

Extract of letter from Chair of Boundaries Scotland to Minister for Parliamentary Business – 5 June 2023

Finally, and related to the issue of approval processes, we also discussed the steps in our review of Scottish Parliament constituencies. It is worth noting that our initial proposals overall have reduced the variation in electorate between the largest and smallest constituencies by over a third and increased the number of constituencies sitting within a single council area from 51 to 59.

You referred to the general disquiet among MSPs in some parts of Scotland. I understand the instinctive reaction from your MSP colleagues, some of which is included in the media coverage, to consider the impact of the proposals only from the perspective of their own constituencies. After the last islands review we had hoped that our efforts to engage with the Deputy First Minister, the Scottish Parliament Chief Executive, SPPA committee convener and clerk as well as the information session with MSPs would have helped all involved to react to proposals in the wider statutory context.

As an independent commission we are required to follow the rules as set out in the legislation. We would welcome your support as Minister in ensuring that MSPs understand this. Submissions to the Commission are most helpful when they provide alternatives that are consistent with the legislation. Some of the reaction has erred on the side of frustration (veering at times towards misinformation) rather than helpful suggestions for improvement. We are better able to discharge our duties when consultation responses set suggestions within an understanding of the review process, its legislative requirements and its overall purpose to ensure a fair electoral system.

It is of concern to me that partisan considerations may override more objective scrutiny when our final recommendations are before the Parliament and I would welcome further engagement with you in due course. It would be helpful to understand what further might be done to ensure that scrutiny is focussed on the match between our proposals and the legislative requirements rather than the implications for MSPs individually.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. Ailsa Henderson
Chair
Boundaries Scotland

Extract of reply from Minister for Parliamentary Business to Chair of Boundaries Scotland - 23 June 2023

In regards to engagement with MSPs around the current review of the Scottish Parliament's Constituencies and Regions, I will continue to encourage members to engage with you directly through any further consultation activity in their capacity as constituency MSPs. I will also emphasise that while representations on the proposed changes to constituency boundaries can be made at the appropriate times, when the review proposals are laid in Parliament the expectation is that these will be considered

in their full context, including all the legislative requirements.

I welcome the comment in your letter on working together to ensure that scrutiny of proposals is focused on those legislative requirements. My observation is that some of the initial reaction and comment could be steered towards a more productive discussion with additional context and explanation of the Commission's rationale on each proposal.

I look forward to working with you and to future meetings.

Kind regards

GEORGE ADAM