

Agenda Item	15
Report No	HC/39/21

## THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

**Committee:** The Highland Council

**Date:** 9 December 2021

**Report Title:** Review of UK Parliamentary Constituencies: Initial Proposals

**Report By:** Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance

### 1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this Report is to advise the Council of the publication of the Boundary Commission for Scotland's Initial Proposals relating to the 2023 Review of UK Parliament constituencies.

### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to consider these proposals and agree a response to the Boundary Commission for Scotland.

### 3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource - If approved a working group between the local authorities, the Electoral Registration Officers and GIS staff would need to be set up to work on the cross boundaries and redefine allocation of electors to the right constituencies.
- 3.2 Legal - there are no direct implications as a consequence of this report. The legislation governing this review is the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 most recently amended by the [Parliamentary Constituencies Act 2020](#).
- 3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island) – these proposals may have an adverse effect on rural and island communities in terms of reduced representation.
- 3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever – there are no direct implications as a consequence of this report.
- 3.5 Risk - there are no direct implications as a consequence of this report.
- 3.6 Gaelic - there are no direct implications as a consequence of this report.

## **4. Background**

- 4.1 The 2023 Review of UK Parliamentary constituencies is required by the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 (as amended). It is being conducted simultaneously and independently by the four Boundary Commissions in Scotland, England, Northern Ireland, and Wales in their respective countries.
- 4.2 Reviews are required to take account of changes in population size and distribution. The four UK Boundary Commissions began reviews in 2011 (the Sixth Review) and 2016 (the 2018 Review) that would have reduced the total number of constituencies to 600.
- 4.3 Neither of these Reviews resulted in changes to constituencies, as they were, respectively, cancelled by changes to legislation and not implemented by Parliament. The existing constituencies have remained unchanged since 2005 and were used in the 2005, 2010, 2015, 2017, 2019 General Elections.

## **5. 2023 Review of UK Parliament constituencies in Scotland**

- 5.1 The Boundary Commission for Scotland began its 2023 Review of UK Parliament constituencies in Scotland in January 2021 and published their initial proposals for an 8-week consultation on 14 October 2021 which ends on 8 December 2021.

The Council has secured an extension of one day to enable the Council to consider this matter and will submit its response following consideration by members.

- 5.2 Scotland has been allocated 57 constituencies for the 2023 Review, two less than at present. England has been allocated 543 (+10), Northern Ireland 18 (no change) and Wales 32 (-8).
- 5.3 Each constituency that the Commission recommends must contain no less than 69,724 Parliamentary electors, and no more than 77,062 (except two 'protected' constituencies of Na h-Eileanan an Iar (the Western Isles) and Orkney and Shetland. If it is considered necessary, the Commission can recommend a constituency with an electorate lower than the minimum if it is larger than 12,000 square kilometres. No constituency can be larger than 13,000 square kilometres.
- 5.4 The constituency with the smallest electorate identified was Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross with 46,924 electors.
- 5.5 This review does not affect Scottish Parliament boundaries, Council area or ward boundaries or any services within them.
- 5.6 For each constituency, the Boundary Commission for Scotland must recommend a name and its designation as a burgh or a county constituency.

## **6. Methodology**

- 6.1 Boundary Commission for Scotland developed their initial proposals using electorate data from 2 March 2020, published by National Records of Scotland.

- 6.2 The electoral quota for the review, which is the average electorate per constituency across the UK, is 73,393, with the electorate of each constituency having to be within five per cent of that i.e., between 69,724 and 77,062.

The electoral quota is calculated by dividing the total UK electorate (less the electorate of the 5 protected island constituencies) by 645 constituencies (650 less the 5 protected islands constituencies)

Total UK electorate 47,558,398  
 Less electorate of protected constituencies 220,132  
 Balance 47,338,266  
 Divided by total non-protected constituencies 645  
 Quota 73,392.66  
 5% range = 69,724 to 77,062

- 6.3 In Scotland, exceptions to these electorate limits apply to the two protected island constituencies Na h-Eileanan an Iar (the Western Isles), and Orkney and Shetland. Likewise, exceptions to these electorate limits apply to the protected island constituencies in England (two Isle of Wight constituencies) and in Wales (Ynys Môn (Isle of Anglesey)), each of which are defined in the legislation. An exception to the minimum electorate requirement can be made if a constituency is larger than 12,000 square kilometres which can only occur in very sparsely populated areas.
- 6.4 Rules for determining parliamentary constituencies, the principles for design and the naming convention can be found in the [report](#).

