

Submission to Constituency Commission on Dail Electoral Boundaries

The constituency of Louth incorporating the contiguous areas of Drogheda (Co. Louth), Drogheda South (Co. Meath) & the Meath Coast: retention of existing 5 seat constituency.

Date: 9th January 2017

From: Cormac Bohan, Drogheda

Proposal: that the contiguous urban areas of Drogheda currently in Co. Meath known as Julianstown and St.Mary's (part rural) are maintained within the Louth constituency and that Louth be kept as a 5 seat constituency.

Current status

The 2007 Constituency Commission proposed that those parts of Drogheda and the Meath Coast known as Julianstown and St.Mary's (part rural) be included in the constituency of Louth and that the expanded area be increased to a five-seat constituency. This corrected the historic anomaly where estates in the town of Drogheda but part of the Meath East constituency were conferred with "rural" status due to their location in County Meath. In addition the suburban areas located on the Meath Coast were added to the Louth Constituency.

Many estates on Drogheda's south side are situated either partly or fully in County Meath due to the fact that the county boundary has not kept pace with the urban expansion of the town which is now the largest urban area in the country outside of the five designated cities of Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford. Consequently, on 19th June 2015, the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government established the *Drogheda Boundary Committee* under section 28 of the Local Government Act 1991. The Committee is currently carrying out a "review of the boundary between County Louth and County Meath and will make recommendations with respect to that boundary, and any consequential recommendations with respect to the area of the Borough District of Drogheda, that it considers to be necessary in the interests of effective and convenient local government" (www.droghedaboundaryreview.ie).

The 2007 Constituency Commission itself noted "that Louth should become a 5-seat constituency by extending the constituency southwards from, ***and in the environs of, Drogheda and taking in electoral divisions (population: 17,333) which have extensive linkages with the town. This will allow the inclusion of the town of Drogheda and hinterland areas in a single constituency***" (Report on Dail and European Parliament Constituencies 2007).

There are many Drogheda housing estates in the Meath County Council administered area although still part of the town itself. Prior to 2007 their inclusion in the Meath Constituency was extremely confusing from both a voters' and candidates' perspective. An arbitrary constituency boundary that cut through the urban area of South Drogheda was corrected by the inclusion of these areas in the Louth Constituency as proposed by the 2007 Commission and reaffirmed by the 2012 Commission.

Drogheda Urban Area located in County Meath now part of the Louth Constituency

Highlands

Laghorveen Manor

Lagavooreen

Beaubec (The Cairns)

Millmount Abbey

Grangerath

Hazel Lane

Deepforde
 Bryanstown
 The Oaks Estate
 Rosevale Est
 Millmount Abbey (The Park DB)
 Ard Ri Est
 Black Bush Avenue, Bryanstown,
 Bryanstown
 Bryanstown Village
 Lagavooreen

In addition the Commission, through inclusion of the full electoral area known as “Julianstown”, added the suburban areas of the Meath Coast adjoining Drogheda to the Louth Constituency including Mornington, Donacarney, Bettystown, Laytown and Julianstown. This has resulted in the full Greater Drogheda Area being included in a single constituency for the first time and with voters now being given the option of voting for candidates from the local area and availing of representation in constituency office facilities in their nearest urban area, Drogheda, located just a few minutes away rather than in Navan some 40 minutes away and the other side of both the M1 and M2/N2.

Up to 2007, Drogheda, Drogheda South (Co. Meath) and the Meath Coast had previously suffered from a representational anomaly whereby a significant portion of the contiguous urban area of Drogheda was situated in the Meath constituency. The breaching of a county boundary in this instance corrected rather than created an anomaly. The old boundary was arbitrary in terms of its application to the growth pattern of the Greater Drogheda / Meath Coast area.

Justification for retention of existing constituency

Local franchise

Voters require representation in the urban area in which they obtain most of their public services and in which they conduct much of their economic activity. The Commission should maintain those areas added by the 2007 Commission to the Louth Constituency so that voters previously trapped in an artificial electoral vacuum where they had little or no say in the political representation for the contiguous urban area in which they live can be given a chance to fully utilise their new franchise and to influence the shape of policy as it applies to their area. Those areas situated on the Meath Coast and South Drogheda which are part of the Greater Drogheda Area, the sixth biggest urban area in the country, now have an electoral stake in their own urban centre of gravity and voters have welcomed the change and made use of their franchise.

