**National Park Commission Paper SAG 2-2 - Developing criteria for the evaluation of new Park proposals**

**Purpose**

1 This discussion paper sets out some preliminary considerations on the development of the criteria for evaluating new National Parks.

**Context**

2 A key starting point for developing the criteria for the evaluation of the new park proposals has to be the current legislative “conditions” contained in the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 which cover “value”, “coherence” and “need”, namely:

* that the area is of outstanding national importance because of its natural heritage, or combination of natural and cultural heritage;
* that the area has a distinctive character and identity; and
* that designating the area as a National Park would meet the special needs of the area and would be the best means of ensuring that the National Park aims are collectively achieved in relation to the area in a co-ordinated way.

3 The first two of these conditions reflect experience from elsewhere – though the 1998 [review of models of National Parks](https://archive.org/details/modelsofnational98bish/page/108/mode/2up) found relatively few countries had actually developed legislative criteria for National Parks – see Annex A. However, even here comparison is challenging given that we are talking about very different types of National Parks in Scotland compared to elsewhere. In terms of size, land ownership and degree of protection, many European national parks are more akin to our larger national nature reserves, and the selection criteria and more “top down” selection process which exist tends to reflect this.

4 More countries have now developed an approach to identifying national parks based on a national ecological and/or landscape assessment to identify preferred areas that make sense when national parks have been developed as an integral part of the system of protected areas. This is not the case in Scotland, though there is scope for greater convergence as part of this work and the 30x30 commission.

5 Alongside identification of criteria, the detail of the nomination process itself will also need to be developed. Again, there are few European or international comparisons to draw on, though one relevant approach to this issue, currently being developed in Belgium, is to provide potential areas with funding to develop their proposal further and prepare a costed outline strategy or plan for their area.

**Possible Criteria**

6 Table A provides an initial set of potential criteria and identifies some of the key issues that will need to be addressed in developing and applying them. The thinking in the table is mainly grounded in the current legislative approach so changes to that being considered in paper 2-1 may increase or decrease the relative importance of the different criteria proposed.

7 As part of the development of the evaluation framework, further consideration will be needed on the “information” or “measures” required to apply any criteria selected and what weight they should have in comparison to each other to enable evaluation of - and between - nominations. Clear and comprehensive guidance to applicants will also needed to inform the nomination process.

**Discussion**

*Outstanding national value*

8 In terms of international practice, a strong case can be made for having a suite of National Parks that are representative of either “the best of Scotland’s nature and landscape” or “all of Scotland’s nature and landscape”. As discussed at the first meeting, while outstanding national quality is strongly linked to international practice in National Parks and should be so in Scotland, we may also want to consider potential for nature restoration in any park area that is nominated. It is worth noting that the existing legislative conditions in the Act refer to “natural and cultural heritage” and it therefore may also remain an important consideration in thinking about future National Parks.

*Need or added-value*

9 As discussed at the first meeting and in paper 2-1, clarity over the purpose of National Parks and how the aims come together is important in thinking about the need or added value of designation identified in the third condition.

10 The Minister has made it clear her ambition for our National Parks to provide leadership through practical action to tackle the climate and nature crises, so this should provide a key basis for evaluation. Other roles have also been identified around visitor management and rural development, and equally we should also be looking at issues of Just Transition, accessibility and inclusivity. Should any of these have more priority than the others or is this determined on a Park by Park basis?

*Degree of support*

11 As reporter, Scottish Ministers asked NatureScot to address the degrees of local and national support for a National Park in both Loch Lomond and the Trossachs and the Cairngorms. This was tested again during the consultation and Parliamentary scrutiny of the designation order. The need for this assessment remains for future proposals, suggesting that the evaluation framework should also include some consideration of this issue to allow Ministers to have confidence that a statutory proposal they issue has the best chance of leading to designation. As well as the level of support, we may also need to consider who is supporting the nomination - including local authorities, communities, land-owners and other key stakeholders - and what weight their support (or opposition) should have. How this is best captured in the framework and expressed in nominations will need careful consideration.

12 A related issue to the degree of support is who can make the nominations? While the Minister has stated a preference to keep this fairly open, it would seem sensible to keep this restricted to “any **local** organisation or group” including local authorities. community councils or constituted community groups. At the same time, we need to take care that national interests and expertise also have a voice either as part of the nomination process or the evaluation of the nominations.

*Practicality of designation*

13 Scotland’s first national parks had, to different extents, existing management arrangements in place in terms of governance and strategy. This allowed the development of proposals for - and the establishment of - National Parks in both these areas to be relatively quick (if not always smooth). Other areas being nominated as new National Parks may not have this foundation to build on - as noted at the first SAG meeting, this could be a particular issue for coastal and marine areas where strategy and partnership working in both the terrestrial and marine areas of the Park may need more effort to join up effectively.

14 To ensure quality nominations from a range of areas, it is intended that those organisations and groups wishing to put forward a nomination for Park status will be supported (likely to be a contractor managed by Scottish Government). At the same time, the criteria may also want to include some consideration of the practicality of designation to meet the 2026 target. To ensure that this did not bias the process towards areas which are seemingly more “oven ready” there is perhaps scope to think about a two stage evaluation which first identifies a list of potential national park areas and then considers at least one preferred candidate area which could be established by 2026.

