



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

REPORT ON THE *REPORT OF THE FEDERAL ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES COMMISSION FOR THE PROVINCE OF NOVA SCOTIA, 2022*

**Report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and
House Affairs**

Honourable Bardish Chagger, Chair

**MARCH 2023
44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION**

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NOTICE TO READER

Reports from committees presented to the House of Commons

Presenting a report to the House is the way a committee makes public its findings and recommendations on a particular topic. Substantive reports on a subject-matter study usually contain a synopsis of the testimony heard, the recommendations made by the committee, as well as the reasons for those recommendations.

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THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

has the honour to present its

TWENTY-SIXTH REPORT

Pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(3)(a)(vi), the committee has considered the objections filed in respect of the *Report of the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission for the Province of Nova Scotia*, in accordance with section 22 of the *Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act*, R.S.C., 1985, c. E-3, and has agreed to report the following:

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REPORT ON THE REPORT OF THE FEDERAL ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES COMMISSION FOR THE PROVINCE OF NOVA SCOTIA, 2022

INTRODUCTION

On 31 January 2023, pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(3)(a)(vi) and section 22 of the *Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act* (EBRA),¹ the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs (the Committee) began its consideration of the objections filed by members of the House of Commons in respect of the *Report of the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission for the Province of Nova Scotia* (the Report and the Commission).

After each decennial census, the number of members of the House of Commons and the representation of each province is adjusted according to the rules found in section 51 and 51A of the *Constitution Act, 1867*.

The chief electoral officer (CEO) is responsible for calculating the number of members of the House allotted to each province. This calculation is mathematical and the CEO exercises no discretion in the matter.

The work of readjusting electoral boundaries is carried out in each province by an independent and neutral three-member electoral boundaries commission. The mandate of these commissions is to consider and report on the division of their province into electoral districts,² the description of the boundaries and the name of each electoral district.

The EBRA provides the rules governing the division of a province into electoral districts. The population of each electoral district must be as close as possible to the electoral quota for the province, that is, the population of the province divided by the number of members of the House of Commons allocated to the province under section 51 of the *Constitution Act, 1867*.

In setting the boundaries of an electoral district, each commission is legally obliged to consider the community of interest, community of identity or the historical pattern of an

1 [Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act](#), R.S.C., 1985, c. E-3.

2 Note that the terms “electoral districts” and “ridings” are used interchangeably in this committee report.



electoral district in the province. Further, electoral districts must have a manageable geographic size, in cases of sparsely populated, rural or northern regions.

A commission may depart from the provincial electoral quota by plus or minus 25% in order to respect the community of interest, community of identity, or the historical pattern of an electoral district, or to maintain the manageable geographic size of sparsely populated districts. In circumstances that are viewed as extraordinary by a commission, the variance from the electoral quota may be greater than 25%.

After coming up with an initial Proposal for the electoral districts in their province, a commission is required to hold at least one public meeting to hear representations by interested persons. After the completion of the public hearings, each commission prepares a report on the boundaries and names of the electoral districts of the province. These reports are tabled in the House of Commons, and referred to the Committee. Members of the House then have 30 calendar days to file objections with the clerk of the Committee to the proposals contained in a report.

An objection must be in writing and in the form of a motion. It must specify the provisions of the report objected to, and the reasons for those objections. An objection must be signed by not less than 10 members of the House of Commons.

The Committee then has 30 sittings days to consider members' objections, unless an extension is granted by the House. The Committee's reports on members' objections are referred back to the relevant commissions, along with the objections, the minutes of the proceedings and the evidence heard by the Committee. The commission then has 30 calendar days to consider the merits of all objections, and prepare its final report.

Once all the commission reports have been finalized, the CEO prepares a draft representation order setting out the boundaries and names of the new electoral districts. This is sent to the Governor in Council who, within five days, must proclaim the new representation order to be in force and effective for any general election that is called seven months after the proclamation is issued.

OBJECTIONS

The Report of the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission for the Province of Nova Scotia was tabled in the House of Commons, and referred to the Committee on 17 November 2022. By the end of the 30-day period, the clerk of the Committee had received three objections.

