

18.442

A Rúnaí, a chara,

I would like to draw the committee's attention to population change in County Galway. At present, there are nine councillors elected west of Galway City and 30 east of the city. However, due to population growth in the east of the county, the notional entitlement of the west is much closer to eight than nine (8.38). There is no requirement for continuity of representation in the terms of reference, and no reason why the western area could not be represented by eight councillors. The seat figures should therefore be changed to eight west of Galway City and Lough Corrib, and 31 to the east.

This proposed change in distribution of councillors would be fairer to the people than the status quo in attaining representation, fairer to councillors in distributing local obligations, and more reasonable than combining the Conamara LEA with any other part of Galway. It is notable that both the Supreme Court and the people at referendum have rejected the principle of undue inequality favouring either rural or urban areas in Dáil constituency apportionment.

Each new LEA must have five to seven seats, unless it would lead to an unusually large area to be represented. This is certainly the case in west County Galway, where Lough Corrib adds to the clear compelling circumstances that permit a breach of the five-seat minimum. One option is a split between two four-seat divisions: the Conamara area north and west from Ros an Mhíl, and the area around Bearna - Maigh Cuilinn south-east from Oughterard. Other solutions, including a 3-seat Conamara LEA, may be feasible, but this proposed option offers advantages in that it divides the LEA almost exactly between the different Gaeltacht language planning areas, and keeps the west Galway commuter towns in a single LEA. Census 2016 reports that 34% of workers living in Oughterard, and 46% in Maigh Cuilinn, commute to Galway along the N59.

I conclude by proposing a brief schema for the east. The two vital points are that it is necessary to create a new LEA to accommodate 31 councillors, and that the LEAs of Tuam and Loughrea are already above seven seats. I would suggest splitting Athenry - Oranmore LEA, which has had the highest population growth, in two parts. The Athenry district would be joined to the area of the Tuam LEA around Corofin and Monivea. Additionally, the area around Abbeyknockmoy and, especially, the Cooloo division should be joined to the rest of the Mountbellew area in the Ballinasloe LEA instead of Tuam, which should have seven seats.

In south and east Galway, the area around Portumna could be connected to Ballinasloe instead of Loughrea, leaving each with seven seats. However, the more usual social and transport connections may be between Portumna and Loughrea, which strongly motivates their sharing the current area; while Ballinasloe requires no further change if the Abbeyknockmoy-Cooloo area is added. I would instead suggest that the coastal area of Loughrea LEA around Kinvara be moved to the new Oranmore LEA, and that the Craughwell divisions be joined to Athenry. This would leave Loughrea with seven councillors, Oranmore with six, and Athenry with five. I attach a plan of the schema.

Le gach dea-ghuí,

Éamon Ó Gamhna

