BCS Paper 2022/15

2023 Review of UK Parliament Constituencies
Consideration of Revised Proposals for Aberdeenshire, Argyll and Bute, Highland and Moray council areas

Action required

1. After considering responses to the initial and secondary consultations on its initial proposals at its meeting of 9 May 2022 the Commission is invited to consider the options outlined below. The options incorporate suggestions made during consultation and also points raised by the Commission in discussion at its meeting of 9 May 2022. The Commission is also invited to agree its revised proposals for public consultation for this grouping.

Background

2. The Commission's initial proposals for this area proposed seven constituencies for this grouping, one fewer than the existing number of constituencies. One existing constituency boundary was retained, West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine.

3. A map of the proposed constituencies is at Appendix A.

Proposed constituencies	Electorate	Wards
Argyll	71,442	Argyll and Bute – all Highland 21(part)
Banff and Buchan	72,837	Aberdeenshire 1 – 6 Moray 2, 3
Gordon and Moray South	73,121	Aberdeenshire 7 – 9, 10(part), 11, 12(part), 14(part) Moray 1
Highland Central	75,651	Highland 5(part), 10, 11, 12(part), 13-16, 17(part), 19, 21(part)
Highland East and Elgin	72,038	Highland 17(part), 18, 20 Moray 4-8
Highland North	76,654	Highland 1-4, 5(part), 6-9, 12(part)
West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine	73,634	Aberdeenshire 10(part), 12(part), 13, 14(part), 15-19

4. At its meeting of 9 May 2022 the Commission considered the responses to the initial proposals in these areas. There were 265 responses, most of which opposed: Moray being split between three constituencies; the size of the proposed Highland North constituency; and the proposed Argyll constituency name. No alternative suggestions were submitted to resolve all of the issues raised.

5. The Commission asked the Secretariat to develop revised options for the northern boundary of the proposed Argyll constituency by Lochaber. The Commission agreed that the alternative suggestion from the Scottish Liberal Democrat Party, to create more equally sized Highland constituencies, with a revised boundary in Ross-shire would address concerns raised during the consultation regarding constituency size, and asked the Secretariat to adopt this suggestion in any revised options. The Commission noted support for the proposed West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine constituency but deferred agreeing its revised proposals in this area until after consideration of revised proposals which may merge this council area grouping with the Angus, Clackmannanshire,

Dundee City, Falkirk, Fife, Perth and Kinross, Stirling and West Lothian council area grouping.

6. The Commission discussed the alternative suggestions combining parts of Aberdeen with Aberdeenshire but felt they lacked strong arguments while there was generally support for, or a lack of opposition to, the initial proposals in Aberdeen.

7. The maps in this paper show revised proposal options in block colours, existing ward boundaries are red and initial proposal boundaries are a black line.

Option 1 – Argyll constituency boundary by Lochaber

8. The Commission asked the Secretariat to develop revised options for the northern boundary of the proposed Argyll constituency at Lochaber.

9. There are too few electors (67,565) to retain the existing Argyll and Bute constituency which is coterminous with the council area boundary.

10. The initial proposals split the Fort William and Ardnamurchan ward by following the Mamore mountain tops, adding Ardnamurchan, Glencoe and Kinlochleven to an Argyll constituency and Fort William to a Highland Central constituency. The initial proposals avoided breaking local ties by Fort William, Banavie, Caol and Corpach.

11. The Commission could consider following other recognised boundaries in Lochaber such as community council area boundaries or the historical county boundary between Argyll and Inverness-shire, although counties were abolished in 1975.

12. All three boundaries are broadly similar:
    - the county boundary mainly follows natural water features, Blackwater Reservoir, Loch Leven and Loch Shiel, creating an easily identifiable boundary;
    - the community council area boundary also follows Mamore hill-tops and Moidart hill-tops; and
    - the initial proposals followed recognisable features, the Mamore hill-tops and a railway-line.

13. The historical county boundary between Argyll and Inverness-shire follows the Kinloch River and splits the villages of Kinlochleven and Kinlochmore between constituencies. The Secretariat have drawn the boundary around the villages to avoid this.

