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| Agenda Item | 19 |
| Report No | HC/49/22 |

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

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| Committee | The Highland Council |
| Date: | 8 December 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. Following consideration of responses to the final consultation phase, 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.
- 1.2 Due to the short 4 week consultation period, ending 5 December, an urgent report was taken to the Communities and Place Committee, setting out the detail of the Commission's proposals and seeking agreement on the approach the Council should take in responding to the revised proposals. Initial and revised/proposed constituency maps are contained in **Appendices A-D**.
- 1.3 The Communities and Place Committee agreed to reject the proposals and delegate authority to the Executive Chief Officer for Performance and Governance to draft a response, which would be circulated to all Members for information and homologated at Full Council, based upon the debate and outcome at Committee.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
 - Consider the initial and revised constituency maps at **Appendices A-D**;
 - Note the recommendations approved at the Communities and Place Committee; and
 - Homologate the response to the Boundary Commission at **Appendix E**.

3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource - If the Boundary Commission's proposals are 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 the review is the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 most recently amended by the [Parliamentary Constituencies Act 2020](#).
- 3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island) – the Commission's 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 of 2023.
- 3.6 Gaelic - there are no direct implications as a consequence of this report.

4. The Council's response to the Revised Proposals

- 4.1 Due to the short 4 week consultation period, ending 5 December 2022, an urgent report was taken to the Communities and Place Committee ([link](#)) to inform Members of the Commission's revised proposals and seek agreement on the approach the Council should take in response.
- 4.2 The minute of the Committee's discussion is included on the Council's agenda at item 4. In summary, Members were unanimous in rejecting the Boundary Commission's revised proposals and agreed the following:
 - i. **AGREED** to reject the proposals on the basis that they did not follow the Boundary Commission's own criteria of respecting natural geographical, Electoral Ward and community boundaries and that the current constituency boundaries should remain;
 - ii. **AGREED** to delegate authority to the Executive Chief Officer for Performance and Governance to draft a response, which would be circulated to all Members for information and homologated at Full Council, based upon the debate and outcome at Committee; and
 - iii. **AGREED** that the Council Leader lobby Highland MPs and the Secretary of State for Scotland to reject the Commission's proposals.

4.3 The Council Leader wrote to Lord Matthews, Deputy Chair of the Boundary Commission on 25 November 2022, challenging the approach taken by the Commission and conveying the Council's unanimous rejection of the revised proposals. A copy of the letter is contained at **Appendix E**. This has also been sent to the Secretary of the Boundary Commission; the Secretary of State for Scotland and all Highland MPs.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance

