

To: [constituency.commission@housing.gov.ie](mailto:constituency.commission@housing.gov.ie)

1. Higher proportion of 5 seaters needed to get a more proportionate outcome in General Elections

The Fourth Report of the Convention of the Constitution – Dail Electoral Reform (August 2013), which reports on the outcome of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> plenary sessions of May and June 2013, recommended that while the existing electoral system be kept that 2 key changes be made to the electoral system. One of those two key changes was to ensure that no constituency size should be less than a five seater. This recommendation on constituency sizes was balloted upon with 86% in favour of 'Larger Constituencies (smallest constituency size will be 5 seaters).

In his introduction to the Fourth Report the Chair of the Assembly wrote “At the conclusion of the plenary meetings in June the ballot was decisively in favour of keeping the current PR STV Electoral System but in a modified form; in particular by changing the size of constituencies and changing the alphabetical order of candidates on the ballot paper”.

It is also recorded in the report that “Many voices called for larger constituencies as a primary solution because results are more representative of actual voter preferences, and therefore arguably more representative” (6.1 – Discussion).

During presentations by Political Scientists to the Convention the members of the Assembly were told that the Golden Rule in proportional representation systems is the larger the constituency sizes (i.e. The more Tds elected per constituency) the more proportionate the outcome.

For example, Professor Michael Gallagher said “As in all PR systems, the Golden Rule is that the greater the number of Tds elected in each constituency (referred to as the 'District Magnitude') the more proportional the election result. This is because it's easier to divide seats proportionately when there is a lot of them (4.4) He went on to say that “Given that the relatively small “district magnitude” of Ireland's constituencies (by international standards) this means that the results are a lot less proportional than they might otherwise be” (4.4) He pointed out that in the 2011 General Election Fine Gael won 46% of the seats with 36% of the first preference vote and 76 seats instead of the 60 that would have represented its proportional share (4.7 – 2.b).

Members were told that in 2011 11 of the 43 constituencies were 5-seaters, 17 were 3-seaters and 15 were 4-seaters (4.4).

In 2016 there were 11 5-seaters out of 40, 16-4 seaters and 13 3-seaters. If you take into account the automatic re-election of the Ceann Comhairle as one seat in a 4-seater then there were in practice 11 5-seaters, 15 4-seaters and 14 3-seaters. This was an increase of the proportion of 5 seaters and a reduction in the proportion of 3 seaters and it appears to have made the result for Fine Gael slightly more proportionate in that it got 31.6% of the seats with 25.5% of the vote.

Professor Michael Walsh told the Convention that the range has been between 3 and 5 since 1948 and that “In principal this makes it harder for the small parties to win seats, and reduces the likelihood of a highly proportionate outcome at national level (4. 8 – 3).

Professor David Farrell and Dr. Jane Suiter said in their presentation that 3 seats is the bare minimum required to ensure a proportional outcome and that “ideally constituencies should be larger than this” and that “an accepted rule of thumb is that in order to get a decent result (i.e. One that is fair to parties, large and small) a constituency should elect at least 5 Tds. Ireland falls below this figure” (5.3.1)

It was argued that constituencies should be larger than 5 and that this did not require a constitutional change.

Professor Michael Marsh said that it would be easy to draw larger constituencies in urban areas (4.8. -3)

Professor Michael Gallagher said “if there is a will to achieve a closer correspondence between vote shares and seat shares, this can be achieved simply through the use of larger constituencies – returning say, 5, 6, 7, and 8 Tds each” (4.7 – 2.b)

The terms of reference for the Constituency Commission is “each constituency shall return 3, 4 and 5 members”. This limits the maximum size of constituency the Commission can aim for to 5 seats.

In light of the expert opinion given to the Convention quoted from above and international best practice and evidence of what works best to achieve the most proportional and representative outcome in elections as well as the desire expressed by the Convention through its recommendation that 5 seats be the minimum size of constituencies, the Constituency Commission should try to increase the proportion of 5 seat constituencies and to reduce the proportion of 4 and 3 seat constituencies, in particular 3 seat constituencies. This should also, considering the tight margins the Commission is working within, make its task easier.

## 2. Dublin Mid West

The terms of reference include that “each constituency shall be composed of 'contiguous' areas and have regard to “geographic considerations including significant physical features and the extent of density of population in each” and that subject to other terms the commission should “endeavor to maintain continuity”. In relation to constituencies outside of Dublin City Council's administrative area it recommended in its 2012 report that it keep as far as practicable within local Council boundaries. I would urge a similar approach to Dublin Mid West this time around and that also population areas which are effectively towns, such as Lucan and Clondalkin not be split between constituencies. However I believe that it would be practical to include Laraghcon in Dublin Mid West as this could relieve pressure in Dublin West. Laraghcon, located in Lucan North but in Fingal looks to Lucan Village both geographically but also its residents tend to look to Lucan village for services including schools etc. Palmerstown, which is in South Dublin County's administrative area should be kept in this constituency (it has been moved with previous boundary changes to Dublin West a Fingal based constituency). Whitethorn should be kept with Palmerstown.