

Your ref:

My ref:

Date:

22nd June 2020

Public Bill Committee
House of Commons
Westminster
SW1A 0AA

Dear friends

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES BILL

It is my understanding that the Public Bill Committee is willing to receive written evidence as part of its scrutiny of the Parliamentary Constituencies Bill 2019-21 and I would be grateful if MPs on the Committee could consider the points in this representation.

I am writing this letter in a personal capacity, but I am the leader of Mebyon Kernow – the Party for Cornwall and I also chair Cornwall Council’s cross-party working group on national minority status.

Cornwall is a historic nation, with its own culture, traditions and language, while the Cornish are recognised as a national minority. This places many obligations on the UK Government and, with this in mind, it is my hope that MPs will wish to ensure that the Cornish border which has been in existence for more than one thousand years is respected in all future boundary reviews and no cross-Tamar seats will be created.

The last Boundary Review

The Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act was passed in 2011. It put in place a process to reduce the number of MPs to 600 and ensure that all seats (except for four named examples) would be within 5% of the average UK electorate. This meant that it was statistically impossible to ensure that all Cornish constituencies would lie entirely within the boundaries of Cornwall (and the Isles of Scilly).

When the “Boundary Commission for England” published its proposals for new constituency boundaries, it inevitably included a “Devonwall” parliamentary seat. This caused considerable upset in Cornwall. Hundreds and hundreds of people opposed the new seat and there was even a protest at Polson Bridge on the Cornish border.



Since the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act (2011) came into being, there has been a significant development. The UK Government has recognised the Cornish as a national minority. This alone should lead MPs to ensure that the new legislation includes a clause or clauses to protect Cornish territoriality.

The possibility of a “Devonwall” seat

Whereas the previous boundary review proposed a “Devonwall” constituency, I would acknowledge that a new review carried out in the near future (on the basis of 650 MPs and Cornwall’s present electorate) might not lead to the recommendation of a cross-Tamar constituency.

But the legislation states that a fresh boundary review should be carried out every eight years and, if Cornwall’s population does continue to grow, it would only be a matter of time before the likelihood of a Devonwall constituency arises once again.

It is my view that the Parliamentary Constituencies Bill 2019-21 could and should categorically rule out such a scenario.

The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities

On 24th April 2014, the UK Government recognised the Cornish people through the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. The official press release stated that “the decision to recognise the unique identity of the Cornish, now affords them the same status ... as the UK’s other Celtic people, the Scots, the Welsh and the Irish.”

As well as protecting the culture and identity of national minorities, the Framework Convention also seeks to protect the political integrity of territories associated with such groups.

An Advisory Committee from the Council of Europe visited the United Kingdom in March 2016 to assess how the UK Government and other public bodies were complying with the articles of the Framework Convention. The subsequent opinion published in 2017 raised a range of concerns about public policy in the UK, which including the review into parliamentary constituencies at that time, that it felt would adversely affect the Cornish national minority.

It is my view that the Parliamentary Constituencies Bill 2019-21, as presently drafted, is in conflict with the spirit and intent of the Framework Convention, and the Bill needs to be revised in order to address that conflict.

If the UK Parliament fails to amend the Bill, it will be failing to meet its obligations with regard to the Framework Convention. I would hope that MPs would want to ensure that it properly acts on the commitments that have been made by the UK Government.

A Boundary Commission for Cornwall

The Parliamentary Constituencies Bill 2019-21 ensures that the territories of other national minorities within the United Kingdom (namely the Scots, the Welsh and Northern Irish) are safeguarded and no seats can be proposed which would cross the

land borders between England and Scotland or England and Wales. This will principally be achieved through the existence of different Boundary Commissions (for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) which mean that there is no scenario in which cross-border seats between these four nations could be created.

It is therefore illogical that Cornwall – the territory of another national minority – is not treated in the same manner.

It is my view that it would be best to create a separate Boundary Commission to agree the future parliamentary constituencies for Cornwall. This would ensure that Cornwall's national border is permanently safeguarded.

Protected constituencies

Just like the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act (2011), the Parliamentary Constituencies Bill 2019-21 includes the four "protected constituencies" of Orkney and Shetland, Na h-Eileanan an Iar, and the Isle of Wight (2 seats).

One option for MPs would be to amend the Bill in order ensure that all Cornish constituencies would lie entirely within the boundaries of Cornwall (and the Isles of Scilly).

Please do the right thing for Cornwall

It is my hope that MPs will amend the Parliamentary Constituencies Bill 2019-21 in order to respect the Framework Convention and Keep Cornwall Whole.

Thank you,



Dick Cole
Cornwall Councillor (St Ender Division)

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