## 7. Initial Proposals for Highland Constituencies

- 7.1 The Boundary Commission has grouped the Highland, Moray, and Argyll and Bute local government areas and determined that 4 UK Parliamentary constituencies should have the following names and cover the following areas.

The proposed Argyll County constituency contains the whole of Argyll and Bute council area and has part of Ward 21 (Ardnamurchan) allocated to this constituency. (map at annex A)

The proposed Highland Central County constituency includes Inverness, Fort William, and Skye. (Wards 5,10,11, part of Ward 12, 13,14,15,16,17 part of ward 21 comprising Fort William and the surrounding area. and part of ward 19). (map at annex B)

The proposed Highland East and Elgin County constituency includes Badenoch and Strathspey, Nairn, and Elgin. (Wards 17,18 and 20). (map at annex c)

The proposed Highland North County constituency contains the northern half of Highland council area. (Wards 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9, and part of Ward 12). (map at annex D)

Constituency Name	Electorate	Area (sq.km)	Designation
Argyll	71,442	9294	County
Highland Central	75,651	8717	County
Highland East and Elgin	72,038	3570	County
Highland North	76,654	12781	County

## **8. Election Responsibilities**

- 8.1 With regards to the Returning Officer responsibilities for election administration, the transfer of part of ward 21 to the Argyll constituency and Badenoch and Strathspey together with Nairn being included with Elgin would involve cross boundary cooperation with Argyll and Bute Council and Moray Council in regard to polling places, polling station staff and other resources and processes required to deliver an election.

## **9. Internal Member Engagement**

- 9.1 A meeting of the Group Leaders took place on 12 November to consider the Commission's initial proposals and the following comments were made: -

- Concern was expressed that these proposals would have a damaging effect on democracy and representation for the Highlands.
- It would significantly curtail the MPs ability to be visible and engage with constituents which given the existing size of the constituencies was already challenging.
- The proposals were predominantly focused on numbers and did not consider the very real geographical issues facing a large rural area such as Highland.
- Future boundaries should reflect local community ties, Council and Ward boundaries.
- As per Islands (Scotland) Act 2018, consideration should be given to granting protected status similar to the Island constituencies of Orkney and Shetland and Na h-Eileanan an Iar and the Isle of Wight.
- Boundary proposals should take account of the unique geographic nature and remoteness of the Highlands, to maintain the integrity of the Highland boundaries and allow for these Parliamentary Constituencies to better reflect local community ties and current Ward boundaries.
- That there should be a fundamental review of the methodology and approach used by the Boundary Commission.

- 9.2 The Council Leader has written to Highland MPs to seek their views on these proposals and has received a response from Drew Hendry MP and Jamie Stone MP which are attached at Annex E.

## **10. Neighbouring Councils**

- 10.1 At their meeting on 10 November 2021, Moray Council unanimously rejected the Boundary Commission's proposals.
- 10.2 Argyll and Bute Council considered the proposals at their meeting on 25 November and agreed that its formal response to the Boundary Commission should comprise the following:
- a) Agreement with the proposals to extend the existing Argyll and Bute Constituency boundary to the north, to incorporate part of the current Highland Council Ward 21 (Annex A)

- b) Rejection of the Boundary Commission for Scotland's proposal to rename the new constituency 'Argyll' and requests that the existing Argyll and Bute name is retained.

