

**Second Review of Scottish Parliament Boundaries**  
**Consideration of responses to consultation on provisional proposals for**  
**constituency boundaries – Highland Council area**

**Action required**

1. The Commission is invited to consider responses to the consultation on its provisional proposals and whether it wishes to make changes to its proposals for constituencies in Highland Council area or hold a local inquiry.

**Background**

2. The electorates of the three existing Scottish Parliament constituencies within Highland Council area are shown in the table below:

Existing constituencies	Electorate	Variation from electoral quota	Wards
Caithness, Sutherland and Ross	56,532	-5.6%	1, 2, 3, 4, 5(part) 6, 7
Inverness and Nairn	70,493	17.7%	12(part), 13 – 19, 20(part)
Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch	62,193	3.8%	5(part), 8-11, 12(part), 20(part), 21

3. The provisional proposals retained the existing Caithness, Sutherland and Ross constituency boundary but amended the boundary between the Inverness and Nairn constituency and Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch constituency by Grantown on Spey and Strathdearn, south of Inverness.
4. The provisional proposals aimed to adhere to the principles of the review. The provisional proposals: had regard to the Highland Council area boundary and retained three constituencies wholly within it; improved variation from the electorate quota from the existing arrangements; and aimed to minimise change to the existing boundaries while considering local ties, with one constituency unchanged.
5. Highland Council area has an electorate of 189,218 with an entitlement to 3.2 constituencies. The neighbouring council areas, Argyll and Bute and Moray, both have an entitlement to 1.2 constituencies. Combining Highland with either Argyll and Bute or Moray would create a grouping of 4.4 constituencies with a higher

than average electorate per constituency. The Commission did consider a Highland–Moray constituency design at its meeting of 9 March 2023 (Paper 37) but it offered no improvement on variation from the electorate quota and crossed a local authority boundary.

6. Highland Council did not object to the provisional proposals or request a local inquiry and neither did a body of 100 electors resident in any of the proposed constituencies.
7. The electorates of the three proposed Scottish Parliament constituencies within Highland Council area are shown in the table below:

Proposed constituencies	Electorate	Variation from electoral quota	Wards
Caithness, Sutherland and Ross	56,532	-5.6%	1, 2, 3, 4, 5(part) 6, 7
Inverness and Nairn	69,113	15.4%	12(part), 13 – 18, 19(part), 20(part)
Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch	63,573	6.1%	5(part), 8–11, 12(part), 19(part), 20(part), 21

8. A map of the provisional proposals is at Appendix A.

### Representations received

9. 12 responses were received for these constituencies during the one month consultation period. All responses have been shared with the Commission. Responses to the consultation will be available on the Commission's consultation site [www.consult.boundaries.scot](http://www.consult.boundaries.scot) if the respondent gave permission to do so.

### Summary of responses

10. Suggestions and comments received during the initial consultation included:
  - alternative boundary and constituency name suggestion;
  - suggestion for four constituencies within Highland Council area; and
  - opposition to the proposals and size of the proposed Highland constituencies.

11. Unless otherwise stated the maps in this paper show alternative suggestions in block colours, existing ward boundaries are red and initial proposal boundaries are a black line.

### Highland Consultation Responses and Analysis

12. Highland Council suggested including the whole of the Badenoch and Strathspey ward in the proposed Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch constituency because it would maintain local ties, take better account of local geography and address variation from the electoral quota. They proposed naming their suggested constituency Skye, Lochaber, Badenoch and Strathspey. Highland Council also highlighted that two of the proposed constituencies were above the electorate quota and they expect the electorate of these constituencies to grow rapidly, due to projects such as the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport. The Council suggested that in the future Highland should have four constituencies.

13. A map of the Highland Council suggestion is at Appendix B and the electorate is shown in the table below.

Proposed constituencies	Electorate	Variation from electoral quota	Wards
Caithness, Sutherland and Ross	56,532	-5.6%	1, 2, 3, 4, 5(part) 6, 7
Inverness and Nairn	65,450	9.3%	12(part), 13 - 18, 19(part)
Skye, Lochaber, Badenoch and Strathspey	67,236	12.2%	5(part), 8-11, 12(part), 19(part), 20, 21

14. The suggestion from Highland Council retains three constituencies within the council area, improves variation from the electorate quota in comparison to both the existing arrangements and the provisional proposals and avoids splitting the Badenoch and Strathspey ward thus maintaining local ties and improving local representation south of Inverness. However their proposed Skye, Lochaber, Badenoch and Strathspey constituency remains at over 10% variation from the electorate quota.