A. Electoral Boundary Changes

1. Jaime Battiste, the member for Sydney—Victoria

Jaime Battiste, the member for Sydney—Victoria, objected to the proposed ridings of Cape Breton—Canso—Antigonish and Sydney—Glace Bay in the Commission’s Report. His objection is based on the adverse effects these proposed boundaries would have on the Mi’kmaq communities of Eskasoni and Wagmatcook, which are communities of interest and communities of identity. It was accompanied by individual letters of support from Chief Norman Bernard of the Wagmatcook First Nation and Chief Leroy Denny of the Eskasoni First Nation, as well as a letter signed by the five Chiefs of the Unama’ki (Cape Breton) Mi’kmaq District.³ The joint letter states that the Mi’kmaq communities’ “constitutional rights to be consulted and accommodated” have been violated by the Commission.⁴

The Mi’kmaq communities of Eskasoni and Wagmatcook are currently situated in the riding of Sydney—Victoria, a configuration that is reflected in the Commission’s initial Proposal. However, the electoral boundaries proposed in the Report for Cape Breton Island would instead create one urban riding (Sydney—Glace Bay) and one large rural riding that include portions of the existing ridings of Sydney—Victoria, Cape Breton—Canso and Central Nova (Cape Breton—Canso—Antigonish). The new configuration would cleave the Mi’kmaq communities of Eskasoni and Wagmatcook from the City of Sydney with which, according to Mr. Battiste, they have significant historical, social, cultural and economic ties.

Mr. Battiste stressed that the affected communities feel that they were unfairly kept out of the consultation process, as the Commission’s Report departs considerably from its initial Proposal. He stated the changes proposed by the Commission had created the suspicion and perception of systemic racism because of how late in the redistribution process they were made. Mr. Battiste believes a clear message must be sent that “systemic racism and failures in the past to ensure indigenous representation stops today.”⁵ He cautioned that should the proposed boundaries be adopted, it could lead to legal action.

3 Chief Terrence Paul, Membertou; Chief Annie Daisley, Waycobah; Chief Norman Bernard, Wagmatcook; Chief Wilbert Marshall, Potlotek; Chief Leroy Denny, Eskasoni.

4 Union of Nova Scotia Mi’kmaq, *Re: Adverse Impact*, 26 January 2023.

5 House of Commons, Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs (PROC), *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 48, 31 January 2023 (Jaime Battiste, M.P., Sydney—Victoria), 1235.



Mr. Battiste recommended maintaining the existing electoral boundaries for the ridings of Sydney–Victoria and Cape Breton–Canso to ensure effective representation and to make up for historical injustices of the past. To support his objection, Mr. Battiste stated:

- There was a lack of procedural fairness for the affected communities. According to Mr. Battiste, the residents of Sydney–Victoria were satisfied with the initial Proposal, as it made little to no change to the boundaries of their riding. This resulted in a low turnout at the public hearing in Sydney. Mr. Battiste indicated that the lack of a mechanism allowing the affected communities to respond to the “dramatically” and “unilaterally” altered proposal in the Commission Report contravenes principles of procedural fairness. Mr. Battiste believes that any such significant changes should have been proposed at the beginning of the process, not at the Report stage, and likened the late change to “procedural catfishing.”⁶
- The boundaries proposed in the Report ignore the close historical and contemporary ties between the Mi’kmaq communities of Eskasoni and Wagmatcook and those of Membertou and Sydney. In particular, Mr. Battiste notes that the Eskasoni community shops, participates in sports and social activities, and accesses government and hospital services in Sydney.
- The boundaries proposed in the Report were drawn without consulting the affected Mi’kmaq communities, and the Commission did this despite the Crown’s duty to consult Indigenous peoples. Mr. Battiste supported this argument by referring to First Nations’ inherent and treaty rights, and the obligations of the Crown in this respect. He also referred to article 19 of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP), which requires that free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous communities be obtained before adopting and implementing any administrative measure that may affect them.
- The proposed electoral boundaries in the Report for Cape Breton Island do not factor in Indigenous languages in the same manner other historical linguistic minority communities have been taken into account by past commissions. Mr. Battiste pointed out that the current riding of Sydney–Victoria has 2,375 Mi’kmaq speakers. He noted that the

6 Ibid., 1200.

Commission's Report does not present any evidence that Mi'kmaq language rights were considered during the consultations. Mr. Battiste fears that the language weight of the Mi'kmaq would be reduced within the proposed riding of Cape Breton–Canso–Antigonish, as it would be a nearly unilingually anglophone riding. He indicated that the interests of other linguistic minority communities, such as those of francophone Acadians, were given consideration in previous electoral boundaries readjustments.