## **11. Next Steps**

- 11.1 In early 2022 the Boundary Commission will hold a secondary six-week consultation period. At the start of this consultation period, they will publish all the comments received on their initial proposals. They will also hold between 2 and 5 Public Hearings. It is worth noting that this further consultation could occur during the local government election period taking place in all 32 local authorities in Scotland.
- 11.2 After the secondary consultation period, they will consider all the evidence received. If they decide to alter their initial proposals, they will publish the resulting Revised Proposals for a 4-week public consultation period later in 2022.
- 11.3 After the consultation period on the Revised Proposals, they will develop their final recommendations which they will submit to the Speaker by 1 July 2023.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance

Date: 9 November 2021

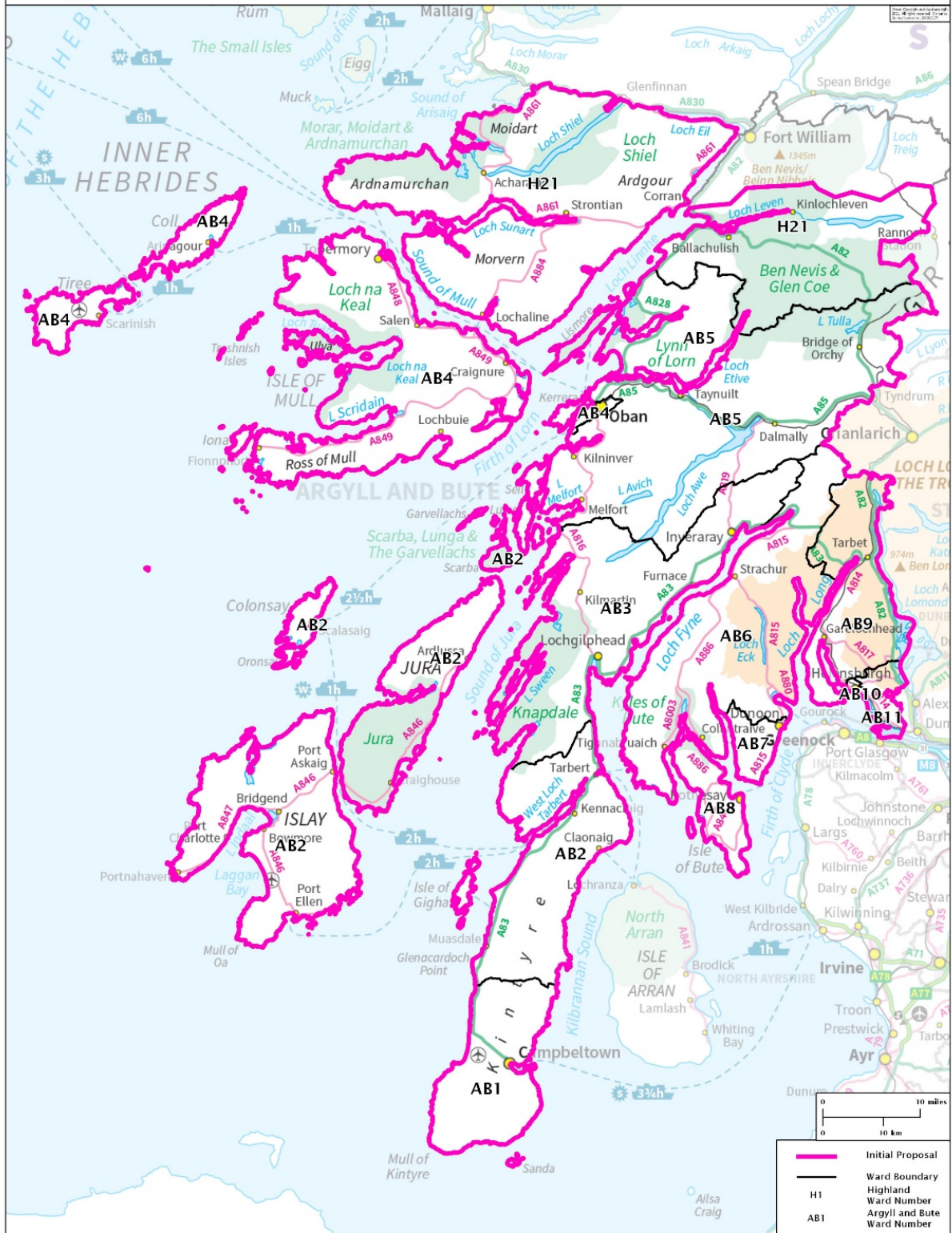
Authors: Gordon Morrison, Policy Manager, Linda Johnstone, Elections Manager

Background Papers: [www.bcs2023review.com](http://www.bcs2023review.com).

Annexes A, B, C, D, E.

