

Sinn Féin Submission to European Parliament Constituency Boundary Review

Sinn Féin welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to An Coimisiún regarding the European Parliamentary boundaries.

We welcome the addition of an extra seat to Ireland in the recent redistribution of European Parliamentary seats. However, the lateness of the process in the term of the current Parliament is regrettable as it has made the work of An Coimisiún, parties and candidates in preparation for the election in June 2024 all the more difficult and uncertain.

Given how close the process is to the next scheduled European Parliamentary election, we would encourage An Coimisiún to prioritise the “continuity in relation to the arrangement of constituencies” as per the terms of reference provided. As well as providing certainty to parties and candidates, it would provide the maximum level of continuity of representation and familiarity to voters.

We believe that the addition of one extra seat makes this a relatively simple choice. The moving of counties Laois and Offaly into the Midlands/North West constituency, along with the increasing of that constituency from four to five seats would achieve all of the objectives to which An Coimisiún is required to have regard to.

While this would be somewhat disruptive to voters in these counties, it would realign the constituencies along the boundaries under which the 2014 European Parliamentary elections were contested – therefore bringing about the minimal amount of disruption to voters possible.

The variance from the average population per seat would be minimal and far below that of the recent Dáil constituency boundary review. We would therefore recommend the following constituencies;

- Dublin city and county - 4 seats
- South (all of Munster as well as Carlow, Kilkenny, Wexford and Wicklow) – 5 seats
- Midlands-North West (all of Connacht as well as Cavan, Donegal, Monaghan, Kildare, Laois, Longford, Louth, Meath, Offaly and Westmeath) – 5 seats

Suggested Constituency	No. of Councils	Population 2022 Census	Suggested Seats	Population per Seat
Dublin	4	1,458,154	4	364,539
South	11	1,859,244	5	371,849
Midlands-North West	16	1,831,741	5	366,348
Totals	31	5,149,139	14	367,796

Timing of Boundary Review

As previously stated, the timing of the boundary review is very late in the process. We accept that this is due to the review of seat allocations made by the European institutions and is outside the control of either An Coimisiún or the Irish Government.

Ireland is one of only three EU states that holds contests for its European Parliamentary seats along geographic constituency lines, with most others preferring some form of list system. The lateness of the finalised recommendation coming from the European Parliament, and the decision from the European Council disproportionately impacts on Ireland and those other states who elect our MEPs on a geographical basis.

We note that there was consideration being given at one point to giving Ireland two additional seats rather than one. Had this been the decision, it would have necessitated considerably more changes to constituency boundaries, and likely the creation of another constituency with the attendant disruption to candidates and the electorate.

We therefore would ask that An Coimisiún write to the relevant European institutions with a view to making them aware of this impact on Ireland and ask that future decisions be made further in advance of scheduled parliamentary elections.

Suggested Research

We would also recommend that An Coimisiún would consider carrying out research on how Irish citizens living in the north of Ireland could be given a voice in the European Parliament.

Since Brexit took effect, Irish citizens in the north east of our country have been without representation in the European Parliament or elsewhere in the European institutions. We would ask that An Coimisiún would consider research into means by which this democratic deficit be addressed, such as allowing for the election of additional MEPs for the six north eastern counties as observers in the European Parliament.

In addition, we would ask that An Coimisiún undertake research into how Irish citizens living elsewhere in the European Union, and beyond, can be facilitated to exercise their franchise in European Parliamentary elections.

Voter Awareness

We would encourage An Coimisiún to develop programmes to encourage better engagement with the European Parliamentary elections to ensure turnout and the importance of casting a ballot on the day.

This would include ensuring that voters understand that they will receive multiple ballot papers that should be marked independently. It is quite common in European Parliamentary elections, which are held on the same day as the local election, for voters to mark their preferences across both ballot papers. This is likely to be further confusing for some voters who are going to receive additional ballot papers for a Mayoral election in Limerick, or Údarás na Gaeltachta election.

This has, in the past, resulted in votes being ruled invalid as per the Supreme Court ruling on the Listowel case. An Coimisiún should seek to minimise the occurrence of such incidents through raising public awareness through publicity campaigns and through prominent signage to be displayed at polling stations.

We would also encourage An Coimisiún to raise awareness among citizens of other EU countries as to their eligibility to vote in European Parliamentary elections in Ireland provided they are not using their overseas voting rights of their country of citizenship.