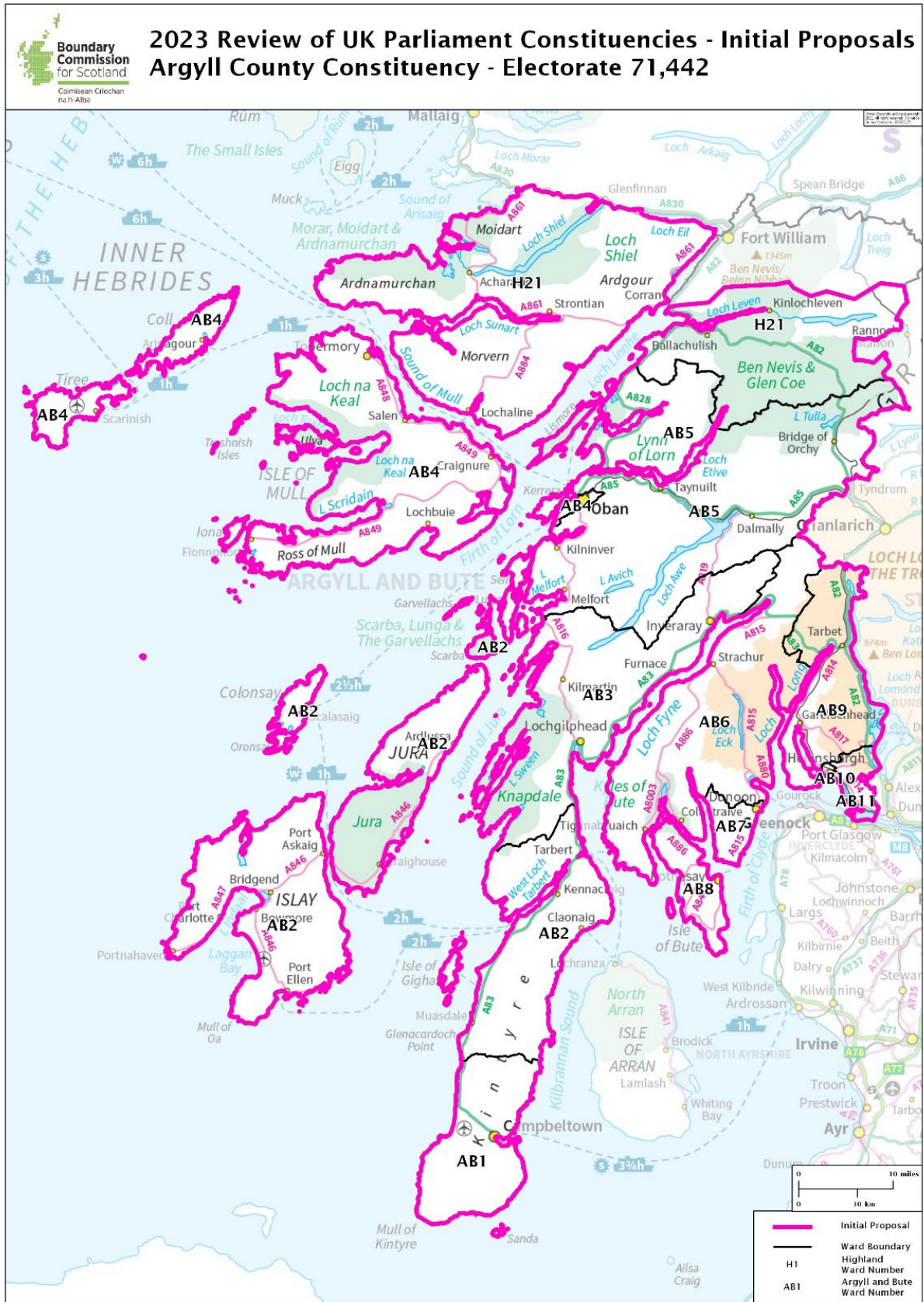
Date: 25 November 2022

Author: Kate Lackie, Executive Chief Officer, Performance and Governance

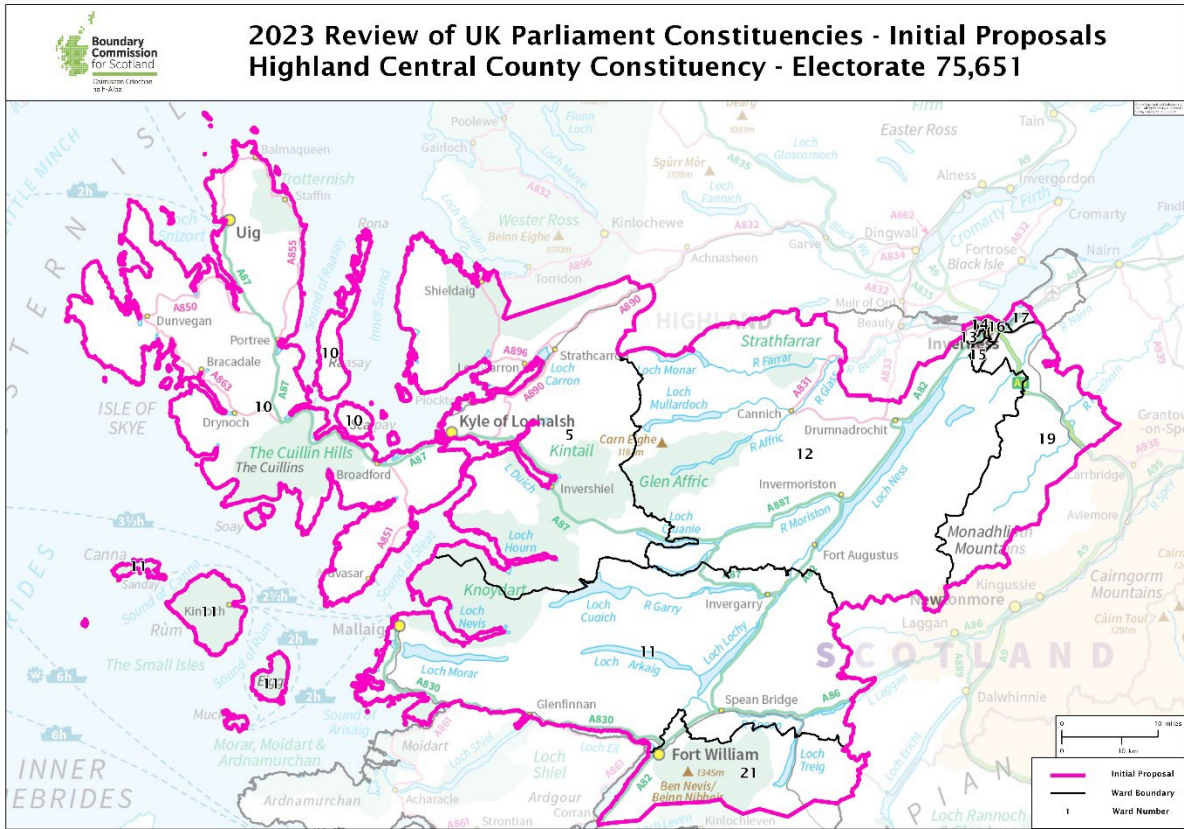
Background Papers:

