**National Park Stakeholder Advisory Group – 2nd meeting – 17th August 2022**

**COSLA conference centre, Haymarket, Edinburgh**

**Unconfirmed Note of meeting**

**Present**

| **Organisation** | **Name** | **Organisation** | **Name** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland /Scottish Campaign for National Parks | Nikki Sinclair | NatureScot | Heather Reid (chair)  Eileen Stuart  Pete Rawcliffe  Laura Campbell  Ceara Webster |
| Cairngorms National Park Authority | Grant Moir | Ramblers Scotland | Helen Todd |
| Europarc Federation | Carol Ritchie | Scottish Renewables | Mark Richardson |
| Forest and Land Scotland | Robin Wadell | South of Scotland Enterprise | Andy Thame |
| Heads of Planning Scotland | Ian Aikman | Scottish Environment LINK | John Thomson |
| Highlands and Island Enterprise | Neil Ross | Scottish Government | Lisa McCann,  Brian Eardley  Tariq Nabi |
| Historic Environment Scotland | Allan Rutherford | Scottish Land and Estates | Simon Ovenden |
| Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Authority | Gordon Watson | Scotland’s Landscape Alliance | Rebecca Hughes |
| National Farmers Union | Jonnie Hall | Trees for Life (Affric Highland) | Charlotte Maddix |
|  |  | Visit Scotland | Ken Massie |
| Ms Lorna Slater, Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity, attended from 14.00 to 13.00 | | | |

**Apologies -** organisations unable to send representatives to this meeting:

Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Sector Organisations Community Land Scotland COSLA

Disability Equality Scotland Land Commission Scotland Marine Conservation Society

Marine Scotland Social Inclusion Scotland Young Scot

**Agenda**

1330 - Welcome and arrangements for the day

1340 - Updates from last meeting – approval of 1st meeting notes and issues arising including stakeholder group membership and plans for consultation

1400 - Recap of first meeting

1410- Discussion – “What should change when entering a Scottish National Park?”

1515 - Park aims and powers – SAG paper 2-1

1545 - Scope of the evaluation criteria/process – SAG paper 2-2

1615 - AOB and DONM

***Welcome and Arrangements***

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and reminded attendees of the important role of the group in helping shape the thinking that Scottish Ministers had asked NatureScot to undertake on the framework for selecting new national parks, and on the broader but related question of what national parks are expected to deliver for Scotland. The papers for this meeting got to the heart of these topics so we expected a stimulating discussion of the issues their raise. Before then, we would hear directly from the Minster and from the chief executives of both national parks. As before, the meeting and notes will follow Chatham House rules.

**Updates from last meeting**

1. The first meeting’s notes were confirmed. All the notes and meeting papers will be made available on the [NatureScot website](https://www.nature.scot/doc/stakeholder-advisory-group-papers-and-unconfirmed-notes).
2. It was noted that membership of the Stakeholder Advisory Group was still evolving with a range of new faces around the table. Additional members will also join from the Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Sector Organisations, (CEMVO) and Disability Equality Scotland although they are unable to attend today. Will are still awaiting confirmation from Maine Scotland on who will represent them on the group.

*Consultation plans*

1. The timetable remains a challenging one. Public consultation is planned for September/ October. After that, the advice to the Minister will be produced, probably in December (tbc). Scottish Government will begin the work required prepare the evaluation framework and lead the nomination process. To support this, a National Park team of three people is being set up in Scottish Government, based in the Biodiversity Team.
2. Consultation would be online using Scottish Government’s system. To support this, a series of meetings is being planned. At present, the intention is for two in-person events, one north with The Highland Council and Highlands and Islands Enterprise and one south with South of Scotland Enterprise. Sectoral meetings are also proposed, currently planned online and to include Agriculture & Forestry, Coastal & Marine, Cultural Heritage, Local authorities, Recreation and Renewables. There would also be more focussed events with CEMVO, Disability Equality Scotland, Inclusion Scotland, YoungScot and the National Parks’ youth groups and Climate reframe which includes young people from ethnic minority groups. We are also happy to “piggyback” on existing meetings, where possible, e.g. on SBS consultation.
3. The contents of these events had yet to scoped but the intention is for them to be interactive and participatory, with content tailored to specific audiences. We are grateful for Stakeholder Advisory Group members’ offers for help so far, and hope for further contributions to holding the events.
4. The following points were noted in discussion.

* Limiting geographic locations to just north and south was queried. Should there not be events in central Scotland or the west coast and islands?
* Further consideration was needed on how the online consultation will work and how more users of national parks could be encouraged to participate. It was suggested that geographic events should be hybrid in format to enable wider attendance, e.g. from islands.
* Did agriculture & forestry include land use more widely, e.g. sporting or recreational interests? Was a sectoral approach still relevant as it is all about land use?
* The environment sector, and climate change and biodiversity, seem to be missing – would they not have a separate sectoral meeting. Another gap is science and research, which is relevant to all of these.
* None of these sectors acts in isolation (which the list probably did not mean to imply). They will intermix.