14. There is little difference between the electorate of these suggestions. The initial proposals proposed an Argyll constituency with 71,442 electors. Following community council area boundaries would propose an Argyll constituency with 71,941 electors, while following the county boundary would propose an Argyll constituency with 71,013 electors. Maps of the initial proposals and these boundaries can be seen at Appendix B.

Option 2 – Scottish Liberal Democrat Suggestion – Highland

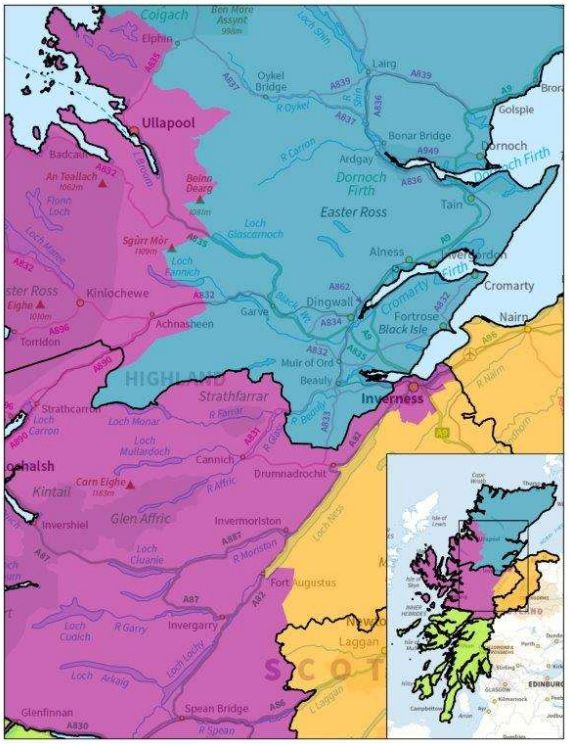
15. The Commission considered all responses and agreed that the Scottish Liberal Democrat Party suggestion addressed concerns raised during the consultation

regarding constituency size, and asked the Secretariat to adopt this suggestion in any revised options.

16. The initial proposals proposed a Highland North constituency with an area of 12,781 km² and this is only slightly larger than the existing Ross, Skye and Lochaber constituency at 12,768 km².

17. Scottish Liberal Democrat Party suggested a Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross constituency at 10,415km². Their suggestion follows polling district boundaries in Wester Ross and also partly follows community council area boundaries and hill-tops. Their suggested Inverness, West Highlands and Skye constituency covers 9,901km².

18. The Commission noted the Scottish Liberal Democrat suggestion created an unsatisfactory shaped constituency boundary by Beauly and south of Inverness, see map below. The Commission asked the Secretariat to try to develop revised alternative boundaries in this area.



19. The Scottish Liberal Democrats suggested boundary followed the initial proposals south of Beauly which followed community council area boundaries, polling district boundaries and hill tops by Beauly. A boundary closer to Beauly could be created by following the River Beauly, however this would create an Inverness, West Highlands and Skye constituency above the electorate quota and split Beauly and Kiltarlity between constituencies.

20. The Scottish Liberal Democrat suggested boundary follows Loch Ness and Great Glen to create an easily identifiable boundary. This splits the Aird and Loch Ness ward which covers both sides of Loch Ness. There are approx. 1,500 electors on the eastern side of Loch Ness and by following the Aird and Loch Ness ward boundary, it may create a better shaped boundary south of Inverness although it

would require a minor change to accommodate this. The Culloden and Ardersier ward would be split by following the Balloch community council area boundary..

21. The Scottish Liberal Democrat suggestion did not include any suggestions for Aberdeenshire, Argyll and Bute or Moray and the Secretariat have retained the existing Argyll and West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine constituencies. See Appendix C.