Balance achieved in Louth / Meath Dail representation

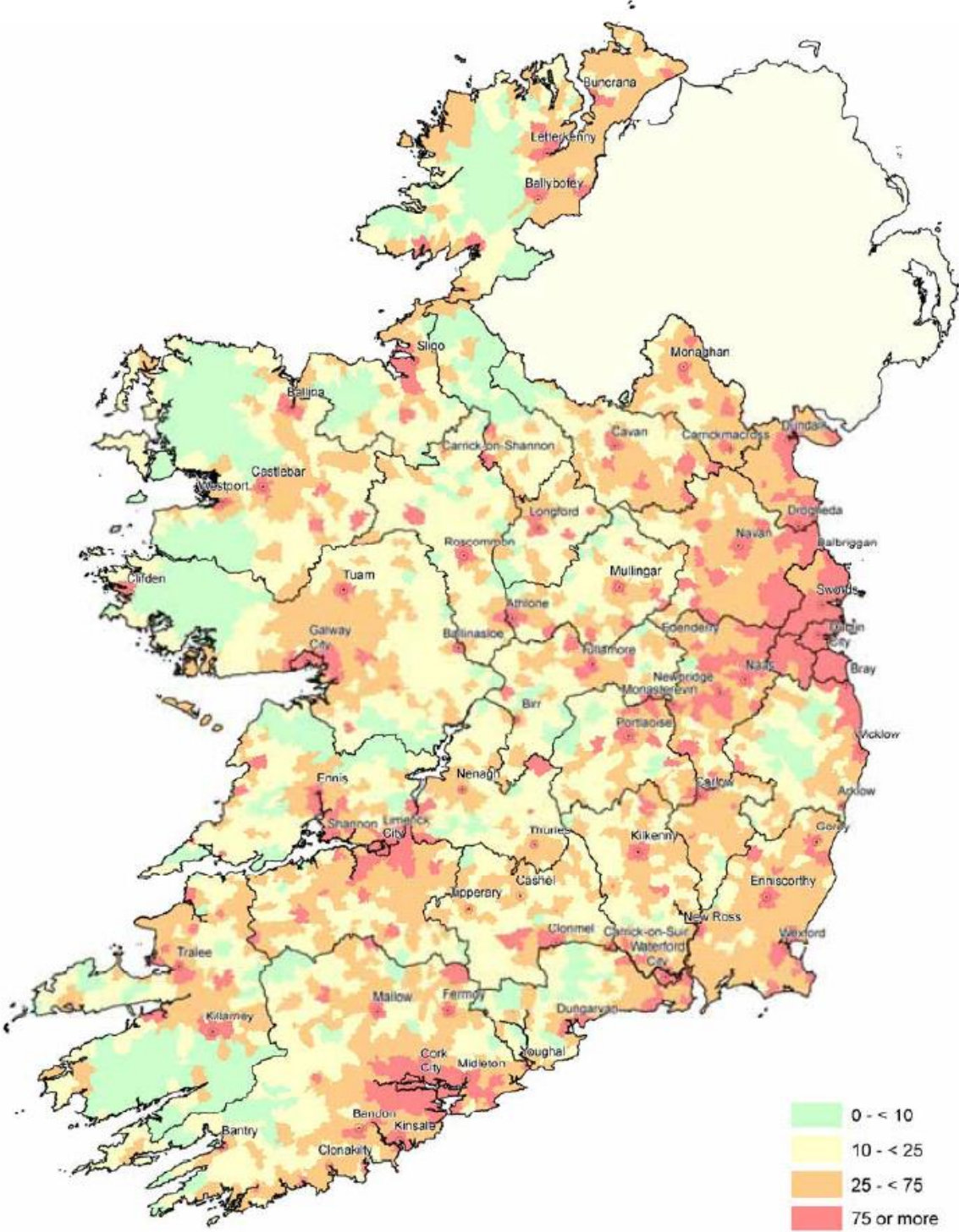
The table below shows the population of the constituencies of Louth, Meath East and Meath West within their current constituency boundaries as applied to 2016 Census data. A very clear and equal representational balance has been achieved between the three constituencies through the inclusion of the South Drogheda and Meath Coast areas in the Louth Constituency and the equalisation of the constituencies of Meath East and Meath West and they are among the constituencies with the smallest population/TD variances in the State.

Constituency	2016 Population	Number of TDs	Population per TD	% Variance
Louth	150,481	5	30,096	-0.06%
Meath East	91,151	3	30,384	0.90%
Meath West	90,358	3	30,119	0.02%

