Inverness, Nairn Badenoch and Strathspey, with the exception of Ward 13 (Aird and Loch Ness). The proposed Constituency Electorate is 12.7% above quota. It should be noted that, by electorate, East Highland is the largest proposed constituency in Scotland.

### 3.0 **What Happens Next**

3.1 The Commission is required to consider any representations concerning its provisional proposals made within a limited period of **one month** from the date of publication of the Statutory Notice. Representations have to be made to the Commission by 14 March 2008.

3.2 Where representations objecting to a provisional proposal are made by a local authority covering the Constituency, or by a body of 100 or more electors resident in the proposed Constituency, the Commission will hold a local inquiry. After considering the result of the inquiry, if the Commission decides to alter its provisional proposal, the revised recommendations will be published and a further public enquiry may be held, although this is not obligatory.

3.3 The Commission has asked that representations are requested to state whether they approve of or object to the Commissions proposals and to give their reasons. Objectors are also advised to state what they propose in place of Commission's proposals and should note that an objection accompanied by an alternative proposal is likely to carry more weight than a simple statement of objection.

### 4.0 **Highland Council's Response**

4.1 The Boundary Commission's proposals for the division of Highland into 3 Constituencies, whilst not ideal, are a fair and reasonable attempt in trying to design Constituencies close the electoral quota, following Rules 1 and 2, as mentioned in paragraph 1.5 above. The Commission is bound by the rules laid down by Parliament.

4.2 The Electoral Quota for the Scottish Parliament Constituencies is 54,728 and the electorate in Highland is 173,760. The Highland area is entitled to be represented by 3.18 Constituency MSPs. The area is 9,576 over the electoral average for 3 MSPs. Rule 3 of the Constituency Rules set out in Schedule 1 of the Scotland Act 1998, as amended by the Scottish Parliament (Constituencies) Act 2004 states as follows:-

*The Boundary Commission for Scotland may depart from the strict application of Rules 1 and 2 if they think special geographical considerations (including in particular the size, shape and accessibility of a constituency) render it desirable to do so.*

4.3 It is clear that the Boundary Commission has not applied any special consideration to Highland. As commented in paragraph 2.5, the proposed West Highland Constituency is 53% of the Highland Council area. The North and West Highland Constituencies, when combined cover, the equivalent of 17.7% of Scotland.

4.4 It can be argued that an MSP covering such vast constituencies cannot represent their electorate as closely as an MSP covering a geographically smaller constituency. It is therefore suggested that the Highland Council formally object to the division of the area in to 3 constituencies and request that the area should be represented by 4 MSPs.

4.5 The electorate of the Highland Council area is 173,760 and for 4 Constituencies, the Highland electoral quota would be 43,440. It is possible to redraw Constituency Boundaries using existing Polling District Boundaries, approved by the Council in October 2007. The 4 proposed constituencies are as follows:-

#### **Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross**

Comprising of Wards 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, part Ward 7 (C07G and H) and 8, with an electorate of 42,091

#### **Ross, Skye and Strathglass**

Comprising Wards 7 (less C07G and H) 6, 9, 10, 11 and part Ward 13 (R13A, B, C and D) with an electorate of 43,337

#### **Inverness**

Comprising Wards 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 (less I18 E, F and G) and 20 (Less I20D and E) – with an electorate of 44,741

#### **Loch Ness, Lochaber Badenoch and Nairn**

Comprising Wards 12, part 13 (I13A - M) 19, 21, 22 and part Ward 20 (I20 D and E) and part Ward 18 (I18E, F and G) with an electorate of 43,900

4.6 A map showing the above proposed Constituencies is circulated separately.

4.7 The constituencies have been designed to ensure that the existing boundary between Caithness and Ross follows the current Holyrood boundary, whilst the Ross / Strathglass and Loch Ness boundary follows the current Ross / Inverness Westminster boundary. Too many recent changes have proved to be of considerable confusion and inconvenience to electors.

4.7 If the Boundary Commission rejects this proposal, it is possible to divide the Highland area into 3 alternative Constituencies, as follows-

North Highland and Wester Ross– 55,718 – Wards 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, part Ward 6 (R06 A – T inclusive – 7,563 electors (Achiltibuie to Lochcarron)) and 7.

Ross, Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch – 61,162 – Part Ward 6 (R06U – ZB), 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 21 and 22

Inverness and Nairn – 56,900 – Wards 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20

(Note:- The difference in total electorate is a consequence of the changes in electoral data from July 2007 and February 2008)

## 5.0 **The Regions**

5.1 Once the Commission has finalised its proposals for the new Constituencies, it will then consider proposals for the Regions, again publishing provisional proposals, on which the Council will be invited to comment. A further report on this will be brought before the Council in due course.

## **6.0 Recommendation**

It is recommended that the Council object to the Boundary Commission for Scotland's provisional proposals for 3 Constituencies in Highland on the basis outlined in Section 4 above.

Signature:

Designation: Chief Executive

Date: 22 February 2008

Author: John Bruce, Elections Manager

Background Papers :- Boundary Commission Publications at <http://www.bcomm-scotland.gov.uk/>

And Highland Council publications at

<http://www.highland.gov.uk/yourcouncil/elections/newboundarymaps-wards/>