

Agenda Item	13.
Report No	CP/26/22

## THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

**Committee**                      **Communities and Place**

**Date:**                              **16 November 2022**

**Report Title:**                      **Review of UK Parliamentary Constituencies: Revised 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 Revised Proposals relating to the 2023 Review of UK Parliament constituencies. There is a 4 week consultation period, ending 5 December, after which the Boundary Commission for Scotland will develop their final recommendations which they will submit to the Speaker of the House of Commons by 1 July 2023.

### **2.                                      Recommendations**

2.1      Members are asked to

- Note the revised proposals detailed in section 8 and Appendices A-D; and
- Consider whether to challenge the proposals being made by Boundary Commission for Scotland.

If it is decided to challenge the proposals it is recommended that Members agree to:

- i)      Delegate authority to the ECO for Performance and Governance to draft a response based upon the debate and outcome at Committee; and
- ii)     Lobby Highland MPs and the Secretary of State for Scotland to change the Commission's proposals.

### **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. If the Highland Council was to administer the elections for all three constituencies there would be increased costs involved relating to additional time and staff required to put the new arrangements in place.
- 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. However, delivering elections over a wider geographic area will result in increased carbon impact for whichever Council administers the new constituency Nairn, Strathspey and Moray West.
- 3.5 Risk – If the proposals are approved in July 2023 and are swiftly followed by a UK Parliamentary General Election, the combined effect of these changes along with the requirements of the Elections Act 2022 would place the delivery of the election at risk. The implications and possible mitigation are currently being worked through and will be captured in a new corporate risk, which will come to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee in the Spring.
- 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 its initial proposals with an 8-week consultation on 14 October 2021 which ended on 8 December 2021.

- 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 The 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.
- 6.3 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

- 6.4 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.
- 6.5 Rules for determining parliamentary constituencies, the principles for design and the naming convention can be found in this [report](#).

## **7. Previous Member Engagement**

7.1 During the consultation on the initial proposals, Members made the following comments which formed the basis of a letter to the Boundary Commission for Scotland: -

- 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.
- 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.

## **8. Revised Proposals for Highland Constituencies**

8.1 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, Bute and South Lochaber County constituency contains the whole of Argyll and Bute Council area and has added part of Highland Council Ward 21 to this constituency. The revised constituency has a minor boundary change from the initial proposal, north of Kinlochleven, and a slight electorate increase from 71,442 to 71,707. The constituency name has been amended from the initial proposal. (map at annex A)
- The proposed Inverness-shire and Wester Ross County constituency includes Inverness, Fort William, and Skye and part of Wester Ross. (Wards 10,11,13,14,15,16,19 part of Wards 5,12,21 The electorate for this constituency compared to the initial proposal has decreased from 75,651 to 73,791. (map at annex B).
- The proposed Nairn, Strathspey and Moray West County constituency includes Badenoch and Strathspey, Nairn, and Elgin. (Wards 18, 20 and part 17). The constituency name has been amended from the initial proposal and Moray is now divided between two rather than three constituencies. The electorate has increased from the initial proposal from 72,038 to 76,914. (map at annex C).
- The proposed Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross County constituency contains the northern half of Highland Council area. (Wards 1,2,3,4,6,7,8,9, and part of Ward 5 and 12). The constituency name has been amended from the initial

proposal and the electorate has decreased from 76,654 to 72,632. (map at annex D)

### Summary Table:

#### Initial Proposal

Constituency Name	Electorate	Area (sq.km)	Designation
Argyll	71,442	9,294	County
Highland Central	75,651	8,717	County
Highland East and Elgin	72,038	3,570	County
Highland North	76,654	12,781	County

#### Revised Proposal

Constituency Name	Electorate	Area (sq.km)	Designation
Argyll, Bute and South Lochaber	71,707	9,303	County
Inverness-shire and Wester Ross	73,791	11,066	County
Nairn, Strathspey and Moray West	76,914	4,617	County
Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross	72,632	10,408	County

## 9. Election Responsibilities

- 9.1 With regards to the Returning Officer responsibilities for election administration, the transfer of part of ward 21 to the Argyll, Bute and South Lochaber County constituency and ward 20, 18 and part of 17 being included into Nairn, Strathspey and Moray West County constituency would involve cross boundary cooperation with Argyll and Bute Council and Moray Council in regard to electoral registration, polling places, polling station staff and other resources and processes required to deliver an election.