Constituency	Electorate
Argyll	71,442
Highland North	72,632
Highland Central	77,010
Highland East	73,960
North Aberdeenshire	75,737
Central Aberdeenshire	70,962
West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine	73,634

22. The advantages of the Scottish Liberal Democrats suggestion are it:
    - creates a smaller Highland North constituency addressing most of the concerns raised during the consultation regarding the Highland North constituency size. There were no other suggestions which addressed these concerns;
    - splits Moray between two rather than three constituencies;
    - can accommodate alternative boundaries by Lochaber; and
    - retains the existing West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine constituency

23. They disadvantages of this suggestion are it does not retain a Moray constituency.

Other Options

24. The Commission asked the Secretariat to investigate if a solution to some of the issues raised during the consultation could be resolved by merging this constituency grouping with the neighbouring grouping of Angus, Clackmannanshire, Dundee City, Falkirk, Fife, Perth and Kinross, Stirling and West Lothian council areas.

25. Unfortunately the Secretariat have been unable to create a solution, mainly because some groupings have a very high or low average electorate per grouping offering little flexibility.

26. For example a grouping of Aberdeenshire, Angus, Argyll and Bute, Clackmannanshire, Dundee City, Fife, Highland, Moray and Perth and Kinross council areas could resolve concerns raised in Fife, Forth Valley and Perthshire but it creates a grouping with a very low average electorate. The total electorate of these areas is 1,145,213, giving a theoretical entitlement of 15.6 constituencies, rounded up to 16 constituencies. This is partly due to retaining four Fife constituencies. Fife has a theoretical entitlement of 3.79 constituencies.

27. As a consequence a grouping of Dumfries and Galloway, Scottish Borders and South Lanarkshire, with 461,282 electors, provides a theoretical entitlement of 6.29 constituencies, rounded down to 6 constituencies. This would propose a

high average electorate of 76,880 per constituency, just 182 electors below the quota maximum.

28. A new design would necessitate new constituencies where there had been some support or little opposition to the initial proposals. It would also be challenging for the Commission to consider its constituency design factors (the size, shape and accessibility of a constituency; boundaries of council areas and electoral wards at the start of a review; existing UK Parliament constituency boundaries; any local ties which would be broken by changes in constituencies; and the inconvenience attendant on such changes).

29. Even merging a grouping of Dumfries and Galloway, Scottish Borders and South Lanarkshire council areas (6.29 constituencies) with a grouping of Glasgow City, Inverclyde and Renfrewshire with a theoretical entitlement of 8.79 constituencies would result in several constituencies overlapping the Glasgow City council area boundary at Bearsden, Cardonald, Yoker and Carmyle/ Dalmarnock.

Constituency Names

30. As agreed at the meeting of 9 May 2022, upon completion of the constituency design process the Commission will have the opportunity to review all constituency names and designations prior to the publication of its revised proposals.

Summary

31. Option 1 proposes three alternative boundaries by Lochaber: the initial proposals; community council area boundaries; and the historical county boundary. All three boundaries offer similar electorate for an Argyll constituency and follow natural or physical features.

32. The Scottish Liberal Democrats suggestion to create a Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross constituency addresses concerns from the initial consultation regarding the size of the proposed Highland North constituency. Their suggestion proposes a constituency over 2,000 km² smaller. There were no other suggestions to address concerns over the size of the Commission's Highland North constituency.

33. The Commission can recommend a constituency with an electorate lower than the quota minimum if it is larger than 12,000 square kilometres but no constituency can be larger than 13,000 square kilometres.

34. The Scottish Liberal Democrats suggestion follows an easily recognisable boundary, Loch Ness, but creates an oddly shaped constituency south of Inverness. The constituency could follow the Aird and Loch Ness ward boundary. It follows a hill-line on the eastern side of Loch Ness from Daviot towards Fort Augustus.

35. The Secretariat attempted to merge this constituency grouping with the neighbouring grouping of Clackmannanshire, Dundee City, Fife, Highland, Moray and Perth and Kinross council areas to resolve issues in Perthshire. Unfortunately it was not possible to find a solution which addressed concerns across Scotland while also considering recognised boundaries.

