

Why have a vision?

Given the SG's position that it wishes to consider *whether or not* to proceed with developing a vision, it's important to start by re-asserting *a priori* the need for a fresh vision due to:

- 1 the importance of the uplands - their widely recognised values and huge scale and extent as a proportion of the Scottish land mass;
- 2 the severe problems of exclusion and lack of opportunity experienced by communities dependent on land uses in the uplands;
- 3 the conflicts between interest groups involved in many of its land uses – stalking, grouse shooting, forestry, recreational access, wildlife and scenic conservation, renewable energy;
- 3 the privileged status of the dominant land uses raising questions over the governing principles of the SG in land reform – ‘...the many, not the few’;
- 4 the long history of failures to resolve these issues, due largely to the way that outdated laws, policies, presumptions, myths and traditions continue to exert a powerful influence on decision-making;
- 5 the growth in understanding of ecosystem services; the arrival of climate change as a new and pressing imperative; and the hitherto overlooked or taken-for-granted significance of the uplands to the lowlands and the wellbeing of the nation as a whole;
- 6 the considerable public costs of failed policies in financial terms and in losses of opportunity (economic, social and environmental).
- 7 the failure of imagination involved, and the need to inspire new thinking with a vision developed with the help of international experience, up-to-date science and the enlightened principles of the Land Use Strategy.

Where are the uplands.

I suggest concentrate on the LAND of the uplands – ie generally above the head dyke – everywhere, always bearing in mind the interests of occupants, neighbours, users and beneficiaries. This inevitably means that a vision for the uplands must integrate with wider visions for Scotland as a whole – all its land and all its people.

What benefits do the uplands provide.

This is a big question which doesn't belong at this stage! One of the important aspects of the vision exercise would be to articulate clearly the answers, helping a wider understanding of these benefits and providing the basis for an exploration of future potential and a search for ways in which existing uses could be modified to enhance potential and reduce conflict.

What should a vision include.

It should be holistic, inclusive, broad, balanced and based on clear principles (LUS is a good start). In particular it should both articulate the values and benefits of the uplands, and tackle all issues which are currently viewed widely as problematic:

Frustrating the pursuit of other priorities – eg ‘sporting’ activities vs biodiversity, climate change, fisheries, flood management

Directly damaging and unsustainable – eg intensive grouse moor management;

Undermining local economic and social development – eg investment forestry, exclusive hunting rights, ownership patterns

Out of step with progressive thinking about conservation – eg ‘lock-in’ aspects of Habitats Directive

Progressive but subject to widespread misunderstanding – re-wilding, forest crofts, deer reforms, access rights, renewables

Questionable solutions to laudable aims – sheep headage payments; wild land designations

How should a vision be developed

This is crucial. It’s important to design the process to avoid the problems of power-imbalance, bias and ignorance which have bedevilled the debate for decades.

So it should be:

entirely independent, conducted by a panel appointed by Ministers, with a remit to advise SG;

undertaken in stages, starting with establishing the core principles, exploration of the values/benefits, moving on to key issues and finally a characterisation of the agreed vision;

informed by an independent critique of the current situation and identification of key issues;

subject to a professionally facilitated process of consultation designed to secure equality of access and rights of participation;

take the form of a narrative representation (illustrated as appropriate) of :

principles

values and benefits

potential

issues needing to be addressed

direction of travel needed to address these issues and reach this potential

Finally the whole exercise should be undertaken with a view to many of its benefits lying just as much in the process as in the product. If it is done well, it could be a major contribution to understanding of the issues involved – both amongst the general public and within the various interest groups whose fixed attitudes are part of the problem.