- [C&P Committee report](#)
- **Appendix A-D: Initial and revised constituency maps**
- **Appendix E: Response to the Boundary Commission**

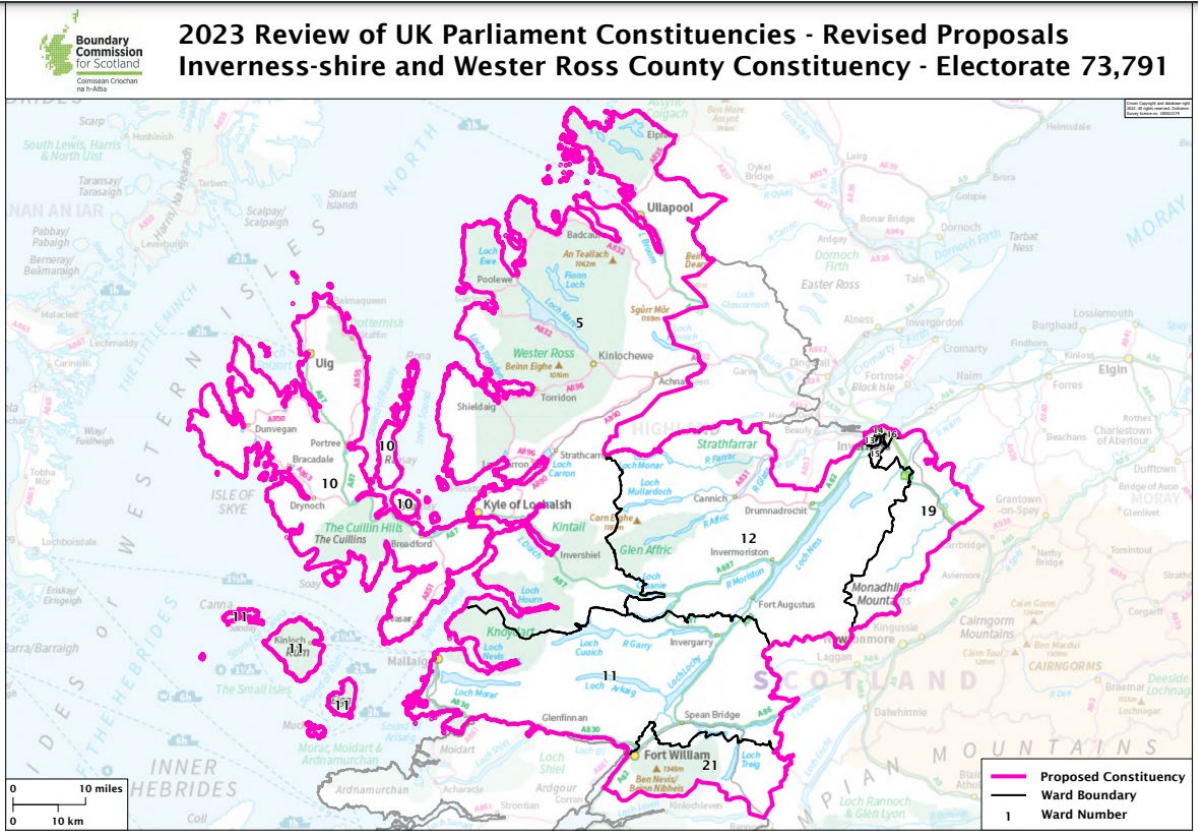
Initial Proposal Argyll County Constituency



