

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

NUTS boundaries are used for reporting of regional statistics to Eurostat and those statistics are used to inform regional policy. The Scottish Government is proposing to make minimal changes beyond aligning existing NUTS boundaries to Local Authority Boundaries.

Do you have any comments on the Scottish Governments proposals for NUTS 2 regions?

The Forum is not entirely convinced that coterminosity with local authority boundaries, while clearly desirable, is absolutely essential. It would point out that the current boundaries do coincide with those of HIE/SE and there is a strong argument that, given the use of NUTS geographies for policies relating to regional development, that the status quo should be retained, unless a further adjustment of the HIE operational boundary is envisaged.

Do you have any comments on the Scottish Governments proposals for NUTS 3 regions?

The Forum understands the rationale underpinning these proposals and indeed has had some reservations about the robustness of the data produced for the very small (in economic terms) existing NUTS 3 areas in the Highlands and Islands. Nevertheless the fact that NUTS 3 data has been produced for areas within the territory covered by the Highland Council area has been of considerable use, for example to illustrate the concentration in recent years of economic growth within the NUTS 2 region in Inverness and its more immediate hinterland.

It would certainly agree that all parts of the Argyll and Bute Council area contained within the NUTS 2 Highlands and Islands region – however eventually defined -should be a self contained NUTS 3 area.

Eurostat have requested we consider merging the Highlands & Islands with North Eastern Scotland to create a new area that's closer to the recommended population thresholds. The Scottish Government plan to request that these areas should be allowed an exemption under Article 3 (5) of the NUTS Regulations, i.e. because of particular geographical, socio-economic, historical, cultural or environmental circumstances, especially in the islands and the outermost regions.

Please provide any evidence in favour of or against an exemption under Article 3 (5) of the NUTS Regulations for Highlands & Islands and North Eastern Scotland NUTS 2 areas?

The Forum fully supports the Scottish Government in opposing the proposed merger of the current Highlands and Islands and North Eastern Scotland NUTS 2 regions.

With only minor revisions these 2 areas have remained separate entities at NUTS 2 level for many years – and the only argument of which the Forum is aware to support such a change is the target population range at EU level for NUTS 2 regions.

Given that the main operational uses of the NUTS geography relate to EU regional policy and Assisted Area designation it is worth noting that the areas are covered by 2 different economic development agencies; Highlands and Island Enterprise and Scottish Enterprise respectively.

The alignment proposal is problematic in so far as it affects North Ayrshire. At NUTS 2 level it would move Arran and the Cumbraes from the Highlands & Islands EU administrative unit and put them in with South West Scotland. At NUTS 3 level it would move them from the Argyll & Bute, Skye, Lochalsh and Lochaber rural and islands unit to a mainland unit comprising North and East Ayrshire. It is worth recalling that Arran and the Cumbraes were transferred into the then HIEB area in the 1970s (having not been part of HIEB's original designated area) on account of the fact that these communities faced very similar socio-economic and demographic challenges to the Highlands and Islands. This arrangement has worked successfully for many years and there is no evidence that the rationale underpinning the inclusion of these areas within the Highlands and Islands Enterprise area has diminished in any way over the past 30 years.

There are also issues arising from the proposals affecting the Helensburgh and Lomond area of Argyll and Bute and the Forum would urge the Scottish Government to take full account of any representations made by Argyll and Bute Council on this matter

So the arguments in favour of the status quo essentially revolve around continuity and alignment with the current SE/HIE operational boundary. In addition reference could be made to the very low population density of the Highlands and Islands one of the lowest at NUTS 2 level in the EU.

Eurostat have suggested that the Scottish Governments proposals for NUTS 3 should include merging Moray with Argyll & Bute Local Authority to create an area that meets their recommended population ranges.

Please provide any evidence in favour of or against an exemption under Article 3 (5) of the NUTS Regulations for the proposed Moray and Argyll & Bute NUTS 3 areas?

The Forum fully supports the Scottish Government in opposing the proposed merger of the Argyll and Bute Council area with the Moray Council area to form a single NUTS 3 region. The Forum is unaware of any other non-contiguous NUT 3 area in the UK and in this case the degree of non-contiguity would be very significant indeed – the two areas being divided by mountainous terrain with few, if any, direct transport links. For example the road distance from Oban to Elgin is nearly 150 miles and it is estimated that a road journey between these 2 towns would take nearly 4 hours (Source: Bing Maps).

Although the 2 local authority areas are predominantly rural, population density in Moray is about three times as high as that of Argyll and Bute (source: SCROL), which also of course has a large proportion of its population residing in inhabited islands (in contrast to Moray).