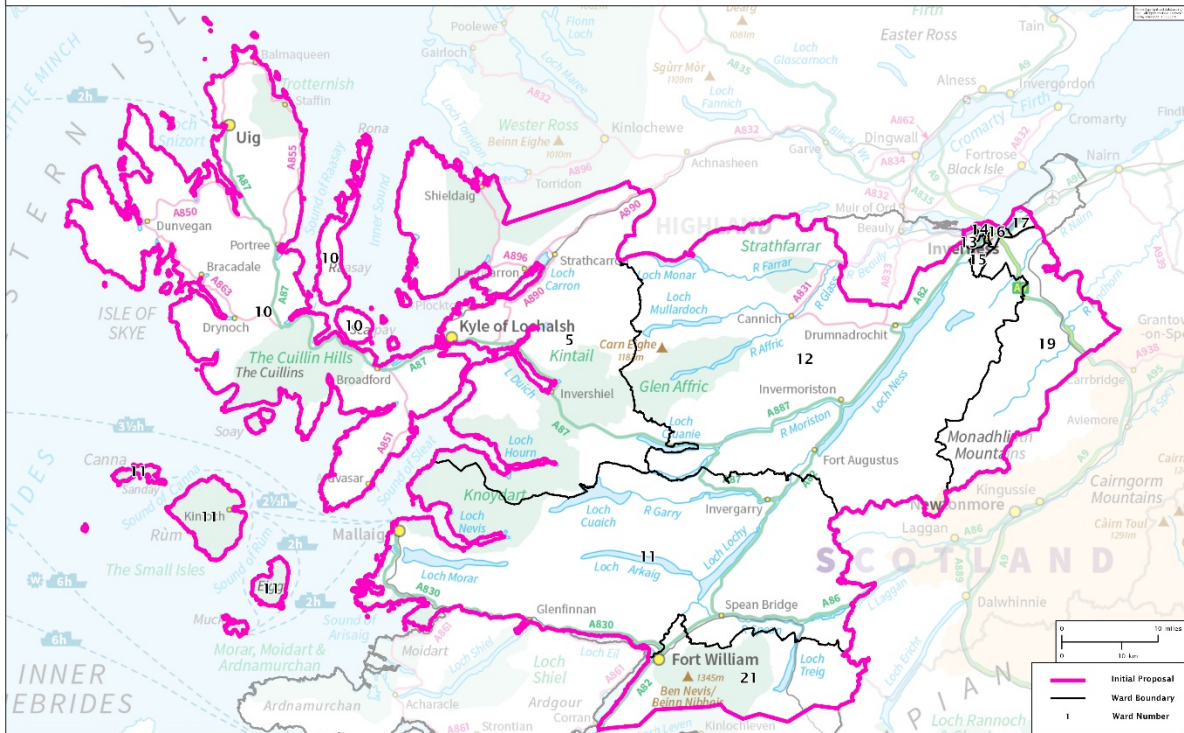
## Annex A – Argyll County Constituency

## 2023 Review of UK Parliament Constituencies - Initial Proposals Argyll County Constituency - Electorate 