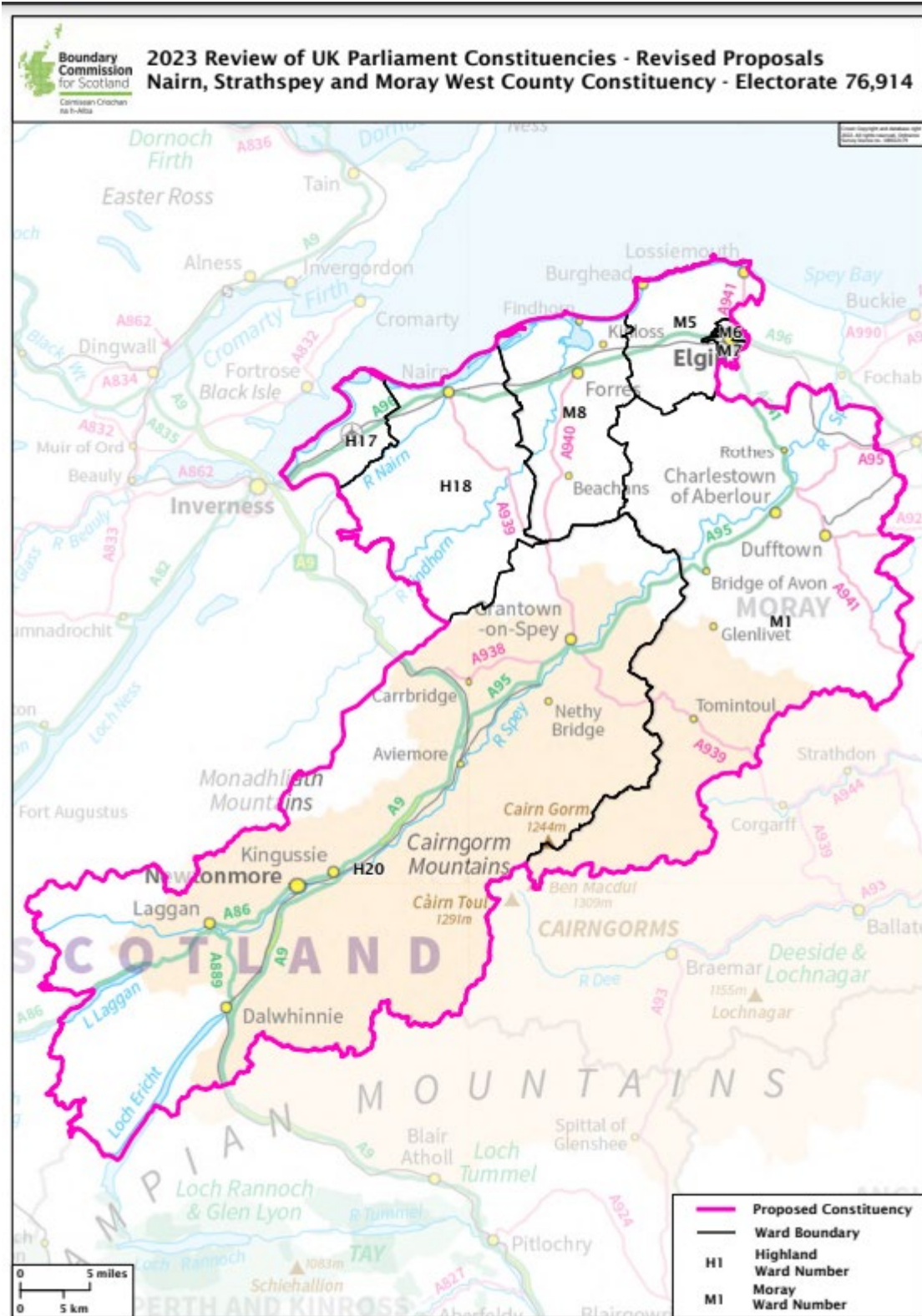
Appendix B
Initial proposal Highland Central County Constituency