1. The feedback on these early ideas has been really useful and we will circulate a note for people to contribute further contacts and ideas, and suggest events that may be useful to tap into. We are mindful that some sectors may want to discuss the issues in more detail separately speak. A bespoke meeting may be needed for coastal and marine as they are poorly represented on the Stakeholder Advisory Group.

*Future Stakeholder Advisory Group meetings*

1. The next, third, meeting, on 1st September, will focus on the consultation paper and discussion on issues including administration and governance, and alternative mechanisms to national parks e.g. regional parks. The fourth and final meeting of the SAG will reflect on the consultation’s results.

**Recap of first meeting**

1. The first meeting had a good discussion about the role of new national parks regarding nature recovery and climate change; also how they fit with the existing family of designations and how they may differ from existing national parks. The take-home messages were that there is a lot of interest in the topic, that there is a lot to do in the time available, and that consultation will be key. Also that there is a lot happening, such as the 30x30 commission, nature networks, Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, new legislation etc. so joining up and simplification of this work will be needed.

**Discussion – “What should change when entering a Scottish National Park?”**

**Introduction**

1. Introductory remarks by the Minister

* Thanked everyone for their attendance because national parks will have enduring impacts
* Let’s be ambitious, let’s be bold – it’s a once in a generation opportunity
* Key to the discussion is what a national park is for, therefore, what tools do they need to deliver their purpose
* Disappointed by limited nature of the debate in parliament
* Need to make the case that National Parks are special, different, and have a key role to play

1. Reflections (in a personal capacity) from Chief Executives of current national parks

* Planning: there are national policies that produce changes, e.g. no wind farms in national parks. Local policy also affects what changes when you cross the border, e.g. presumption against tracks in open moorland and affordable housing (45% compared to 25% nationally).
* There are things that are different within them, such as increased rates for woodland planting at CNP (following discussions with Scottish Forestry).
* Gives confidence to funders private or otherwise – the power of the brand is something the private sector ‘gets’; it can help leverage funding.
* No impact on rural payments schemes (except LEADER); and legislative base doesn’t change in NPs (e.g. deer management)
* Convince people who own the land to do the right thing and deliver on the NP plan; it is perhaps 95% carrot and 5% stick, or even more.
* How much has changed – the focus in the early days as a destination and better visitor management (largest ranger service in UK).
* In the past, national park was for protection to keep areas the same, whereas now we are focused on significant change in the future thinking about role of national park for climate change, reversing decline in nature, and role in change to low carbon economy. Aim is to become not just net zero but net absorber.
* Being blunt about the state of nature, the levers are not there for National Parks to act.
* National parks were a product of their time but need to reflect where we are now, so current discussions on the role and purpose of national parks is timely.
* Challenges around visitor pressures – there are better ways than legal recourse – would be good to have a more efficient way to enforce bylaws.
* Want to get a join-up on infrastructure to improve visitor experience; national parks do not own much, so help is needed.
* So what do we want our national parks to do today? And are they doing enough for Nature and Climate?

**Discussion points**

*What should change?*

* What you would want to see, on entering a National park, is ideally what you would see everywhere. A place that is beautiful, rich in wildlife, thriving economically and lively socially in a high quality environment based on environmentally sustainable land uses and featuring high quality built development appropriate to its setting. Along with high quality infrastructure options and provision (e.g. electric charging ports, low carbon public transport) and visitor provision that doesn’t conflict with ecological requirements.
* Concern is that we almost ring-fence funding for geographic areas – need to be cautious about leaving other areas to live on scraps with national policy objectives only delivered by national parks.
* We would have failed if there were a dramatic difference when entering a national park because that would imply we are creating isolated ecological islands. But it should *feel* different because of a collective community vision, pride, and purpose.
* Largely support previous speaker in not wanting to see a great step-change when you enter a national park. Do not want us to be in a place where we have a significant differential between land management within and outwith a National Park. The context of how we manage land across Scotland is changing, so much that we are trying to achieve is very different since the last twenty years. A new national park needs to be alive to climate and biodiversity challenges - but so does the rest of Scotland.
* Visitors’ perceptions matter too. National parks should be the ‘best of the best’ from a visitor perspective. There is also a massive shift towards responsible tourism, about value not volume. In the international context: perception on visitor experience could be quite different, about what they want from a national park e.g. from Germany or USA. It is important to minimise visitor conflict and maximise their enjoyment without damaging the resource.