71,442



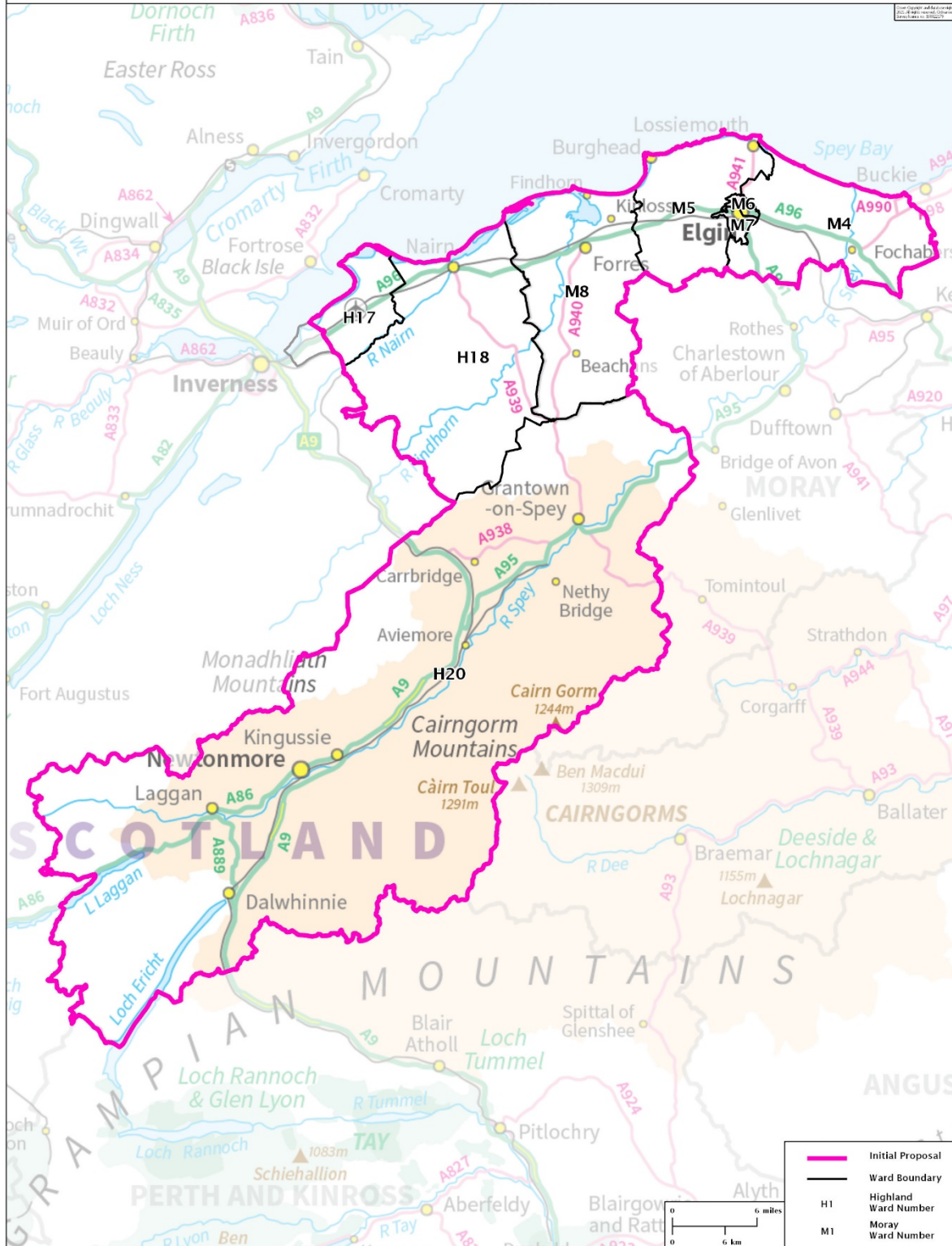


## 2023 Review of UK Parliament Constituencies - Initial Proposals Highland Central County Constituency - Electorate 75,651



