



Public Bill Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Your ref:
My ref: KK/240620
Date: 24 June 2020

By email: Direct to members of the Public Bill Committee

Dear Members of Public Bill Committee

On behalf of Cornwall Council, I write in respect of the Parliamentary Consistencies Bill 2019-21.

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 Members of Parliament 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 seats will be created that span Devon and Cornwall.

The Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act was passed in 2011 and 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 parliamentary seat that straddled Devon and Cornwall. 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 that requires consideration. On 24 April 2014, the UK Government recognised the Cornish people through the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. In making the historic announcement, the Government 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.”

Crucially, 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 Members of Parliament would want to ensure that it properly acts on the commitments that have been made by the UK Government.

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 and I ask that consideration be given to a separate Boundary Commission to agree the future parliamentary constituencies for Cornwall. This would ensure that Cornwall's national border is permanently safeguarded.

The alternative option 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) which is consistent with the Framework Convention by adding a fifth 'protected constituency' to the four already included in the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011.

I would be grateful if the Public Bill Committee could consider the points in this representation as part of the scrutiny of the Parliamentary Constituencies Bill 2019-21.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely
Dhywgh hwi yn hwir



Councillor Julian German
Hembrenkyas an Konsel
Leader of the Council
Pell/Tel: 01872 322102
Email: julian.german@cornwallcouncillors.org.uk

CC: Cornwall MPs - Steve Double MP, Scott Mann MP, Cherilyn Mackrory MP, Derek Thomas MP, George Eustice MP, Sheryll Murray MP