## 10. Next Steps

- 10.1 The revised proposals have now been published and a further public consultation will run from 8 November to 5 December 2022.

The consultation provides that where comments contain suggestions for improvements to the revised proposals, the Boundary Commission would welcome alternative proposals that take account of statutory requirements and consider the consequences for the wider area, including suggestions of alternative names for constituencies.

Given the very short timescales allowed, should Members agree to challenge the Commission's proposals it is recommended that the ECO for Performance and Governance is delegated to respond on the basis of the points made by elected Members in the course of the discussion at Committee. The response would also be used as a basis to lobby MPs and the Secretary of State for Scotland.

In addition, should any Member wish to submit an individual response, comments can be made via:

Consultation site: [www.bcs2023review.com](http://www.bcs2023review.com)

In writing: Boundary Commission for Scotland, Thistle House, 91 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh EH12 5HD

By email: [comments@scottishboundaries.gov.uk](mailto:comments@scottishboundaries.gov.uk)

10.2 Following this four-week consultation period on the revised proposals, the Boundary Commission for Scotland will develop their final recommendations which they will submit to the Speaker of the House of Commons by 1 July 2023.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance

Date: 11 November 2022

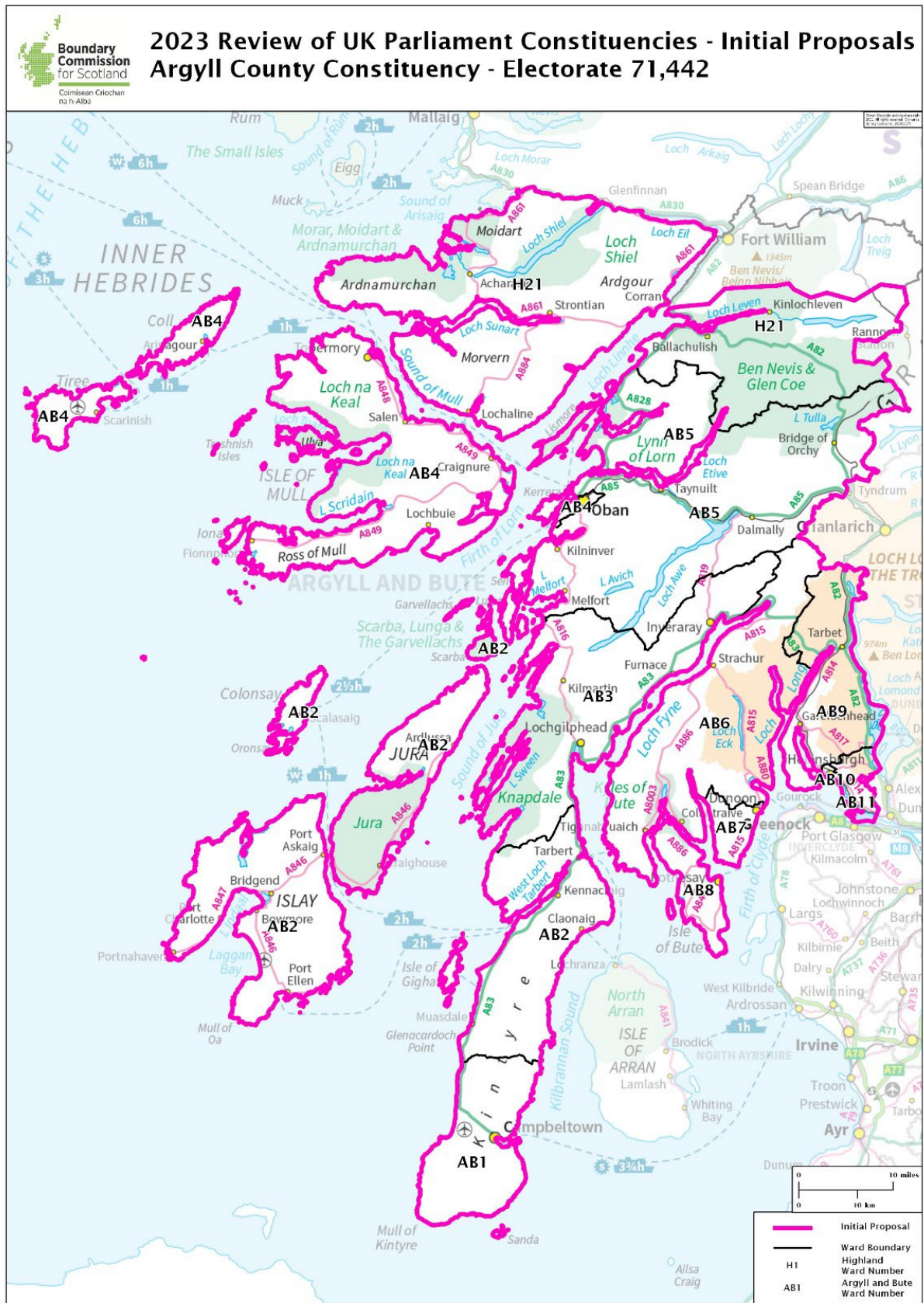
Authors: Linda Johnstone, Elections Manager, Gordon Morrison, Policy Manager