Recommendations

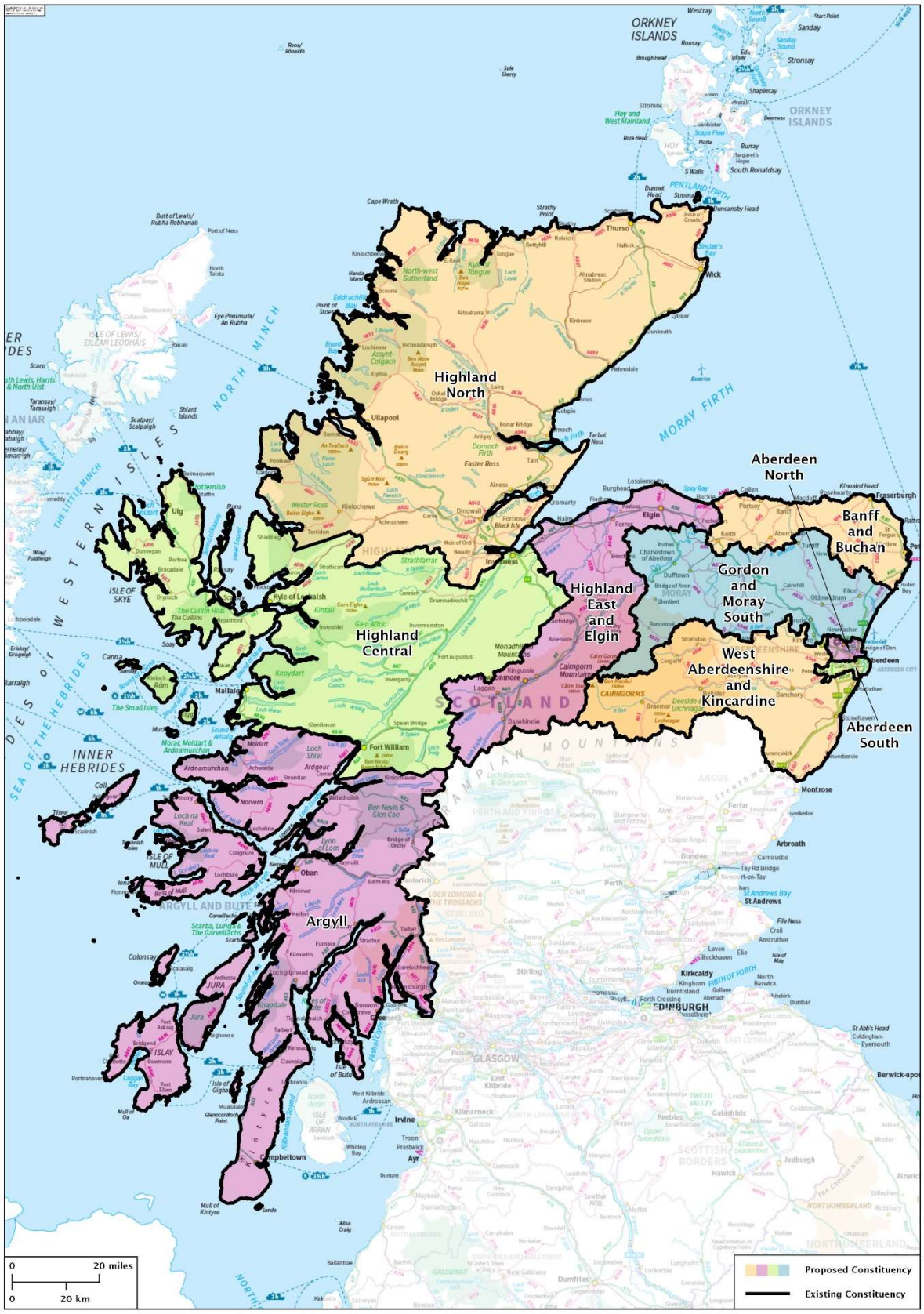
36. Taking into account all of the evidence arising from the public consultations on the Initial Proposals, the Secretariat invites the Commission to decide whether:
    - to adopt any of the alternative suggestions or options;
    - to amend its proposals for constituency names; or
    - to adopt without amendment the Initial Proposals for Aberdeenshire, Argyll and Bute, Highland and Moray council areas are adopted without amendment as the Commission's revised proposals (as in Appendix A), subject to consideration of all other constituencies.