- The Commission did not align its work with other electoral commissions, which gave appropriate consideration to the distinct rights of Indigenous peoples. Mr. Battiste stated that since the 1992 redistribution, the electoral boundary commissions in Nova Scotia have recognized the Mi'kmaq communities as a core community of interest. He underlined that indigenous communities were not mentioned anywhere in the Commission's report. Mr. Battiste also alluded to the work of other commissions, which considered the importance of Indigenous consultation and accommodation in their work.

The Committee supports Mr. Battiste's objection and recommends that the Electoral Boundaries Commission for the Province of Nova Scotia consider it favourably.

2. Lena Metlege Diab, the member for Halifax West

Lena Metlege Diab, the member for Halifax West, objected to the proposed electoral boundaries of Halifax West in the Commission's Report. Ms. Diab is advocating in favour of the boundaries proposed by the Commission in its initial proposal, which kept together a number of communities of new immigrants in the current Halifax West riding and left intact, in a single riding, the community of St. Margarets Bay.

Ms. Diab's objection was threefold. First, she stated that Halifax West has a well-established community of interest of diverse Canadians, which the Commission did not take into consideration in its Report. For decades, Halifax West has had a community of new immigrants and minority racial, cultural, ethnic, religious and linguistic groups. According to Ms. Diab, the current electoral boundaries provide for the effective representation of these various groups; however, this effectiveness would be diluted if these communities were to be divided into separate ridings. Indeed, Ms. Diab stated



that, in her view, the Commission's proposal for Halifax West in the Report decimates this community hub for new Canadians.⁷

Next, Ms. Diab stated that the proposed ridings of Halifax West and South Shore–St. Margarets do not respect St. Margarets Bay's community of interest or identity, or the historical patterns of previous electoral boundaries. With respect to the latter, Ms. Diab stated that the community of St. Margarets Bay was founded in 1780 and that, from Hubbards to Peggy's Cove, it has been in the same federal riding since 1867.

She indicated that St. Margarets Bay is a distinct, connected community, as seen by their common school system, shared local services and close economic and social association. However, the proposed boundary changes made by the Commission in its Report places two-thirds of the residents of St. Margarets Bay in Halifax West rather than in their namesake riding of South Shore–St. Margarets. She told the Committee that residents were concerned about their community being divided in two, especially because population growth in the area was not the impetus for this proposed change.

Ms. Diab underlined that these changes were extensive and not part of the Commission's initial proposal, and as such, residents did not have an opportunity to provide their input about these changes during the public consultations. She provided the Committee with over two dozen names of residents, stakeholders, representatives, businesses and community groups or associations from St. Margarets Bay who had contacted her, following the issuance of the Commission's Report, and asked her for her help in keeping their community intact in a single riding.

Lastly, Ms. Diab objected to the Commission's proposal for the riding of Halifax West on the grounds of procedural fairness. She indicated that the Commission did not hold any public in-person hearings in Halifax West. Having attended the one virtual Commission hearing, she noted that she did not hear anyone suggest or advocate for the boundaries that the Commission proposed in its Report for Halifax West. According to Ms. Diab, based on the Commission's initial proposal, the various communities of interest in Halifax West had no reason to believe that the Commission intended to recommend drawing a division through them.