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

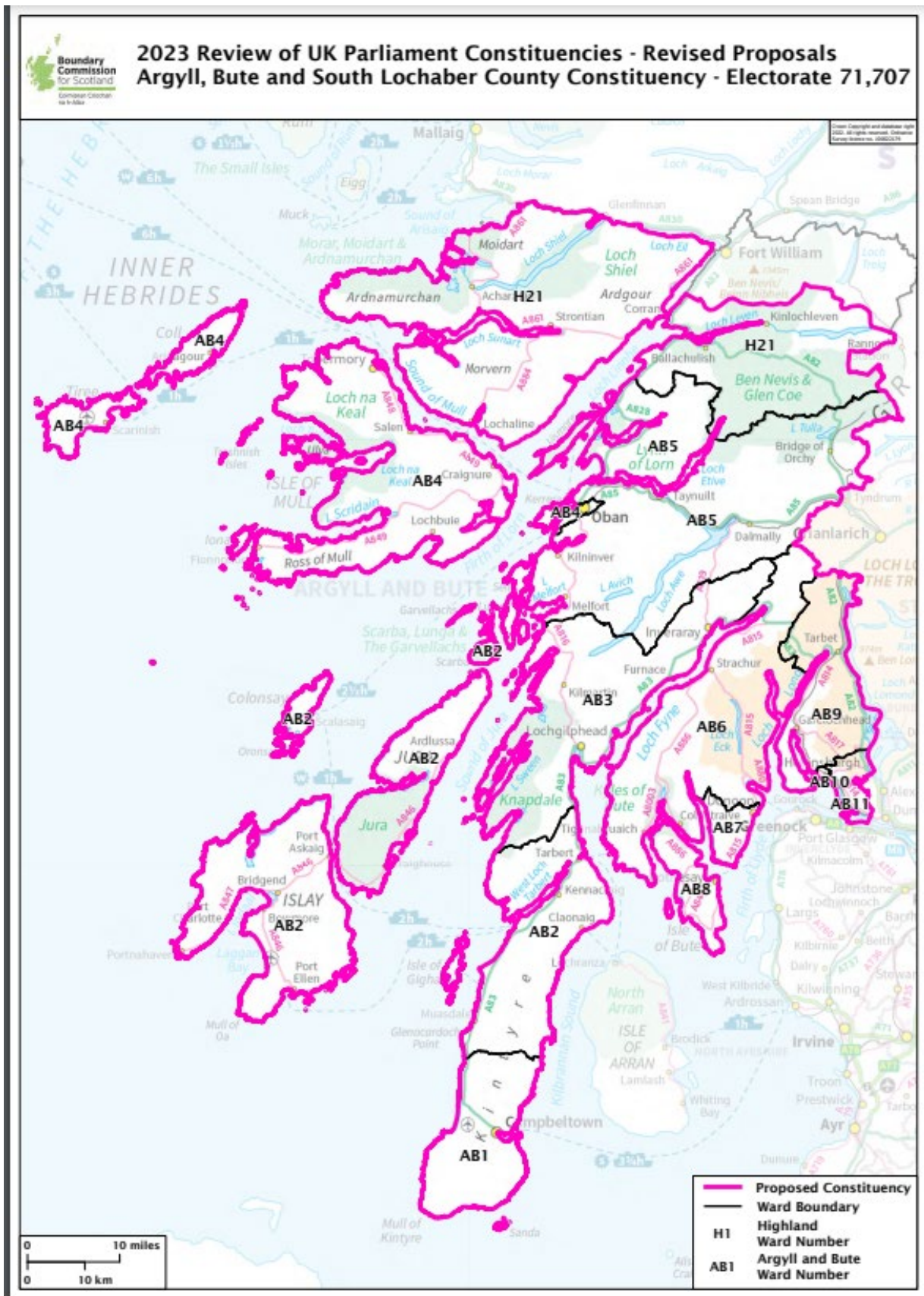
Annexes A, B, C, D,

Annex A

Initial Proposal Argyll County Constituency

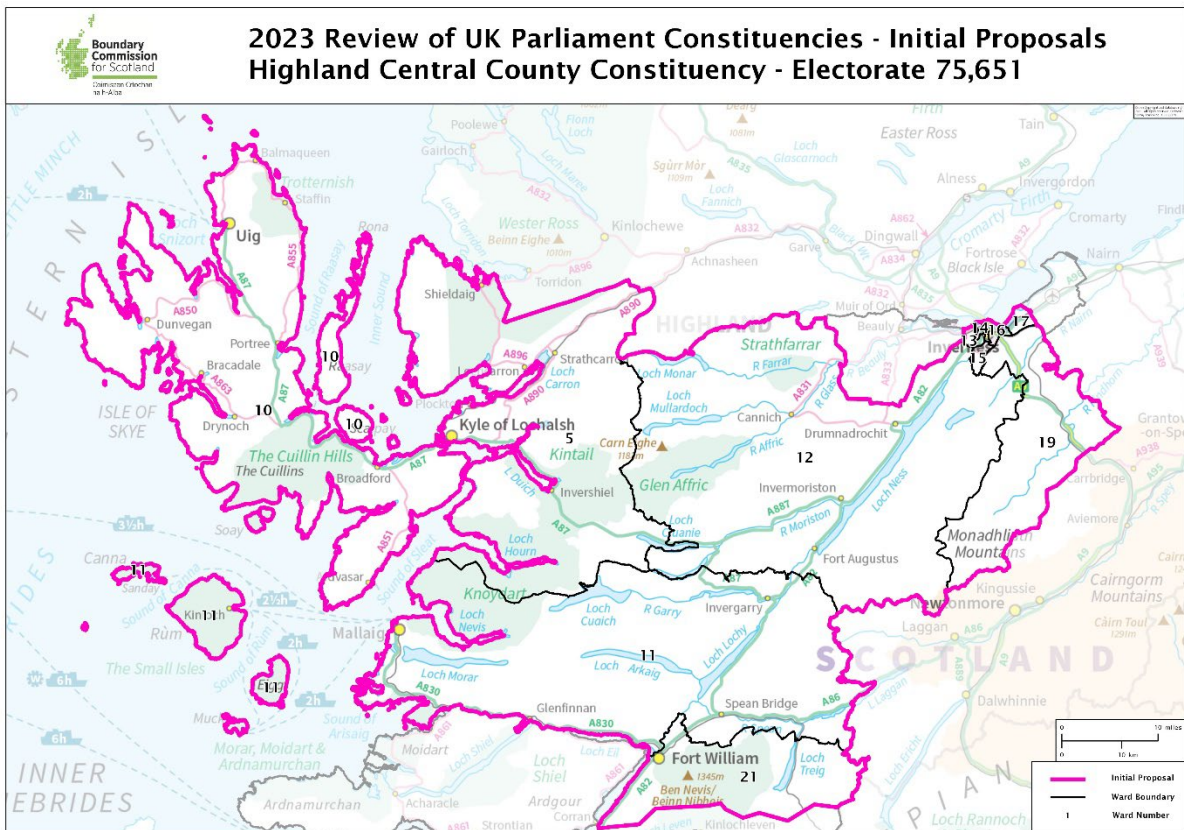