*Role of Parks in managing change*

* How can we make that happen at pace because of nature and climate change challenges we face?
* Generating vision and consensus but also levering the changes required - parks will increasingly have to manage change to be an effective agent in achieving this. Suggest that Scottish parks need to mirror English and Welsh model – lived-in landscapes to illustrate how people and nature can coexist harmoniously. We are talking about lived-in cultural landscapes and this does take time to achieve.
* We could use the English and Welsh models as exemplars of living and working land-spaces and/or marine and cultural space to embrace change. Also moving change on, because we need to change the way we manage natural capital to enable rural communities to thrive - to enhance not just safeguard what we have got.
* What is different in England? National parks in England largely developed for landscape protection - for maintaining the status quo. They have done that effectively but the question is about whether this is what is needed now. They were effective agents at doing what they were asked to do - now they may need to do something different.
* We probably do not want to switch to the English model; current national parks are seen as instruments for Scottish agenda, doing a lot of thinking around public finance and how to spend public money better for public benefit. They can be ‘accelerators’ although we are probably not doing a good enough job for contributions to nature - but Scotland has better opportunities to do better for nature. For a third park – how can we move forward our agenda?
* Don’t make a national park something it is not. A concern from environmentalists is that creation/designation of a national park takes away the uniqueness of an area/region (quiet and peace, for example). A word heard only once today is community. The community needs greatest potential say on whether they want to support a national park in an area or not because they live in these areas.
* Should not just be thinking about influencing what people will see - but how to keep the uniqueness of an area if it were to become a national park. Look at the Scottish Government key facts document regarding the importance of rural communities.
* Engagement is about helping people understanding change in landscapes and the current twin crises we are facing. Communities of interest are important.
* Education can sit beside climate and nature – and are likely to remain important in new national parks.
* We are probably on the cusp of a movement happening across Europe. They too are going through a revolution in their parks network and systems (we lack the system but are undergoing same considerations of what NP should do). This integrated thinking and management from the land and the people is need for these living landscapes. Norway and Belgium are also looking to Scotland to see what approaches we will take to NP so we have the benefit of starting – almost – from scratch. See the Glover Report for its recommendations on issues with England and Wales national park models.

*Parks as exemplars*

* Would land use organisations support using an exemplar, and / or taking a regional approach to exemplars?
* National parks have a lot of history in working with businesses to generate a knowledge exchange. National parks could act as demonstration sites for what you *can* do – then roll out the good stuff on much broader scale.
* “Preserve and protect” was good but now our landscape is massively degraded. Where we try to create national parks, we should have a strong ambition about the recovery of nature. They could be useful laboratories or exemplars for what we want to do across the country. Let’s give parks the tools that enable them to show what can be done in those places.
* There is a key role for national parks around private investment and national capital. The finance is important but the market is not designed and/or governed well enough for this yet. National parks can be an accelerator – but should not be at the expense of the rest of Scotland.
* We get a sense of the appetite for exemplar project, working with key stakeholders in land use and land management partners.
* The exemplars point is a good one. Exemplar should be what you think a NP should be - and the tools to create that vision. Use national park mechanism with community support for degraded landscapes.
* Existing national parks already provide good exemplars for recreation and visitor engagement. There is an expectation that, in a national park, recreational facilities and visitor management will be better.
* The available tools are important but these are a matter of political decision. National parks should be in the vanguard of the changes we would all want to see – an example for all to follow, the vanguard of where we want to be.
* Future - there is some tension between preservationist and aesthetic (too many place may look nice but are poor from an ecological perspective). National parks as exemplars – the Cairngorms national park has planted more trees over the last five years than England (all of England). Perhaps there is not much we can learn from England’s national parks –although the Lake District has good things regarding transport. The issue can be what happens when your ideas are refused – doing good work is fine when you can take people with you, but what happens if you can’t?
* From current national parks, the amount of work put into communities is huge and innovative. Listen to communities and real experience.

1. *Closing remarks by the Minister*

* We need to face the facts - over the last 30 years nature in Scotland has declined by 24% even while we have been trying to protect it. This has to change all over Scotland.
* Scottish Government has committed to 30% of the country significantly protected for nature by 2030 and we cannot do this without national parks. For the baseline question of what that changes when entering a national park, would expect a higher percentage within the park protected for nature - but national parks should not become islands. They need to be connected.
* It’s not a question of imposing a national park on a community that does not want it. Parks work by persuasion as they do not have big sticks, and they will still need to work with their communities. But they are not regional parks they are National – what is the relation between the National Park and the nation?
* I like the idea of them being the vanguard, pitching new ideas and programmes e.g. re-peopling rural areas. National parks are useful for facilitating change because they have a bit more resource – e.g. a ranger service, transport system. These can then be seen from elsewhere, so areas outwith the national park can learn from their good ideas and practice.

