

## **Scottish Association for Country Sports - Upland Vision scoping consultation response**

### **1. What broad characteristics should we use to define the uplands? Some possible approaches are summarised in the annex to this note.**

In our view, the uplands are most obviously defined by a combination of vegetation classification, topography and a predominance of primary industries such as hill sheep farming, deer and game management as well as being an environment that demonstrably provides a wide range of ecosystem services. It may be easier to describe what the uplands are not; however, although we recognise that there is an element of 'the blind men and the elephant' in describing the uplands, we believe that clarity may be achieved by consulting one specific source: the people who live there. Those individuals and communities who live in the uplands know what the uplands are, and since upland management policy is ultimately about people, we suggest that this should be the starting point.

### **What benefits do the uplands provide to Scotland?**

### **2. What are the key social, economic and environmental benefits that the uplands provide for Scotland?**

The nature of the uplands, i.e. the characteristics of vegetation, topography, soil structure, accessibility and climate, ultimately determine what this environment is able to provide. The reason that extensive agriculture, deer and game management, as well as forestry and woodland management and more recently renewables, proliferate is due to the inherent restrictions of the upland environment that make other activities and uses easier – and therefore more efficient – outside the uplands. The communities that have developed over the history of human habitation in these areas are well-established and centred almost entirely upon these primary activities.

The social benefits provided by the uplands to those who live there are a strong sense of community and shared endeavour; the upland fieldsports and agricultural communities in particular have an established annual cycle of social, cultural and economic activities that are characteristic of these areas and a central part of our indigenous heritage. For those who do not live in the uplands, but instead visit, the landscape created and managed by these communities is enjoyed for recreation (a significant health benefit). On a wider basis, the ecosystem services provided by the uplands and managed by upland inhabitants allow the Scottish nation to thrive.

In terms of economic benefits, the foundations of the Scottish economy are land-based activities such as agriculture, forestry, fieldsports and, more recently, the renewable energy industry. The uplands, due to the natural restrictions described previously, are a significant contributor to these economic activities; consequently, the uplands in their current state are an established foundation stone of our economy. The well-known PACEC report on the value of shooting to the UK <http://www.shootingfacts.co.uk/pdf/The-Value-of-Shooting-2014.pdf> contains evidence to support the economic importance of shooting, which is a widely-practiced activity in the uplands. Of particular interest is the significant supply chain value of fieldsports in local communities and beyond.

Covering a vast land area, the uplands are a major provider of ecosystem services. The benefit of a mosaic of upland habitats including heather moorland (a globally rare habitat supporting a fragile ecosystem maintained by natural human intervention), montane, woodland, forestry, rough grazing and unimproved grassland as well as spate rivers and burns, lochs and in some cases coastal areas, is unique. This environment is maintained by the communities who live there, for the wider benefit of all. Clean air, pure water and healthy soils are essential to life; sustainable management of the uplands is vital, and we agree with other stakeholders that there is scope to improve management practices

so that the mosaic of habitats is maintained at optimum quality, thereby benefiting the many species of flora and fauna that depend upon them. We reiterate that humans are one of those species.

### **3. How can upland land use help to prevent or reduce the impacts of climate change?**

Upland land use already helps to prevent or reduce climate change by locking-up carbon in peat and timber. We accept that certain areas of the uplands may be able to support more afforestation, but this should not be at the expense of heather moorland, a globally rare habitat of which 75% is found in the UK; in addition, well-managed muirburn carried out to manage heather for the benefit of those species that use it to forage, shelter and reproduce, does not compromise the underlying peat structure. Land managers within the fieldsports sector have worked, and continue to work, to re-vegetate bare peat by stopping-up drains that were originally installed under now-defunct agricultural policies. This work should be supported and encouraged.

We recognise that the uplands, with their relatively high wind speeds and fast-flowing burns, are looked to for the provision of renewable energy as part of the Government's climate change strategy; however, the passage of migratory fish must not be hindered by hydro schemes, and we do not wish to see a repeat of the environmentally catastrophic large-scale hydro-dams that were constructed in the twentieth century. Any upland land use to prevent or reduce the impacts of climate change must take place in the context of lessons learnt from the past, in full and genuine consultation with established communities, and following a full impact assessment including identification of unintended consequences.

#### **What should an upland vision include?**

### **4. A strategic vision could inform decisions about the balance between different land uses in different parts of the uplands. What are the key choices that an upland vision should address, and why?**

We would be supportive of a vision that informs decisions, but we would not be supportive of a vision that dictates decisions. As we have previously stated, there is a diversity within the uplands that prevents a 'one-size-fits-all' approach from being appropriate; also, ultimately it must be for the upland communities themselves to decide how their environment should be managed, since management decisions impact them every day, directly. We do not believe that the imposition of an artificially created 'balance between different land uses' would be sustainable.

In our view, a strategic vision should encourage best practice within existing upland land management activities, as well as facilitating alternative practices or uses as an ancillary option where this is appropriate. The vision must not be divisive, negative or biased against traditional activities; at the Land Use Strategy event at Battleby on 29 June 2016, one of the participants in the upland vision session spoke of 'making people accept change.' This is an abhorrent attitude that flies in the face of the principles of genuine community engagement and consultation. If existing upland communities see the benefit of change, then they will embrace it; if it is forced upon them against their will, change will fail. It should be the place of the vision to make the case for sustainable upland land management in the context of climate change mitigation, healthy ecosystems, strong local economies and robust local communities. To attempt to wrench people, including the fieldsports community, from their traditional way of life would be a cultural crime. We understand the principles of land reform, and support the idea of local people being able to fully utilise their local natural resources in a sustainable way.