Revised Proposal – Renamed Argyll, Bute and South Lochaber County constituency

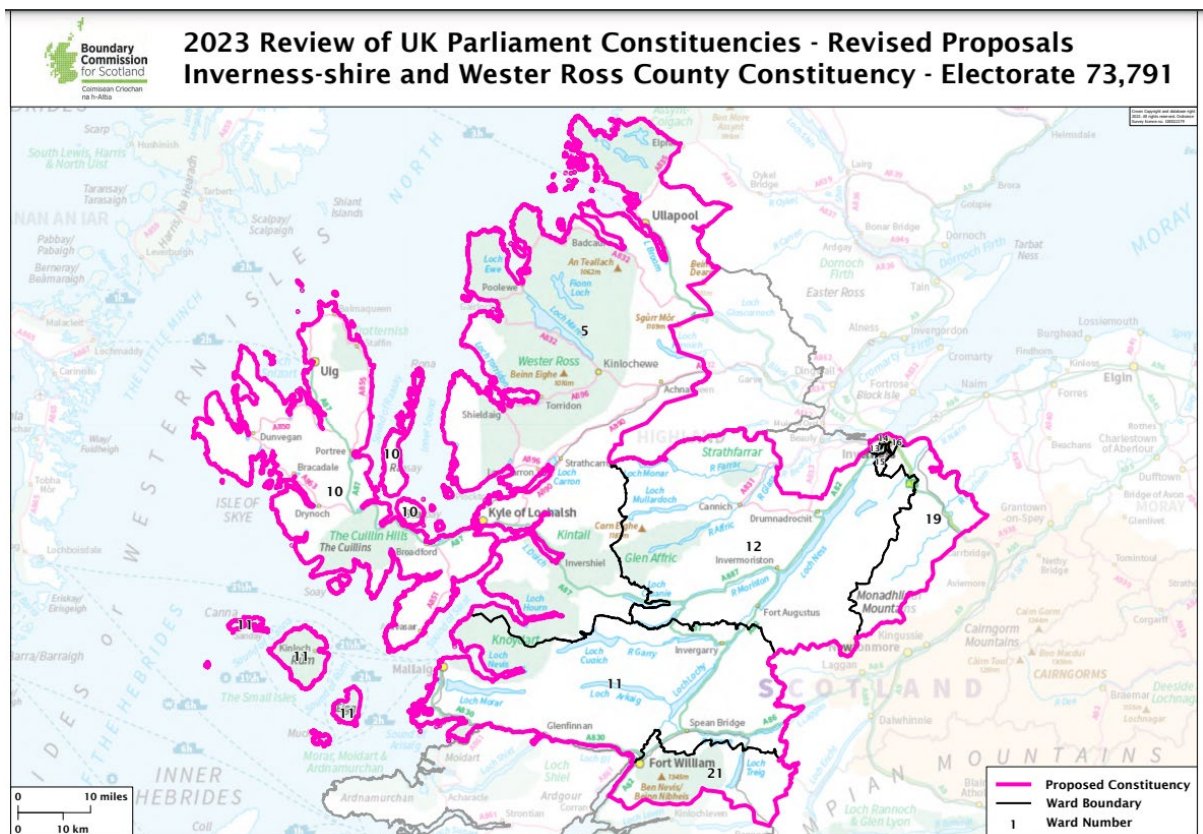




Annex B  
Initial proposal Highland Central County Constituency



