

**Submission to Local Electoral Area Boundary Committee 2018, Committee No.1.**

There are several points to be made in relation to the revision of the boundaries under your remit: all the counties excluding the councils in Galway, Cork & Dublin.

The first is that in 2014 there was a massive change the abolition of all town and councils and urban boroughs indeed many city councils were also abolished in what seemed a naked political ploy by Fine Gael to destroy one of the few growth platforms for alternative parties, not just be killing town councils where district magnitude was normally 9 (or in some rare cases 12) so much easier to get elected to, but also in that urban populations seem to seek more diverse representation. Clearly the carrot for their government partner, Labour, was the increasing in size of district magnitude within county councils and the newly merged city & county councils. This has only been allowed one election and it is clearly of bad faith to change it after only one exercise. But it is much worse than that.

District Magnitude or the number of seats does not just have an impact on effective electoral thresholds and thus the likelihood of being elected, (impacting the scale of whether STV operates more as a majoritarian or a proportional system) but it also effects government formation (or in council terms office holding) and the number of parties and independents. Even in council terms this has a major impact in government formation terms, as most successful candidates for the Dail (and indeed the Seanad) will have been successfully elected as councillors first.

The fact that Fine Gael has now ordered a reduction in the district magnitude is yet another naked attempt of a power grab by them, and is a kick in the teeth to their former allies Labour and the current partners the independents. Going along with this form of gerrymandering shows either a lack of consideration for the electoral system or else an ignorance of how it works. One assumes that FG & FF have decided that they have had enough of minority govt and of backbench and opposition parties having input into legislation and want to get back to the old days of a 2.5 party system and squash all other smaller parties and independents.

How else to explain the boundary committee to be limited in scope to reviewing downwards only with a view to 5-7 seats but allowing them to consider 3 or 4 seaters in special circumstances (but not 8 or 9). Most academic experts agree that for minimum proportionality PR-STV needs to operate at a district magnitude of at least 6 seats.

Yet when we consider Malta with 5-7 seats also operating PR-STV it has been a two party state since 1964, and Australia with a form of PR-STV in its federal senate of 12 seat districts but on rotations of 6 seats elected at different times we find that while there is some diversity the vast bulk of the seats have been held by the two main parties. NI assembly has seen several small parties die over the years and while the reduction from 6 to 5 seats did not overly harm the small parties on this first cycle, the effect on the medium sized UUP was

drastic and we can fairly assume that in the next cycles it is likely that the smaller parties will start to feel the pinch.

The remit of this body is 89 different electoral areas, if you go cut the bigger than 7 down to 7 you will change a substantial 30% of EAs, if you reduce them down to 6 seaters you will change a massive 47%, and if you bring them all down to 5 seaters, all but one, 88 of the 89 will have to change. Which is no doubt the preference of FG & FF to secure the good old days, as not only will this impact the ability of alternatives to reach the threshold to get elected (which will naturally be higher in smaller seats) but it will also do the following;

Considering that there are 622 council seats under this remit, in 89 electoral areas but if it is reduced to 5 seaters that will mean there will be 124/125 electoral areas instead, in reality this means it will be harder to for smaller parties to also find the candidates to contest and of course it means more election expense as more different runs of leaflets and posters need to be printed as well. So harder to get elected, harder to run someone, and more expensive. The fact is that for the bigger parties without a vote cast this will mean default far more seats for them in any given election, as simply put smaller parties will not be able to event contest let alone compete with them and as for independents they will lack the cohesion of transfers that might have been witnessed in the last 2 elections due to a plague on both your houses from the electorate, which will be to some extent reduced in the coming elections, besides for the last 20 years at least half the independents if not more were members of either FF or FG and many continue to vote with them in Council or Dail chambers.

As a very brief exercise I counted up the Cllrs as elected on the day in 2014 (not taking account of defections etc since) within your remit from the 89 electoral areas, 166 were elected by FG, 197 elected by FF, 100 by SF, 124 by independents (incl the independent groupings such as I4C or Ind Alliance) and Others 35, (labour, greens, pbp etc).

And then as a quick exercise applied the 5 seat rule on each district and did a new headcount, this comes with a huge amount of caveats (what part of the area is this new 5 seater, the quotas which candidates, what new order of eliminations etc, all of which can't be guessed with any degree of accuracy) but as a rough barometer.

While independents are reduced to 81% of their total, and SF reduced to 79% Others are reduced to 57%, most telling is of course that, even though FF and FG also lost a good deal of seats, that in nearly 40% of instances they had a running mate also who would be eliminated (or last man standing as in not elected but not eliminated) so in 40% of cases where a FF or FG was eliminated under my rough exercise, they would in fact leap frog the No.5 placed person (who often had not reached the quota, but in this new 5 seater would in nearly all cases not have) so in fact the situation is more stark that those figures account for, this then especially coupled with challenges posed smaller or medium parties in relation to getting more candidate and more finance along with higher quotas really seem to highlight what the game is here.

As such I can only implore the committee, If they do not wish to be a veneer of respectability placed on what is a gerrymander 2.0, that they will ensure the highest possible number of 7

seaters and where necessary 6 seaters, and only in extreme and rare cases 5 seaters, they should not countenance in any shape or form 4 or 3 seaters.

One final issue I would like to raise is the issue of Waterford and Kilkenny Councils, it was shameful enough that both cities lost their councils, but it is simply incredible that when they were merged neither city was able to retain urban constituencies. Kilkenny's two city wards are laughable in the amount of rural hinterland they also occupy, not as extreme but two of the three Waterford city constituencies are also heavily diluted by large rural hinterlands. Clearly the Fine Gael war on urban Ireland continues. I would urge the boundary committee to be more mindful that both rural and urban are worthy of strong representation.