In terms of 'key choices', we are concerned by the phrasing of this question. We do not believe that it is appropriate to impose choices in this context, because this is divisive. If this question refers to a strategic choice, one of sustainable or unsustainable uplands, then the answer is clear. If the question is more specific, for example one of afforestation vs. moorland management, then this is clearly inappropriate. We believe that the key choice, if any, is this: in order to achieve and maintain optimised upland ecosystems as a foundation of sustainable upland communities, which are tied to a sustainable upland economy, which in turn is based upon a sustainable upland environment (and so the circle closes by returning to ecosystems again), the Scottish Government, its agencies and all stakeholders must work together – having empathy with, and understanding of, the lives and activities of established land managers, inhabitants and users of the uplands – towards achieving positive, altruistic objectives. As a regular attendee of meetings and seminars such as the LUS Battleby event, SACS has seen little evidence that this will ever be possible while anti-fieldsports interests and other radical, ideology-based agendas are allowed to dictate the direction of travel. Pragmatism and a genuine willingness to cooperate are now needed.

**5. Are there any other topics or issues that should be included in an upland vision, and if so why?**

If the upland vision effectively and positively manages the issues that we have discussed in the previous questions, then this should ensure that it is both appropriate and useful.

**6. Are there any topics or issues that should be excluded from an upland vision, and if so why?**

As we have already stated, the vision should seek to encourage and facilitate, rather than to dictate and divide. Any language or proposals that would have a negative effect on established upland communities should be excluded.

**How should the vision be developed?**

**7. Which stakeholders do you think it would be particularly important to involve, and how? Would particular approaches be needed, for example, to reach particular groups?**

It is our understanding that the majority of upland stakeholders are represented by membership bodies, and we further understand that the Scottish Government is aware of most of these bodies. It is essential to involve representative bodies from the established upland communities, for example, agriculture, fieldsports, forestry, as well as the renewables sector, the third sector, recreational users, retailers and the hospitality sector, local business forums, and local authorities. It is likely that there are other communities who do not benefit from cohesive representation by one group or body, so it is vital that, if the vision does progress, every effort is made to publicise and make accessible the development of the vision to all those individuals and groups who have a direct – not abstract – interest in the uplands. We emphasise again that the views of established upland communities must be given precedence, as imposed change from outside influences cannot be said to be sustainable, or indeed ethical.

**8. What are your views on the process that might be needed to bring together the key interests and develop a shared vision?**

We have introduced our views on this matter in the answers to previous questions, but the current approach taken in meetings and seminars is not working. The SACS representative in attendance at the aforementioned LUS event was effectively a lone voice representing the established upland fieldsports communities – a significant proportion of upland inhabitants – and yet was literally shouted down due to the dominance of anti-shooting interests present in the room. When overt mistruths such as those spoken at that event are broadcast unchallenged and allowed to influence policy, that

policy becomes untenable. We hope that this event is not indicative of the way SNH intends to deal with this scoping consultation process and any subsequent consultation.

In order to bring together stakeholders and develop a shared vision, the basic principles of sustainable upland management must be established. Those stakeholders who are opposed to land management for fieldsports and agriculture need to develop empathy and an understanding that these communities are already established, and have every right to go about their lawful business and live their lives as they wish. Similarly, those in the established, traditional upland communities would do well to consider opportunities for improvement in land management practices that will not threaten their livelihoods but could actually enhance the environment for local benefit as well as for climate change mitigation and improvement of ecosystem services. This should be framed as negotiation, adaptation and the recognition of common goals for common good – which means everyone, including the fieldsports community. Divisive language, egotism and ideology must be laid aside if genuine cooperation is ever to be achieved.

**9. Who would be best placed to lead this process?**

The Scottish Government seems best placed to lead, with a steering group of representative interests from the upland communities. We suggest that the cross-stakeholder format of the Moorland Forum would provide a guide for this, but also suggest that a strong, neutral chair will be a necessity; someone who possesses knowledge of – and practical experience of – upland land management, sustainability, and the wider policy context.

**10. What form should a vision for the uplands take (visual or descriptive, maps, diagrams or text)?**

We do not believe that the format of the vision should be prescriptive at this stage. The process of developing the vision should be results-led, not driven by process. The vision should take whatever form assists its adoption by practitioners as a usable document; this may well include maps and a focus on pictorial presentation, and its authors should be wary of including too much text in prose form. Accessibility must be a key objective.

**11. Do you have any other comments or suggestions?**

The fieldsports community cannot be dismissed or sidelined if the vision is truly to be based on the principles of sustainability. We are a vital part of rural Scotland, especially the uplands. We welcome the opportunity to respond to this scoping consultation, not least because it allows us to formally register our concerns about the consultation process to date. As Scotland's largest representative fieldsports body, with a significant number of our members living and working in the upland environment, our views must be taken into account; we are keen to work with other stakeholders in order to fulfil our responsibilities to sustainable upland management, but partnership working cannot succeed if it is not based upon respect and empathy.