Revised Proposal – Renamed Inverness-shire and Wester Ross County constituency

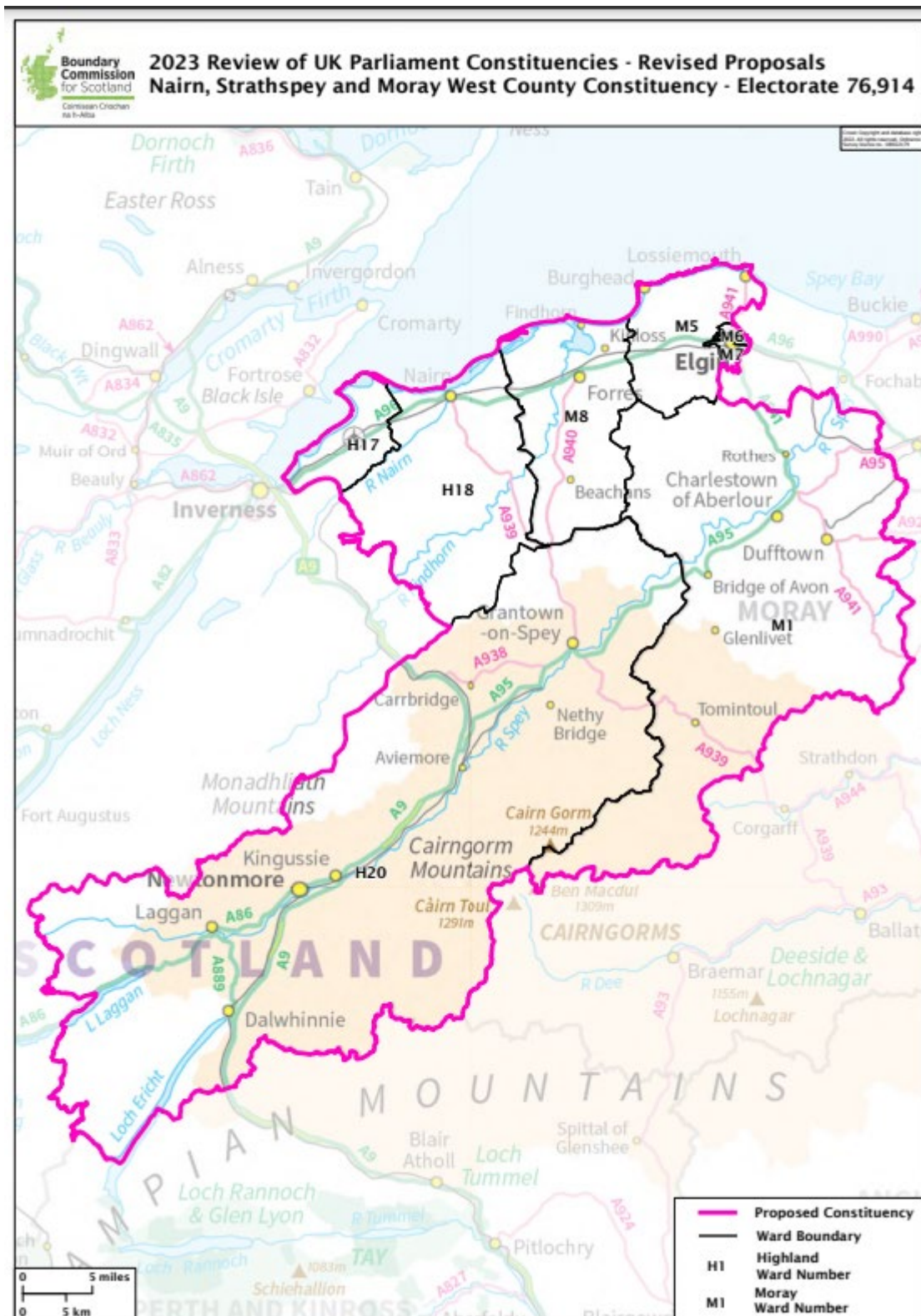


# Annex C

## Initial Proposal Highland East and Elgin County Constituency