She stated that, in her view, had the Commission had the intention of proposing big changes to the current ridings in Nova Scotia, the big changes ought to have been proposed at the initial proposal stage and not at the Report stage. Ms. Diab stated that the residents of the current Halifax West riding were happy with the boundaries for that riding

7 PROC, Evidence, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 48, 31 January 2023 (Lena Metlege Diab, M.P., Halifax West), 1225.

made by the Commission in its initial proposal. As such, they were caught off guard by the proposal in the Commission's Report. Further, she indicated that the population of new immigrants in her riding, understandably, lack familiarity with the electoral boundaries readjustment process and, as such, were not predisposed to make submissions about their viewpoints to the Commission. This lack of familiarity could potentially have been addressed had the Commission proposed big changes to the Halifax West riding at the initial proposal stage and not subsequent to the public hearings.

In sum, Ms. Diab believes that the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) is a pocket of diversity in Nova Scotia and that Halifax West is a pocket of greater diversity within the HRM. She stated that this diversity merited protection and meaningful representation.

The Committee supports Ms. Diab's objection and recommends that the Electoral Boundaries Commission for the Province of Nova Scotia consider it favourably.

3. The Honourable Sean Fraser, the member for Central Nova

The Honourable Sean Fraser, the member for Central Nova, objected to the proposed changes to the electoral boundaries of the current federal riding of Central Nova (proposed riding of Pictou–Eastern Shore). Mr. Fraser told the Committee that of the 10 municipalities in his riding, nine objected to both the process followed and the outcome reached by the Commission. Mr. Fraser noted that while significant opposition was raised by residents of the current riding of Central Nova during the public consultations, their input resulted in no accommodation in the Report. Indeed, he stated that some issues raised about the Commission's initial Proposal were even exacerbated in the Report.

According to Mr. Fraser, if the Commission's proposal were to be adopted, it would divide a number of communities of interest, create rural and urban tensions between communities in the region, and undermine the ability of the member of Parliament representing that riding to serve their constituents. To support his objection, Mr. Fraser stated:

- The connections run deep between the Town and County of Antigonish, and Pictou County, as both regions share a long common history. These two communities are better served by remaining in the same federal riding. Many people live in one community and work in the other. Further, both counties have Indigenous communities, a historical connection to Scottish settlers, and several institutions of higher education.



- Residents of Antigonish are deeply concerned about the placement of their community into the proposed riding of Cape Breton–Canso–Antigonish, as the majority of this riding is located on Cape Breton Island. Further, the Commission’s Report proposes to enlarge the area of Cape Breton Island that is contained in the proposed riding of Cape Breton–Canso–Antigonish, as compared to the initial Proposal. This enlargement in fact deepens the concerns held by residents of Antigonish, and this despite residents having voiced their objection to being a part of the proposed riding of Cape Breton–Canso–Antigonish at the public hearings.
- Despite the Commission’s assertion in its Report that there is some connection between Antigonish and a small portion of Cape Breton, Mr. Fraser argues that there is no significant connection between Antigonish and most of the other communities on Cape Breton Island. He stated that the island “faces particular challenges, which are separate and apart from those faced in Antigonish,” in particular with respect to health care, Indigenous rights, poverty reduction and industrial economy. Mr. Fraser stated that these communities share “no real common economy or common political issues.”⁸
- Extending the southwest boundary of the proposed riding of Pictou–Eastern Shore to include parts of the Halifax suburbs would alter the character of the riding, which is currently made up of small towns and rural communities. In Mr. Fraser’s view, the interests and priorities of these small, widespread rural communities are fundamentally different from those of the residents of the Halifax suburbs.
- The large size of the proposed riding of Cape Breton–Canso–Antigonish would pose challenges for a member of Parliament to effectively serve all constituents in the riding, in particular if communities without logical connections were to be joined together.

In addition, Mr. Fraser indicated that the process which resulted in the Commission’s Report was fraught with serious issues to do with legal and procedural fairness. He underscored that no public consultation was held in the proposed riding of Pictou–Eastern Shore. Further, the venue for the hearing in Antigonish was too small and quickly reached full capacity. While the Commission did subsequently obtain a larger room for

8 PROC, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 48, 31 January 2023 (Hon. Sean Fraser, P.C., M.P., Central Nova), 1150.

the hearing, the last-minute nature of this change resulted in confusion among some residents who showed up in the wrong venue or others who decided not to attend at all.