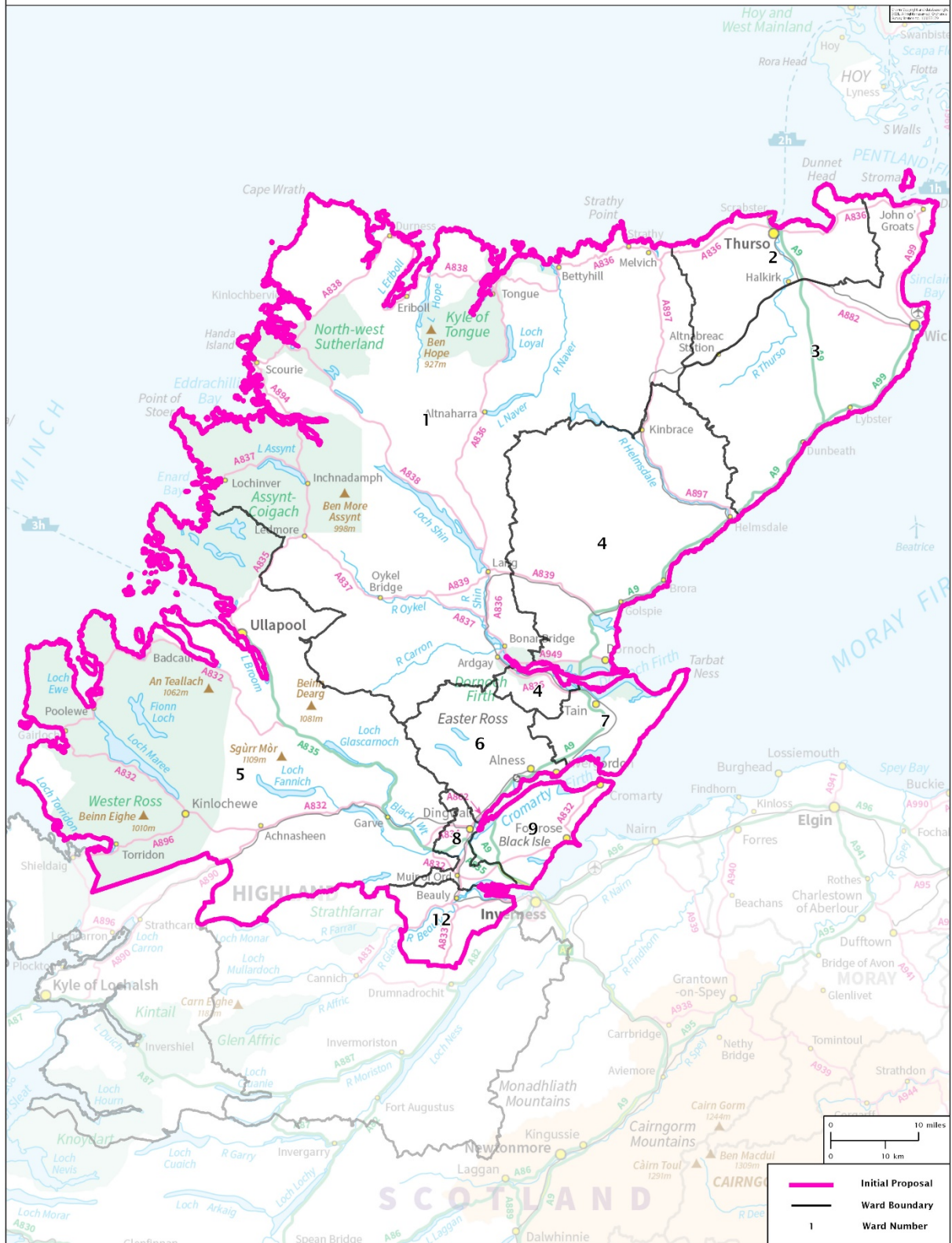


## 2023 Review of UK Parliament Constituencies - Initial Proposals Highland East and Elgin County Constituency - Electorate 72,038



# 2023 Review of UK Parliament Constituencies - Initial Proposals

## Highland North County Constituency - Electorate 76,654



## **Comments from Drew Hendry, Member of Parliament for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey**

“The proposals in the previous boundary commission review showed a lack of understanding of the Highlands & Islands, Scotland’s communities and our landscape. Instead of improving that offering, these new proposals go even further to show that the commission has not considered the rurality of the Highlands, the importance of community and fairness in representation.

I hope that a new review will seriously consider the impact of wholesale changes based purely on population, when this includes creating constituencies over 12,000 km<sup>2</sup> such as Highland North. This is about eight times the size of greater London, which has 73 MPs, with much more challenging transport links.

We should be working to bring democracy closer to people not further away.

### **NOTES:**

#### **SIZE OF CONSTITUENCIES**

Highland North would become the largest constituency in the UK, with a KM Sq land mass greater than 49 countries including Cyprus or Qatar, with Highland Central: 8717 larger than 32 Countries, including Samoa or Palestine.