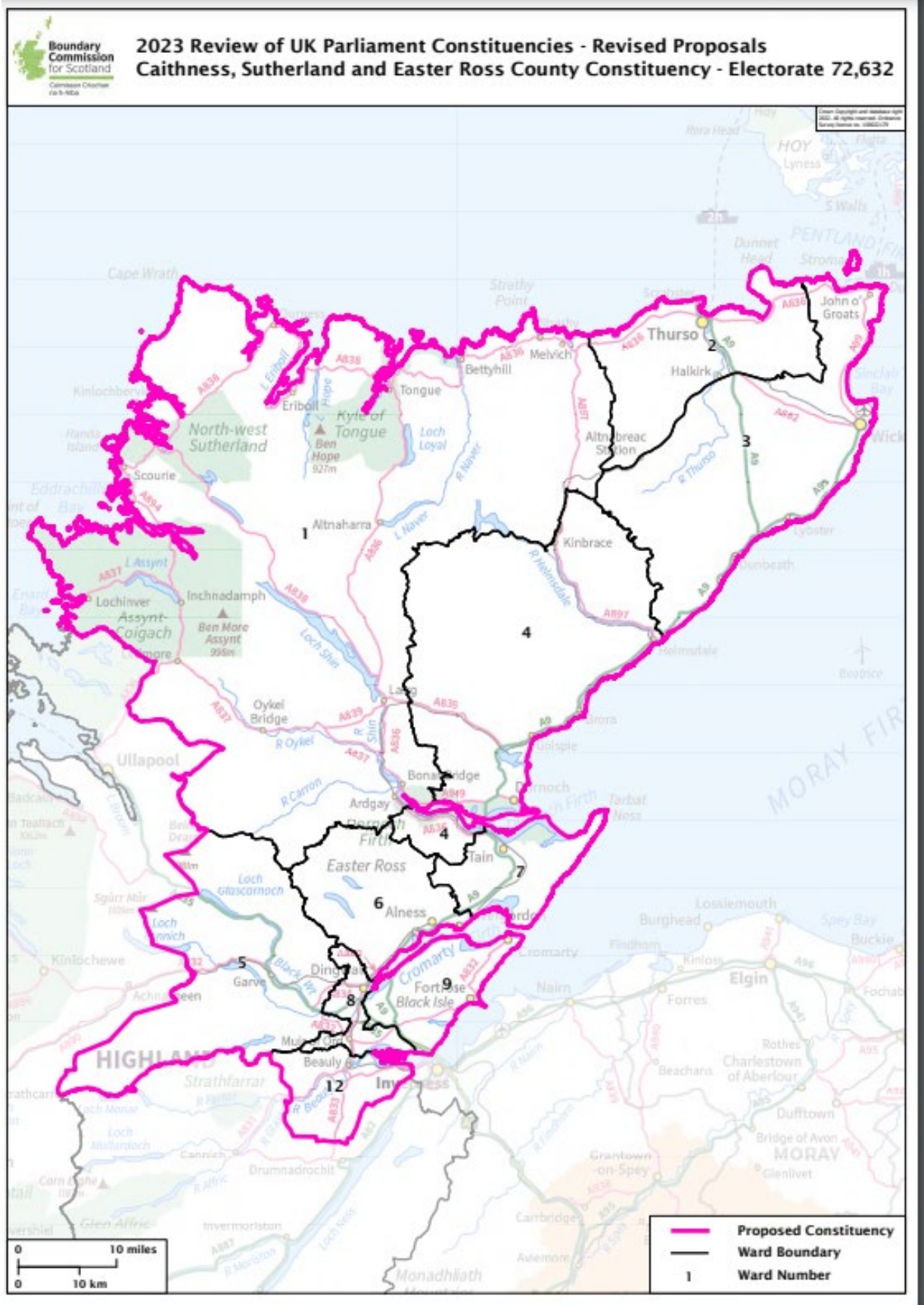
Revised Proposal – Renamed Inverness-shire and Wester Ross County constituency