Secretariat
May 2022

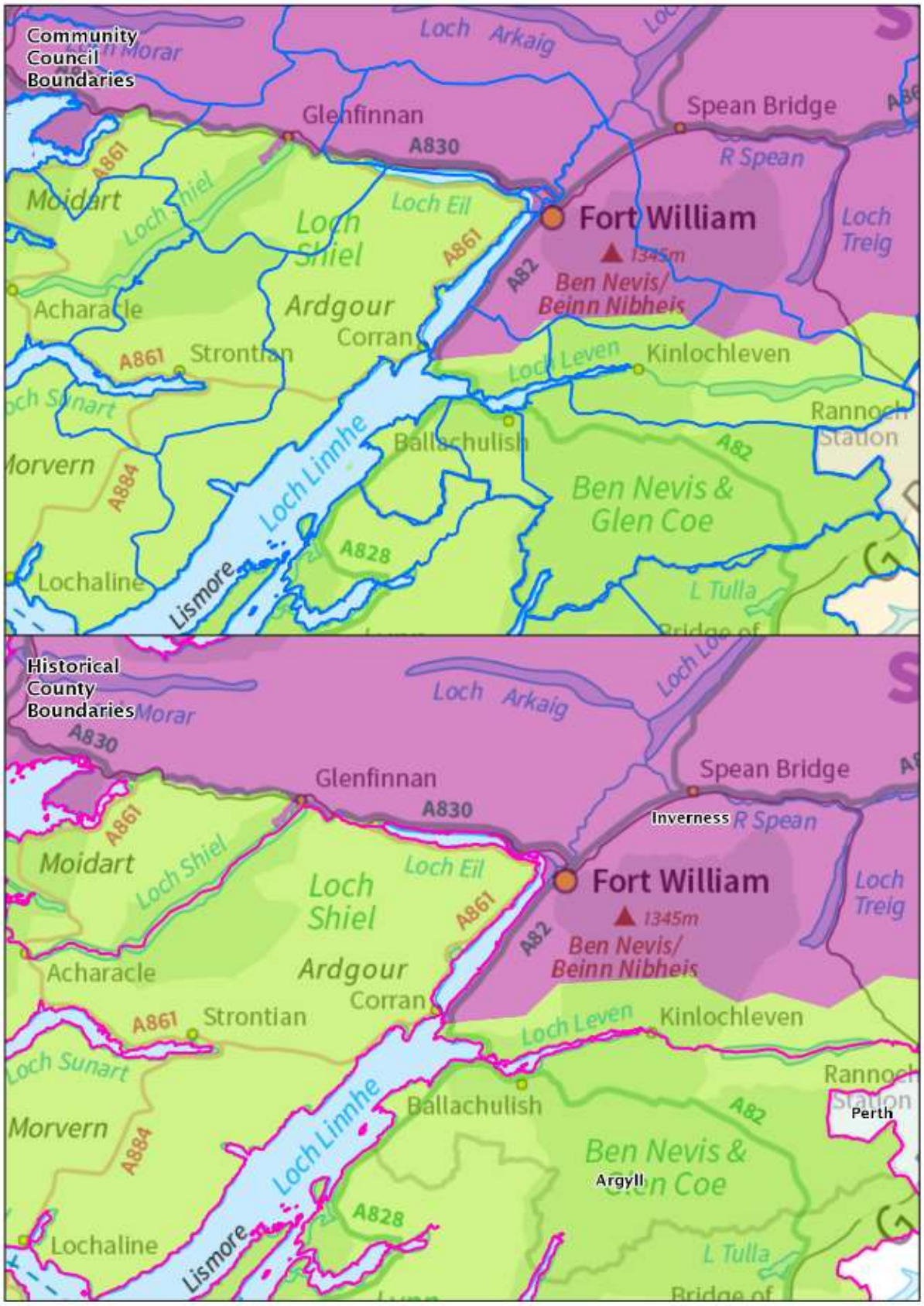
BCS Paper 2022/15

Appendix A

Initial proposals – Aberdeenshire, Argyll and Bute, Highland and Moray council areas