15. The Highland Council Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee stated the Badenoch and Strathspey ward should not be split between constituencies. They suggested placing the whole of the Badenoch and Strathspey ward in either the

Inverness and Nairn constituency or the Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch constituency.

16. A member of the public opposed the inclusion of the Black Isle in a Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch constituency because the Black Isle has nothing in common with Skye, Lochaber or Badenoch. They suggested including the Black Isle in either the proposed Caithness, Sutherland and Ross or Inverness and Nairn constituencies. They offered no electorate or boundary information with their suggestion.
17. The Black Isle has nearly 8,800 electors. Based on the provisional proposals, the Commission could add the Black Isle to the Caithness, Sutherland and Ross constituency, see table below.

Constituency Name	Total Electorate	Variation from the electorate quota
Caithness, Sutherland and Ross	65,332	9.1%
Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch	54,773	-8.6%
Inverness and Nairn	69,113	15.4%

18. The Black Isle has been in the same Scottish Parliament constituency as Skye and Lochaber but never with Strathspey. From 1999–2011 the Black Isle was situated in a Ross, Skye and Inverness West constituency. Since 2011 the Black Isle has been situated in a Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch constituency. Similarly with the UK Parliament, the Black Isle has been in a constituency Skye and Lochaber but not with Strathspey.
19. Two members of the public opposed the proposals because the Highland constituencies cover vast areas. They stated the distance and time to travel across a large constituency make it challenging for an MSP to hold regular surgeries and meet electors face to face. They also stated poor broadband connections in many areas make it challenging to hold online meetings.
20. There are no area limit rules for Scottish Parliament constituencies. No alternative boundary suggestions were submitted with the comments.
21. A member of the public wished no change to the existing Inverness and Nairn constituency boundary and opposed adding Strathspey to an Elgin constituency.
22. The provisional proposals did not place Strathspey in an Elgin constituency. The respondent may have been confused with the 2023 Review of UK Parliament

constituencies which recommended a Moray West, Nairn and Strathspey constituency.

23. Two members of the public stated some boundary changes are required due to population changes and to balance the electorate between constituencies.
24. A member of the public opposed the number of electors in the proposed Inverness and Nairn constituency. They suggested four Highland constituencies.
25. Fergus Ewing MSP for Inverness and Nairn stated the provisional proposals over-represent central belt city constituencies in comparison to rural or partly rural constituencies, such as in the Highlands. He expanded that Inverness and Nairn has the largest electorate with 69,113 electors while the average electorate in Glasgow is 61,201. He compared the geographical size of the Highland constituencies, highlighting that the proposed Skye, Badenoch and Lochaber constituency covers 12,367 km<sup>2</sup>, while the average size of a Glasgow constituency is 24 km<sup>2</sup>. He suggested the Commission should consider special geographical considerations in Highland and propose four Highland constituencies. He also hoped the Commission would hold a local inquiry.
26. The number of Scottish Parliament constituencies is fixed at 73. Four Highland constituencies would necessitate the Commission making changes to another constituency grouping. If the Commission were to consider four Highland constituencies, the average electorate of a Highland constituency would be  $189,218 \div 4 = 47,304.5$  electors, with variation from the electoral quota of -21%. The Secretariat have developed a sketch of four Highland constituencies by simply combining ward boundaries, see table below and map in Appendix C. The map, although a sketch, highlights that four constituencies would still create constituencies covering large areas. One constituency would extend from Ullapool to Glen Coe.

