



## Submission re European Parliament constituency boundaries

We welcome the opportunity to make a submission regarding the review of constituency boundaries which will apply for the election of members of the European Parliament, due to be held in May 2019.

### Background

The current configuration of constituencies was determined by the Commission in 2017 – and comprises three constituencies, returning a total of eleven members.

<i>Constituency</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Seats</i>	<i>Population per MEP</i>	<i>Variance</i>
<b>Dublin</b>	1,347,359	<b>3</b>	449,120	3.75%
<b>Midlands-NW</b>	1,686,175	<b>4</b>	421,544	-2.62%
<b>South</b>	1,728,331	<b>4</b>	432,083	-0.19%
	<b>4,761,865</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>432,897</b>	

The Commission delivered a result which achieved an equality of representation, with the individual variances from the average population per member falling within a range of 0%/+4%; however, we note that on occasion, previous Commissions have recommended constituencies with variances ranging from -11% to +12%.

### Terms of Reference

Given that the total number of seats has now been fixed at 13, the Commission has a limited number of options to consider. The Terms of Reference require that constituencies return either 3, 4, or 5 MEPs. Other criteria to be considered include

- A reasonable equality of representation as between constituencies
- respecting county boundaries, and taking geographical considerations into account
- maintaining continuity in relation to the arrangement of constituencies.

## Options

In light of the Terms of Reference, and the fact that constituencies must return either 3, 4 or 5 members, there are three configurations possible:

- a) Three constituencies, comprising
  - a. One three seat, and two five seat constituencies, or
  - b. One five seat, and two four seat constituencies, or
- b) Four constituencies, comprising one four seat constituency, and three constituencies with three seats

In considering these options, we looked at the number of seats each of the current constituencies might warrant, based on the average population per MEP, in the context of 13 seats:

<i>Constituency</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Seats</i>	<i>Range +/-12%</i>	
<b>Dublin</b>	1,347,359	<b>3.68</b>	3.24	4.12
<b>Midlands-NW</b>	1,686,175	<b>4.60</b>	4.05	5.16
<b>South</b>	1,728,331	<b>4.72</b>	4.15	5.28
	<b>4,761,865</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>366,297</b>	

Allowing for the most extreme variances accepted in the past, and given that the Terms of Reference also prevent the breaching of county boundaries, it is clear that a Dublin constituency must return four members. A three-seat constituency in Dublin would result in a variance of +22.6%. A four seat constituency results in a variance of -8%.

We considered alternative options, in terms of incorporating each of the counties surrounding Dublin, and whilst Dublin plus Wicklow, Kildare or Meath respectively, would generate variances ranging from +1.7% to +7.1%, the resulting constituency options would leave the additional territory in a highly marginalised situation, with little or no chance of having any representative elected. The individual counties would account for 10-14% of the revised constituency.

If Dublin is retained as a four seat constituency, it follows that there are two options for other constituencies:

- a) a north/south split, to define the other two constituencies, which would reflect the Terms of Reference, requiring the commission to 'endeavour to maintain continuity', or
- b) reverting to a previous configuration, with three constituencies modelled on provincial boundaries.

The difficulty with creating three constituencies based on provincial boundaries, is that the population in Connacht/Ulster is well short of the minimum required to warrant three seats, while also delivering equality of representation.

<i>Constituency</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Seats</i>	<i>Population per MEP</i>	<i>Variance</i>
<b>Connacht/Ulster</b>	847,442	<b>3</b>	282,481	-22.88%
<b>Dublin</b>	1,347,359	<b>4</b>	336,840	-8.04%
<b>Leinster</b>	1,287,044	<b>3</b>	429,015	17.12%
<b>Munster</b>	1,280,020	<b>3</b>	426,673	16.48%
	<b>4,761,865</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>366,297</b>	

In fact, Connacht/Ulster would require three additional counties, to reach the threshold for three seats - potentially Longford, Westmeath and Clare. Such a constituency would comprise counties from Connacht, Ulster, Leinster and Munster – and would fly in the face of the continuity Term of Reference.

We believe a more prudent configuration can be achieved by following the existing north/south split, with minimal change.

Maintaining the existing constituency boundaries, with Dublin and South each gaining a seat, results in a significant variance in Midlands-North West.

<i>Constituency</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Seats</i>	<i>Population per MEP</i>	<i>Variance</i>
<b>Dublin</b>	1,347,359	<b>4</b>	336,840	-8.04%
<b>Midlands-NW</b>	1,686,175	<b>4</b>	421,544	15.08%
<b>South</b>	1,728,331	<b>5</b>	345,666	-5.63%
	<b>4,761,865</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>366,297</b>	

Should the Commission wish to achieve a greater level of equality of representation, we suggest that the least disruptive change would involve the transfer of Co. Laois to South, which addresses that concern:

<i>Constituency</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Seats</i>	<i>Population per MEP</i>	<i>Variance</i>
<b>Dublin</b>	1,347,359	<b>4</b>	336,840	-8.04%
<b>Midlands-NW (-LS)</b>	1,601,478	<b>4</b>	400,370	9.30%
<b>South (+LS)</b>	1,813,028	<b>5</b>	362,606	-1.01%
	<b>4,761,865</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>366,297</b>	

## **Conclusions**

It is clear that there are a number of permutations and combinations of boundaries, which satisfy the simple requirement to establish equality of representation.

The critical thing is to deliver constituencies which function effectively, which deliver genuine representation, to which citizens can relate, and which represent groups of citizens with similar issues and concerns.

In broad terms, we favour retaining the existing constituencies, with minimal change, over the alternative of establishing three new constituencies outside Dublin, involving significant changes.