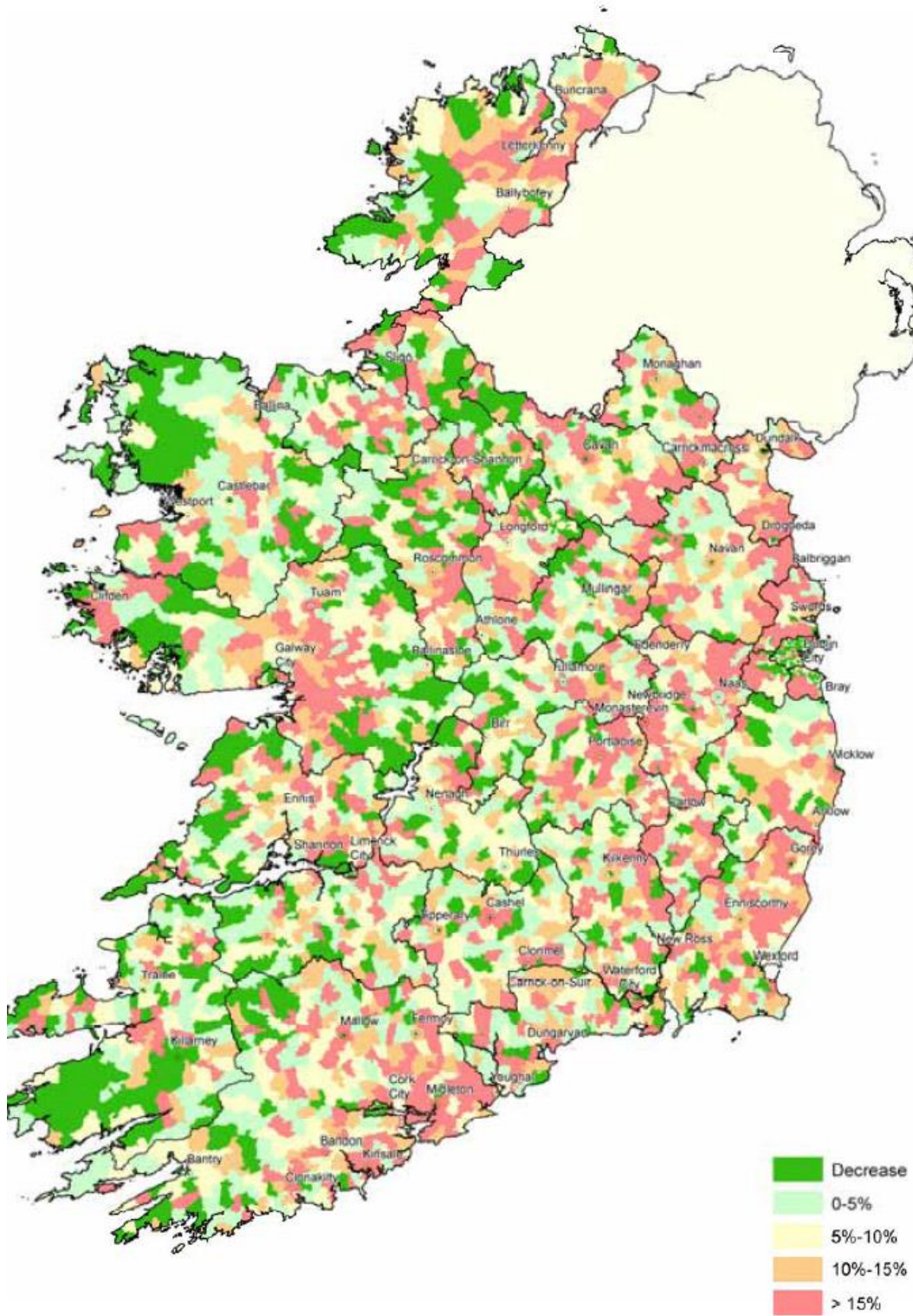
Geographical manifestation of the Greater Drogheda Area

Both of the maps on pages 4 and 5 of this submission (courtesy CSO Census 2011 findings) showing both population density by electoral area and the increase in population between 2006 and 2011 clearly demonstrate that the area surrounding Drogheda stretching from South Louth down through the town itself and on to the Meath Coast (areas shaded Red and Orange) is a contiguous urban area and that it forms a natural geographical entity which should be located within one constituency as has been the case since 2007.

Map 5 - Population density per square kilometer of Electoral Divisions, 2011



Map 3 - Percentage change in the population of Electoral Divisions, 2006 - 2011



Conclusion

The inclusion of those parts of Drogheda and the suburban Meath Coast previously located in the Meath constituency in the Louth Constituency has been a success. The full urban area of Greater Drogheda now resides within one constituency and voters have been given an enhanced franchise relevant to their local area in terms of relevant local representation, policy provision as it affects local services and convenient access to local representatives in their nearest urban area, Drogheda.

County Boundaries can be useful arbiters in areas with less population density and where urban areas do not cross ancient boundaries. County boundaries can have important resonances in terms of GAA support or for other soft identification reasons but they can coexist with relevant constituency or administrative boundaries which reflect the realities of modern urban growth patterns. The revisions proposed by 2007 Commission, reaffirmed by the 2012 Commission and accepted by the Oireachtas achieved a progressive balance in this regard which reflect the realities of the South Drogheda and Meath Coast areas as they relate to the Greater Drogheda Area. I therefore respectfully urge the Commission to retain the current Louth Constituency both in terms of geography and number of Oireachtas representatives.

Yours sincerely

Cormac Bohan, Drogheda