<b>Proposed constituencies</b>	<b>Electorate</b>	<b>Variation from electoral quota</b>	<b>Wards</b>
Caithness and Sutherland	48,486	-19.1%	1-4, 6-7
Skye, Lochaber and Wester Ross	45,524	-24.0%	5, 10-12, 21
Inverness West and Dingwall	44,662	-25.4%	8-9, 13-15
Inverness East and Nairn	50,546	-15.6%	16-20

27. As a consequence of four Highland constituencies another constituency grouping would need to lose one constituency. Less one constituency, the:
- City of Edinburgh, East Lothian, Midlothian, West Lothian council area grouping with 11 constituencies would have an average variation from the electoral quota of +8%;
  - Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Angus, Moray council area grouping with eight constituencies would have an average variation from the electoral quota of +12.6%;
  - Argyll and Bute, East Dunbartonshire, North Lanarkshire, West Dunbartonshire council area grouping with seven constituencies would have an average variation from the electoral quota at +16.7%; and
  - all of the other groupings would have an average electorate per constituency over 70,000.
28. Although not suggested during the consultation, the Commission could also consider reducing the electorate of Highland by transferring some electors to a neighbouring grouping. This would create slightly smaller sized constituencies. For example the Nairn and Cawdor ward could be added to the Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Angus and Moray council area grouping or Fort William could be added to the Argyll and Bute, Dunbartonshires and North Lanarkshire council area grouping or Newtonmore/ Kingussie to the Perth and Kinross Council area grouping.
29. The Commission did consider a Highland–Moray constituency design at its meeting of 9 March 2023 (Paper 37) but it offered no improvement on variation from the electorate quota and crossed a local authority boundary.

### **All Scotland Consultation Responses**

30. Over 60 responses made general comments opposing the review or made comments out-with the legislation.
31. Six responses made general comments supporting the review.
32. A further 18 responses commented on more than one area. This included the Scottish Liberal Democrats who supported the Commission's provisional proposals for Highland that retained three Highland constituencies.

### **Summary**

33. The existing Inverness and Nairn constituency had variation from the electorate quota at 17.7%.

34. The provisional proposals retained the existing Caithness, Sutherland and Ross constituency but amended the boundary of the other two Highland constituencies to improve variation from the electorate quota.
35. There was no strong opposition to the provisional proposals in Highland Council area. Highland Council did not object to the proposals and neither did a body of 100 electors. There were few alternative suggestions.
36. The alternative suggestion from Highland Council would place the whole of the Badenoch and Strathspey ward in a constituency named Skye, Lochaber, Badenoch and Strathspey. Their suggestion would improve variation from the electorate quota in comparison with the provisional proposals and may better reflect local ties as it does not split the Badenoch and Strathspey ward.
37. In their response to the consultation, Highland Council mentioned the expected population growth within their area. The rules for a Scottish Parliament boundary review do not allow the Commission to consider forecast electorate growth. For reference, based on the National Records for Scotland's People registered to vote statistics ([nrsotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/people-registered-to-vote/1st-december-2022](https://nrsotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/people-registered-to-vote/1st-december-2022)), between 2012 and 2022 Scotland's electorate grew by 4.4%, while Highland's electorate grew by 2.6%, mainly by Inverness.

	2012	2022*	% change
Scotland electorate	4,063,206	4,243,803	4.4%.
Highland electorate	181,047	185,746	2.6%.
Scottish Parliament constituencies			
Caithness, Sutherland and Ross	56,724	55,423	-2.3%
Inverness and Nairn	65,172	69,181	6.1%
Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch	59,151	61,142	3.4%

*Note, the electorate franchise changed between 2012-2022.*

38. One respondent opposed the Black Isle being situated in a Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch constituency. The Black Isle currently sits in a Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch constituency.
39. There were suggestions for four Highland constituencies although no boundaries were provided. A four Highland constituency sketch has been drafted but would

still create constituencies covering large areas. Four Highland constituencies would also require another grouping to lose one constituency. The most obvious grouping being City of Edinburgh, East Lothian, Midlothian, West Lothian council area grouping with 11 constituencies but the average constituency variation from the electorate quota would be 8%. The Commission could consider merging Highland with a neighbouring grouping to lower the average electorate of the Highland constituencies but this was not suggested by anyone during the consultation and the Commission had considered this at an earlier meeting when developing its provisional proposals.

40. The Commission will be cognisant of the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 which requires the Commission to have a duty to consider island communities. Highland Council area contains a number of inhabited islands.