#### **Inverness**

- Could potentially end up in 3 different constituencies: with city planning already allowing further growth on outskirts and suburbs of Inverness gradually expanding. Under proposals Bunchrew sits in ‘Highland North’ boundary close to Level Crossing near Delmore, Tornagrain in ‘Highland East and Elgin’ with Newton representing the proposed A96 boundary.
  - Inverness Airport is outside of the constituency comprising most of the city, ‘Highland Central’, this would be a significant detriment to representations for regional connectivity for the city.
  - INBS is significantly above average for new build housing in a constituency; 478 vs 180 in 2021 by end of Quarter 3. This has been a consistent during the NHBC’s yearly 3 quarter build assessments – 2019: 546 vs 246, 2020: 225 vs 189 – Inverness remains a core driver for this growth and is a rapidly growing city, with a population increase of [17.1%](#) between 2001 and 2014. This could add electors to both ‘Highland North’ and ‘Highland Central’. With particular issues for the proposed ‘Highland North’ constituency, which as proposed is only 408 electors from the Boundary Commissions maximum number of 77,062.
- **Disparate Communities**
    - Highland Central would span from the East to West Coast of Scotland, and have highly urban communities like Inverness combined with traditional fishing communities like Mallaig. – Clear issues with representation on economic activity in this proposed constituency and competing interests between urban communities and those of rural and island communities.
    - Badenoch and Strathspey, which would be in ‘Highland East and Elgin’, would;

- Have no easy singular public transport system to the largest urban areas within the new constituency.
  - Be in a constituency that excluded core health facilities, Raigmore not Dr. Grays been the main treatment centre for the area.
  - No longer be included with Inverness as a commuter route along the A9, leaving it with representation that didn't include a major aspect of its economy.
- Nairn – Similar issues to B&S on health care representation/commuting.
- **Additional Areas of Concern**
  - 'Highland East and Elgin' -
    - Constituency would have 3 different Constituency MSP's, this would make cross working on devolved issues incredibly difficult.
    - Spans 2 different Council Areas Moray and Highland.

(Combined these 2 facts together would make the sort of personal representation and development of organisational structural knowledge, which is key to good constituency casework, incredibly difficult.)
  - To go from Inverness to Portree for surgeries is 114 miles one way, and about a 5 and a half hour round trip.
  - Currently only one constituency requires additional funding for a second office; Ross, Skye and Lochaber. – This would additionally need to be replicated in the new 'Highland Central' constituency due to size and disparate travel links, whilst probably also been needed in 'Highland North' additionally due to geographical area.

**Scottish Liberal Democrat submission to the Scottish Boundary Commission's  
consultation on their initial proposals for the  
2023 Review of UK Parliament Constituencies**

We believe the Commission have done a good job. Given the tight constraints imposed by Parliament, the Commission have done their best to avoid splitting natural communities.

We support the proposed boundaries with one exception in the Highlands. We regard the proposed Highland North constituency as far too large in area and the MP would have great difficulty serving all the communities contained within it. We propose moving the Wester Ross part of the constituency into Highland Central. This would mean both Highland North and Highland Central would be of manageable size for their MPs. We also think our proposals follow more natural boundaries than the initial proposals.

We propose the following amendments.

1. The whole of Wester Ross should be in Highland Central rather than Highland North. That would keep the whole Wester Ross community together. The dividing line between Wester and Easter Ross is a more natural dividing line than the one in the initial proposals.
2. The boundary between Highland Central and Highland East & Elgin should be along Loch Ness and the southern and eastern limits of the Inverness urban area. We think Loch Ness forms a more natural boundary than the one in the initial proposal. The rural communities south of Inverness and east of Loch Ness fit more naturally into Highland East & Elgin than they do into Highland Central.

Our proposals make Highland Central and Highland North closer to each other in area.

To achieve the above we propose the following changes.

Transfer the following polling districts from Highland Central to Highland East & Elgin.

Aird and Loch Ness ward, Polling Districts

I12J - Aldourie Primary

I12K - Foyers Primary

I12L - Stratherrick Primary

I12M - Farr Primary

Inverness South ward, Polling Districts

I19D - Cradlehall Primary Part 2 – this is the part of the polling district south and east of the red line on the attached map.

I19E - Daviot Primary

I19F - Strathdearn

I19H - Balloch Primary



Transfer the following polling districts from Highland North to Highland Central

Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh ward, Polling Districts

R05A Achiltibuie

R05B Ullapool

R05C Badcaul

R05D Aultbea Area

R05E Poolewe

R05F Gairloch

R05G Badachro

R05H Kinlochewe

R05K Torridon

R05O Achnasheen

Our calculations give electorate numbers as follows for the revised constituencies,

Highland Central **76,682**

Highland East and Elgin **75,035**

Highland North **72,626**

All three revised constituencies are well under the 13,000 sq kilometre limit.