He also noted that the boundaries for the proposed riding of Pictou–Eastern were drawn without consultation with important community groups, such as Nova Scotia’s African and Mi’kmaq communities. In his view, the Commission ought to have directly sought their input. Mr. Fraser indicated that he raised this issue with the Commission, but it did not to address his suggestion. With respect to Indigenous communities, Mr. Fraser felt that the Commission acted without fulfilling the constitutionally required duty to consult.

The Committee supports Mr. Fraser’s objection and recommends that the Electoral Boundaries Commission for the Province of Nova Scotia consider it favourably.

B. Electoral District Name Changes

1. The Honourable Sean Fraser, member for Central Nova

Mr. Fraser objected to the proposed riding name of Pictou–Eastern Shore. Instead, he believes that the name of the riding should remain Central Nova, as the proposed name ignores some “significant communities” that make up the riding.

The Committee supports Mr. Fraser’s objection and recommends that the Electoral Boundaries Commission for the Province of Nova Scotia consider it favourably.

APPENDIX A LIST OF WITNESSES

The following table lists the witnesses who appeared before the committee at its meetings related to this report. Transcripts of all public meetings related to this report are available on the committee's [webpage for this study](#).

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
House of Commons	2023/01/31	48
Jaime Battiste, M.P., Sydney—Victoria		
Lena Metlege Diab, M.P., Halifax West		
Hon. Sean Fraser, P.C., M.P., Central Nova		

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

A copy of the relevant *Minutes of Proceedings* ([Meetings Nos. 48 and 52](#)) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Hon. Bardish Chagger
Chair

**Report on the Report of the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission for the Province of
Nova Scotia 2022: Conservative Dissenting Report**

This Dissenting Report reflects the views of the Conservative Members of Parliament who serve on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs (“PROC”): MP John Nater (Vice-Chair of the Committee, Perth-Wellington), MP Luc Berthold (Megantic-L’Erable), MP Blaine Calkins (Red Deer-Lacombe), and MP Michael Cooper (St. Albert-Edmonton).

Introduction

Three Notices of Objection were submitted to PROC in response to the Report of the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission for the Province of Nova Scotia by MPs Jamie Battiste, the Honourable Sean Fraser, and Lena Metledge Diab. We respectfully disagree with the conclusions in the Report of PROC to support the objections and set out our observations in this Dissenting Report.

General Observations

We acknowledge the work of the Commission. It is evident that the Commission made a significant effort to gather public feedback, holding eight in-person public hearings across Nova Scotia, as well as one virtual hearing. The Commission heard from 104 presenters and received more than 1,000 written submissions. As the Commission noted in its report, adjustments were made between the original proposal and the final report based on this input.¹ Considering the foregoing, we are deferential to the Commission’s final conclusions.

The Battiste Objection

MP Battiste recommended maintaining the existing boundaries for the ridings of Sydney-Victoria and Cape Breton-Canso. MP Battiste also raised procedural issues.

Our Observations

We respect the Commission’s decision to divide Cape Breton into a generally urban riding consisting of “industrial” Cape Breton (Sydney-Glace Bay), and a rural riding extending onto the mainland (Cape Breton-Canso-Antigonish). The Commission noted that during the consultation process, which MP Battiste neglected to participate in, there was support for dividing Cape Breton into urban and rural ridings.² We also take note that the that the Commission “spent considerable time” to determine the boundaries of an urban industrial riding, Sydney-Glace Bay.³

We note that the Commission explored maintaining two Cape Breton only ridings, however, determined that this was not possible, as both ridings would fall below the permissible -25%

¹ Report of the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission for the Province of Nova Scotia, p.10.

² ibid., p.11

³ ibid., p.16

variance.⁴ Accordingly, MP Battiste’s recommendation to maintain the status quo in Cape Breton is not feasible.

We observe that MP Battiste only took the position of maintaining the status quo on Cape Breton after the release of the Report of the Commission. MP Battiste did not object when the Commission originally proposed adjustments to the Cape Breton ridings, including extending Cape Breton-Canso onto the mainland. Indeed, MP Battiste did not provide input to the Commission, despite having ample opportunity to do so. Now late in the process he has decided to take his case to PROC.