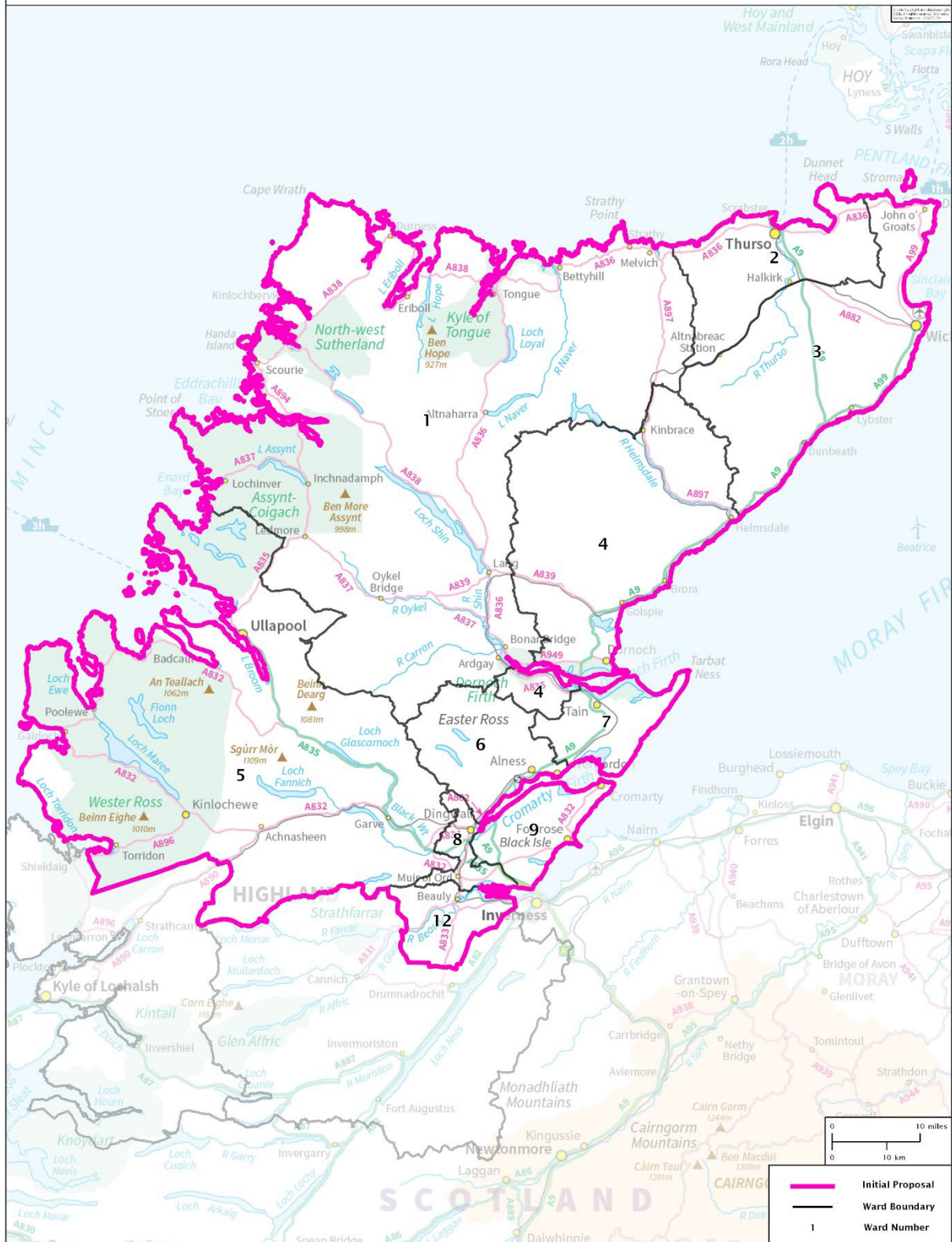
Revised Proposal  
 Renamed Nairn, Strathspey and Moray West County Constituency



Annex D  
Initial proposal Highland North County Constituency



2023 Review of UK Parliament Constituencies - Initial Proposals  
Highland North County Constituency - Electorate 76,654



Revised Proposal  
 Renamed Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross County Constituency