### **Recommendations**

41. Taking into account all of the evidence arising from the public consultation on the provisional proposals for constituencies, the Secretariat invites the Commission to decide whether to:

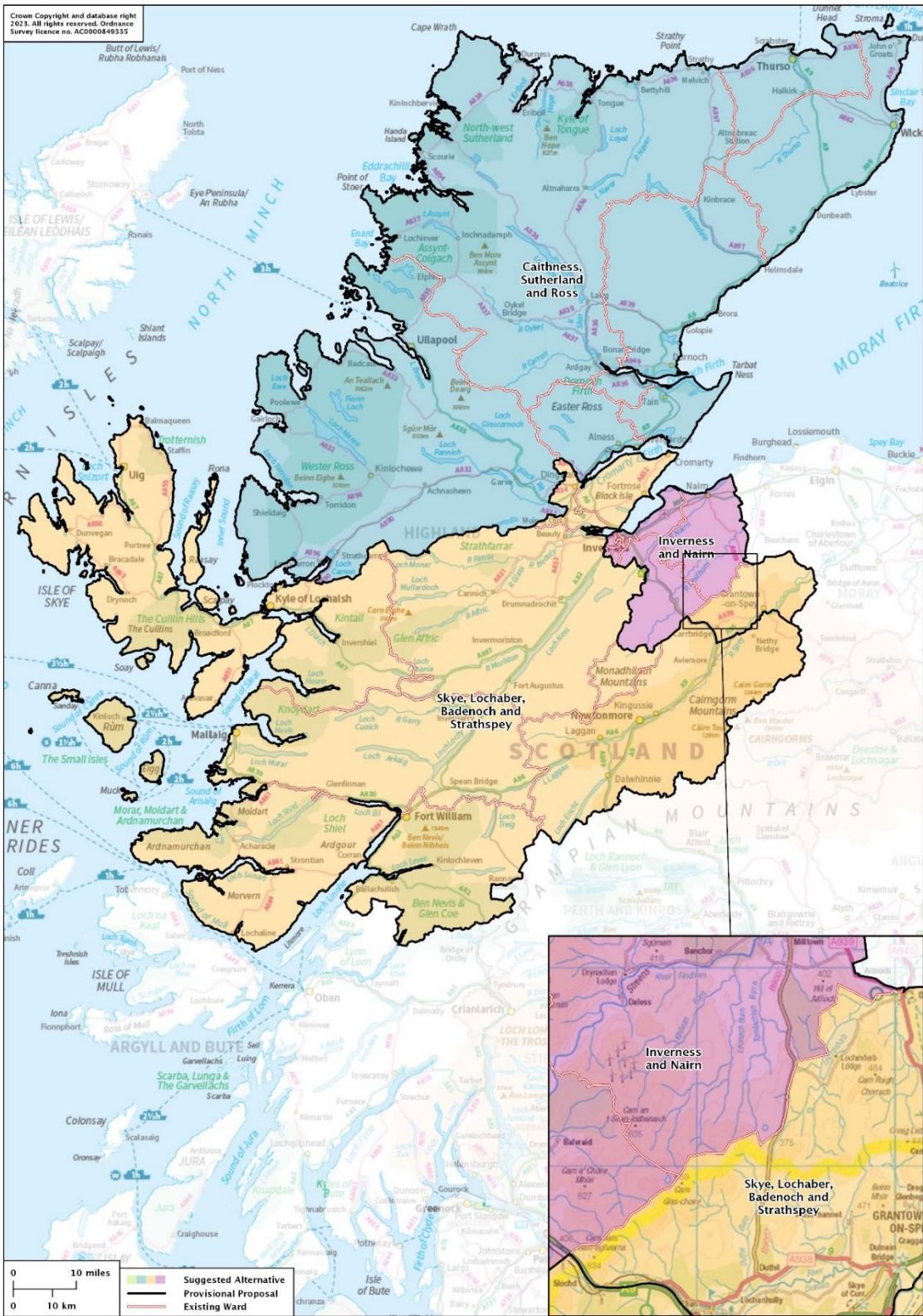
- adopt the published provisional proposals as its final recommendations subject to satisfactory design in other groupings being agreed;
- amend its proposals for constituency boundaries or names and consult upon them again; and
- hold a local inquiry.

**Secretariat**

**August 2023**



Highland Council suggestion –



Highland Council area with four Constituencies