MP Battiste’s contention that this was because the Sydney-Victoria riding remained largely unchanged in the Commission’s initial proposal is wanting. Other MPs who were satisfied with the initial proposal provided input to the Commission. For example, MP Stephen Ellis shared his positive remarks at the virtual hearing noting: “since you already have it right – it’s already a great riding, the boundaries and numbers appear to be appropriate – I’ll keep my comments short and to the Commission I will say thank you for your deliberations and thank you for keeping Cumberland-Colchester the way it is.”

Likewise, MP Battiste could have informed and encouraged members of the Eskasoni, Membertou, and Wagmatcook communities to provide input to the Commission. The location of the Commission’s public hearing at the Cambridge Suites hotel in Sydney is accessible to these communities. According to Google Maps, the hotel is only a six-minute drive from Membertou, a 33-minute drive from Eskasoni, and a one hour and nine-minute drive from Wagmatcook. There was also a virtual hearing plus the opportunity to make written submissions over several months.

Having done none of the above, it is unreasonable for MP Battiste, late in the process, after the release of the Commission’s final report, to now ask the Commission to make significant adjustments to the riding boundaries in Cape Breton.

The Fraser Objection

MP Fraser’s main objections to the configuration of the newly drawn Pictou-Eastern Shore riding, can be summarized as follows: (1) extending the riding close to the City of Halifax changes the character of the riding to one that includes bedroom communities with different needs from riding’s small towns and rural communities; and (2) Antigonish and Pictou counties should not be separated. MP Fraser also proposes a name change from Pictou-Eastern Shore to Central Nova.

The Proposed Name Change

We support MP Fraser’s recommended name change. Central Nova better captures the geographical location of the riding and does not exclude communities of interest in the name. Central Nova has for decades been the riding name for large parts of the riding except between

⁴ Ibid., p.15

1997 and 2004. Many residents no doubt identify with living in the Central Nova riding, which is further reason, in our opinion, to maintain this historical riding name.

Extending the Riding close to Halifax

We acknowledge that the character of the riding will change by adding communities in the Halifax Regional Municipality (“HRM”). However, the HRM is projected to account for much of the province’s population growth for the foreseeable future. We are concerned that removing communities within the HRM from Pictou-Eastern Shore will cause a cascading effect impacting the boundaries of multiple ridings across the province. The Commission laid out the challenge of the HRM beginning with the overpopulation of Halifax-West on page 6 of the original proposal stating: “It is not as simple, however, as making a single adjustment to Halifax-West to bring it within the 25% permissible variance. Adjusting the boundary or boundaries of one riding necessarily results in the adjustment of adjoining ridings, and this often causes a cascading effect to others.”⁵

We submit that any further adjustments the boundaries of ridings at this late stage in the process should generally be limited and targeted.

Antigonish and Pictou Counties

As already noted, we respect the Commission’s decision to establish an urban and a rural riding in Cape Breton. Given Cape Breton’s population, we take note of the Commission’s finding that it is necessary to extend one of the Cape Breton ridings onto the mainland.⁶

We further observe that there are strong links between Antigonish and rural Cape Breton. We note that during the consultation process the Commission was advised of a “strong community of interest” and received support for Antigonish to remain connected with Cape Breton.⁷

There are particularly strong current and historical ties between Antigonish and the Cape Breton counties of Guysborough, Inverness, and Richmond, that together is known as the Strait Area. The communities of the Strait Area share:

- A common chamber of commerce, the Strait Area Chamber of Commerce.
- Health services, including a regional hospital at Antigonish, and until recently a common healthcare delivery structure under the Guysborough Antigonish Strait Health Authority.
- A common school district, the Strait Regional School Board.
- A community of faith, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Antigonish.
- A strong connection to St. Francis Xavier University.
- The radio station XFM/CJFX was the original station serving listeners in Antigonish, Guysborough County, Inverness County, and Richmond County.

⁵ Proposal of the Electoral Boundaries Commission for the Province of Nova Scotia, p.6.

⁶ Report of the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission for the Province of Nova Scotia, p.15.