**Recommendation**

15 Stakeholder group members are asked to:

* to consider and discuss the usefulness or otherwise of the criteria proposed in table A;
* identify other criteria which could be considered further;
* suggest any factors we need to consider on who should be able to make nominations or comment on them;
* highlight examples of relevant international experience.

**NatureScot**

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**Table A – Developing a framework for evaluating national park nominations**

| **Potential Criteria** | | **Possible measures/Indicators?** | **Issues** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1. Fit with current legislative criteria | 1a) Value | * Minimum percentage of existing national or international designations * Types of nature and landscape and cultural heritage included * None or maximum percentage of “non-compatible” land or sea uses | Should the area add to the representativeness of the best of Scotland’s nature and landscape or all of Scotland’s nature and landscape?  To what extent should cultural heritage be an important component of “outstanding” national value and how can this be best assessed?  Should the area not include significant urban areas, commercial forestry, large wind farms (fit with existing planning policy) or ports etc?  Is future potential value relevant for National Parks or does the area need to be of outstanding national importance?  Consideration of cultural heritage value? |
| 1b) Coherence | * Minimum size threshold? * At least a core area of high nature and/or landscape value? * Inclusion of relevant coastal and marine areas up to 12 nm. | Is there a maximum size threshold?  What proportion of the area should be considered to be of “outstanding value”? |
| 1c) Need/Added Value   * Contribution to tackling the climate and nature emergency? * Contribution to visitor management? * Contribution to rural development? * Contribution to a fairer Scotland | * Nature recovery potential * Transformation potential of current land or sea use * Sustainable transport options * Visitor and tourism pressures * Nature based job potential * Potential to increase accessibility to nature for all | Are some of these themes more important than others or should we leave the criteria open at this point?  Are we assessing current or potential transformative leadership and action?  What are the best measures/indicators to use to assess bid? |
| 1. Current degree of support | | * Support by local community or group * Support by local authority/fit with local authority policy * Indication of national support//fit with national policy | Does the local authority need to supportive (or at least not against)?  How do we ask the proposal to evidence wider community support? |
| 1. Practicality of designation by 2026 (interim arrangements and plans) | | * Existing governance and strategy in place | How do we encourage development of these arrangements?  Should this be considered in a separate phase of evaluation once nominations have been shortlisted? |

**Annex 1 – Process for selecting National Park areas in selected countries – overview (in development)**

| **Country** | **Selection Criteria** | **Selection process** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Austria | No specific selection criteria | Regional government selects potential areas |
| Belgium (Flanders) | **To qualify as a national park, an area must:**   * have a minimum size of 5,000 hectares at the start, and grow to 10,000 hectares after 20 years of nature, * be distinctive and unique in terms of nature value and quality, * reach the status of nature reserve for half of the area after ten years, and at least 75% after 20 years, * be biologically valuable, or very valuable according to the Biological Value Map (for more than half of the nature reserve), * have a unique experience value and an international aura, * be possible to open up for tourism while respecting the carrying capacity of the natural values.   **To qualify as a landscape park, an area must:**   * be at least 10,000 hectares in size, and form a logical and dynamic landscape entity, * have at least 35% as landscape heritage, and at least 70% must be open space, * have a high degree of intermingling between agriculture and nature, * be at least 15% nature (special areas of conservation, Flemish ecological network, and green uses), * have a unique experiential value and international appeal. | Regional government selects potential areas using an evaluation framework to assess nominations |
| Canada | No specific selection criteria but the Green Plan (1991) requires national parks to be established to represent all of Canada’s ecosystems | National agency selects potential areas |
| England and Wales | No specific selection criteria | National agency selects potential areas |
| Finland | Minimum area of 1000 hectares. The area should be significant as a natural attraction in general or with respect to raising general awareness of or interest in the natural environment. | National government initiates and leads selection process |
| France | No specific selection criteria | National government initiates and leads selection process |
| Germany | Criteria set out in the 1987 Nature conservation act | Regional government selects potential areas |
| Ireland | No specific selection criteria | National agency selects potential areas |
| Italy | No specific selection criteria | National government initiates and leads selection process |
| Norway | No specific selection criteria | National government initiates and leads selection process |
| Netherlands | A contiguous nature area covering at least 1,000 hectares, which is home to rare or protected plants and animals | National government initiates and leads selection process |
| Sweden | National parks must have high natural value, and:  * should represent, individually or as part of a whole, a wide or unique spectrum of natural landscapes as part of a nationwide system * should comprise a variety of natural environments in an area of, normally, at least 1000 hectares * should include natural areas representative of the Swedish landscape and preserve them in their natural state * should be appealing areas of great natural beauty or unique environments which create enduring nature experiences and a lasting impression * should be a viable subject for effective conservation and, at the same time, be suitable for research, outdoor recreation and tourism without the risk of harm to their natural value.   <https://www.nationalparksofsweden.se/national-park-facts/> | National agency initiates and leads consultation process |

***Notes***

* *Cairngorms National Park - 4,528 km² - 452,800 hectares;*
* *Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park - 1,865 km² - 186,500 hectares*