Revised Proposal
 Renamed Nairn, Strathspey and Moray West County Constituency



Revised Proposal
Renamed Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross County Constituency





Lord Matthews
Deputy Chair of the Boundary Commission for Scotland,
Boundary Commission for Scotland
Thistle House
91 Haymarket Terrace
Edinburgh
EH12 5ND

24 November 2022

Dear Lord Matthews

**2023 Review of UK Parliament Constituencies
Public Consultation – Revised Proposals**

I refer to the Boundary Commission for Scotland's revised proposals for Highland constituencies as part of the 2023 Review of UK Parliament constituencies.

I can advise that these were considered at the Council's Communities and Place Committee on 16 November 2022 where it was unanimously agreed to reject the revised proposals on the basis that they do not follow the Boundary Commission's own criteria of respecting natural geographical, Electoral Ward and community boundaries. Members also agreed that the current constituency boundaries should remain in place until the Commission engages with the Council to develop options which better reflect the needs of the Highlands. I have attached a copy of the Council report for your information.

It is disappointing to see that despite our previous submission, a copy of which I attach for ease of reference, very little consideration has been given to our concerns in the Commission's revised proposals.

At Committee, members highlighted the following areas of concern:

- The timeframe to provide comments for this final public consultation period is far too short to consider the changes and suggest alternatives.
- These revised proposals will have a damaging effect on democracy and representation for the Highlands and do not provide enough consideration to the rurality of the Highlands, with its distinct character and culture which needs to be maintained.
- The changes and the split across Aberdeenshire, Argyll & Bute, Highland and Moray councils do not take into account the principle of not crossing a council area boundary and as a result adds complexity in managing cross-boundary elections.
- The Highlands should be granted protected status, similar to the Island constituencies of Orkney and Shetland and Na h-Eileanan an Iar.

Councillor Raymond Bremner
Leader of The Highland Council

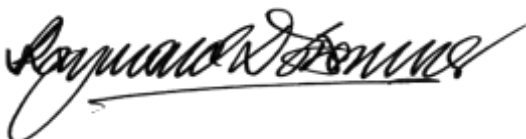
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- The revised proposals would significantly curtail an MP's ability to be visible and engage with constituents which, given the existing size of the constituencies, is already challenging. The revised proposals merely shifts the problem to another constituency.
- The revised proposals predominantly focus on numbers and do not consider the very real geographical issues facing a very large rural area such as Highland or a growing city such as Inverness. 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.
- The revised proposals do not consider transport links e.g. ward 17 and 18.
- The electoral wards are well-defined and well-understood units which have a broad community of interest. The proposed split of electoral divisions to create the revised constituencies has not considered the community level boundaries and fails to meet the Commission's own criteria in relation to boundaries reflecting local community ties and Council and Ward boundaries. Specifically, there is no natural relationship between Badenoch and Strathspey area and Moray; likewise, we do not support transferring part of the Ardnamurchan ward to Argyll and Bute; and we are wholeheartedly against splitting wards and drawing boundaries through existing towns and villages.
- Another consequence of creating such huge constituencies is that the revised names are not properly representative of the areas e.g. Inverness-shire and Wester Ross has no mention at all of Skye and Fort William.
- The Highland Council is of one view that there should be a fundamental review of the methodology and approach used by the Boundary Commission for Scotland in terms of the proposals for the Highland region and until this has been undertaken, the existing boundaries should remain in place.

The Council is keen to engage constructively and meaningfully with the Commission with a view to developing alternative proposals that better reflect the needs of the Highlands.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Raymond Bremner
Leader of The Highland Council

An Comhairliche Raymond Bremner
Ceannard Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd

Copied to:

- Isabel Drummond-Murray, Secretary, Boundary Commission for Scotland
- All elected members of the Highland Council

Councillor Raymond Bremner
 Leader of The Highland Council

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