⁷ Ibid., p.11

Moreover, there is historical precedent for situating Antigonish and Cape Breton within the same federal riding. From 1968 to 1997 Antigonish was part of the then Cape Breton-Highlands-Canso riding.

It has been suggested that the new Cape Breton-Canso-Antigonish riding will be geographically large and difficult to effectively represent. We disagree. We note that in the current Cape Breton-Canso riding, it takes approximately 3 hours and 10 minutes to drive from Glace Bay to Isaacs Harbour, which is essentially end-to-end. It takes approximately the same time to drive from Dingwall to Antigonish, which is essentially end-to-end in the new Cape Breton-Canso-Antigonish riding.

The Diab Objection

MP Diab's objects to the newly drawn Halifax-West riding on the grounds that: (1) the Larry Uteck community should be returned to Halifax-West; and (2) communities of St. Margaret's Bay moved to Halifax-West should be returned to South Shore-St. Margaret's. MP Diab also asserts that the process was procedurally unfair.

The Process

We are of the opinion that MP Diab's contention that the process was procedurally unfair is without merit. MP Diab complains that no public hearing was held within Halifax-West. However, the Commission held eight in-person public hearings, including in Cole Harbour and Lower Sackville, which are accessible to Halifax-West residents. Driving times to get to Cole Harbour and Lower Sackville from all corners of Halifax-West range from approximately 15 minutes to one hour. There was also a virtual hearing, and plenty of time to make written submissions.

At PROC, MP Diab argued, without evidence, that Halifax-West residents, particularly newcomers, were unfamiliar with the process, and therefore did not participate. While MP Diab appears to lay the blame entirely on the Commission for this, there is nothing to indicate that she took the initiative to inform constituents about the process and encourage participation.

Larry Uteck

We do not take issue, per se, with the Larry Uteck community being placed back in Halifax-West. This new, fast-growing area is more connected to Bedford in terms of shopping and school patterns than it is with Timberlea and Fairmount.

We caution, however, that this is one of the fastest growing communities in Nova Scotia, and Halifax-West is already +12.60% above the electoral quota. We are also concerned that this will have a complicating ripple effect necessitating significant changes to the boundaries of multiple ridings.

St. Margaret's Bay

The Commission's decision to move some of the communities of St. Margaret's Bay within the HRM to Halifax-West from South Shore-St. Margaret's is reasonable. In the final report, the boundary between Halifax-West and South Shore-St. Margaret's divides the St. Margaret's Bay communities in a manner which comes closer to respecting the approximately 300 years of history represented by the Lunenburg County Line.

MP Diab's assertion that the communities of St. Margaret's Bay have always been in the same federal riding is factually incorrect. Except for one decade between Confederation and 2004, communities of St. Margaret's Bay were divided federally, with the boundary separating the communities being the Lunenburg County line, which divides the eastern and western shores of St. Margaret's Bay. Accordingly, the new boundary is closer to the historical pattern of the South Shore-St. Margaret's riding than the current boundary or that proposed by MP Diab.

Additionally, the new boundaries also better reflect the communities of interest found within Halifax-West and South Shore-St. Margaret's. The communities of St. Margaret's Bay now lend themselves closer to the bedroom urban communities of Halifax rather than the rural fishing and forestry counties of Queen's, Shelburne, and Lunenburg.

During the public hearing in Bridgewater, several presenters expressed this view, including former MP Gerald Keddy, who noted how "much of Halifax County has become a bedroom community for Halifax" and that the residents of St. Margaret's Bay have become "urbanites" lending themselves now to a close connection with Halifax.⁸ Furthermore, as presenter George Ernst pointed out, the residents of the HRM "are not dependent on resource-based industries [like the communities along the South Shore], but instead often make their living working in service, government and other industries scattered through Halifax and surrounding industrial parks."⁹

Based upon the input received at the public hearings, we observe that the Commission made a significant effort to listen to public feedback in drafting the final report.

Conclusion

We do not recommend any changes to riding boundaries drawn by the Commission in its final report.

⁸ F.E.B.C.N.S. Public Hearing Bridgewater, p.37.

⁹ F.E.B.C.N.S. Public Hearing Bridgewater, p.56.

Respectfully submitted,

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