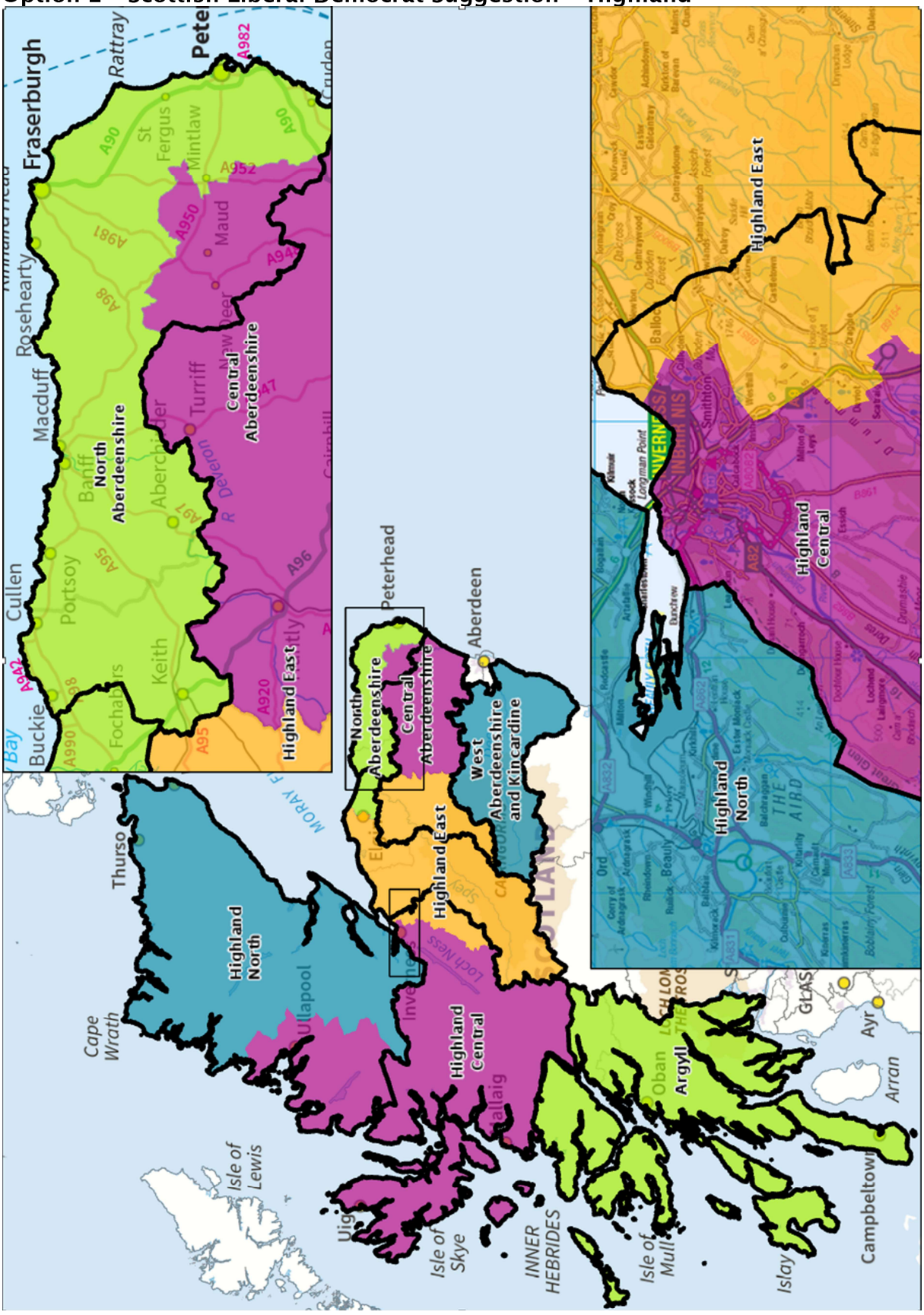


Option 1 – Argyll constituency boundary by Lochaber



Appendix C

Option 2 – Scottish Liberal Democrat Suggestion – Highland



Option 1 – Argyll constituency boundary by Lochaber