**Park aims and powers – SAG paper 2-1**

***Introduction***

1. The paper sets out three models. The powers and aims against each one are flexible and could be adjusted. Are these models a useful way to present the range of options?
2. Common to all three options is the need for national vision or mission. The annex provides one example, from Austria (in English) of a national statement or vision – something that isn’t in place for Scotland. National parks should be outstanding examples of natural heritage; are exemplars or “greenprints”; support nature recovery climate action; and are part of Scotland’s brand. Can all this be captured in the vision for the parks?
3. Implicit in all three models are changes to powers, i.e. that we will not retain the status quo. Arguably, the three become progressively more European or international in how nature-oriented they are. How far do we want to move towards this given that the USP of Scotland’s national parks is integrated management mechanisms for people and nature? Some other countries’ parks look to us to see how we have integrated people and nature in our Parks. How do we meet expectations of nature recovery and climate change and still capitalise on the USP we do have of engaging communities and supporting sustainable economic development?
4. The recommendations at the end of the paper will be useful for targeting discussions. We would be interested in identifying changes to the parks’ aims and powers: how diverse should powers and size of NPs in Scotland be? We are especially interested in hearing from stakeholders likely to be affected by these changes.

**Discussion points**

Models

* Our preference is for option A, along with a vision. We see more change needed in powers and functions, but it is important not to regard options as hermetically sealed. So some listed in option B, and even option C, could be in the mix. For example, giving national park authorities more leverage – what that involves practically is up for debate – over public sector funding and land management in national parks is critical.
* We need to retain the USP about Scottish communities to be sustainable in the aims. If we do not have people and economics in the model, it won’t work. In favour of adding more powers, and wish to hear insight from the national park executives so it is easier for them to fulfil their job. The third model, about giving nature complete primacy, could undermine the chance to learn and apply elsewhere, which could be a problem of transferability of what we are learning in the parks.
* We support something between options B and C. Uncomfortable about anything that excludes people and communities from the landscape. There is the added complexity of Nature Networks coming in. The legislation is twenty years old and if we are facing new problems, we may need to update our legislation.
* Option B: idea of strictly protected nature protection zones could be tricky, considering we may impose that on areas that may be already lived in. What compliance would be needed? The current management and access framework we have now should work. In Rum, people are being asked not to go there so we need to see what compliance there is like. Education and engagement is needed, not telling people where or where not to go.

*Aims*

* Our feeling is that the aims are pretty satisfactory – they are broad and encompassing. Agree there needs to be a cultural element: there has to be a natural heritage justification but culture sits with it as an important component of landscapes.
* Continued preference is to see inclusion of cultural heritage within the aims. It is restrictive to separate cultural and natural aspects because they have been intertwined for so long – Scotland is almost entirely a cultural landscape and has been over millennia.
* This resonates well with earlier comments on communities and tourism, and our expectations of our landscapes.
* Concerned about just the restoration and nature focus from the minister. It is not just about nature but also about how humans interact with it: ‘culture’. Would be concerned if the word culture does not appear in primary aims as we are in danger of losing something that we should not drop at the stage so early on. Scotland’s landscape character is so diverse – one of the most diverse landscapes in the world for our size – so we should celebrate that. Decline of nature is not the only loss cultural loss would be too. This concern has come up a lot with the many organisations I am here to represent. Just focusing on ‘facts’ can potentially eliminate diversity (whether that is of landscape or culture or otherwise). We should hold on to all aspects.
* Nature recovery is a strong priority for the Minister but in ways that nature and people are thriving together. Options for aims and powers, our feeling is that the aims are pretty satisfactory – they are broad and encompassing. Agree there needs to be a cultural element: there has to be a natural heritage justification but culture sits with it as an important component of landscapes.
* Agree with the points made about cultural heritage. Also, there is a gap in the proposed aims: they are not looking at aspirations of placemaking and sustainable development.

And do we need to have one set of powers? A framework of Parks? Or different models for different parks? We could be more flexible – could maybe have a lighter touch regarding governance, compared to the ‘full fat’ or multi-level models of the existing parks.

*Powers*

* There are questions about how much national parks need sticks as well as carrots; averse to turning rangers into a police enforcement service but there are challenges they face. Last resort powers could be useful even if rarely used.
* Overall, strengthening of duties on other public bodies is needed. “Have regard to” is too weak. Public bodies and voluntary bodies have been less forthcoming that some private bodies so there needs to be a strengthened sense of duty to deliver contribution to parks.
* We should not overcomplicate things - there is already is a duty for all public bodies to enhance and protect biodiversity to a higher level. So there may not be a point in adding another layer to that legislation – maybe enhance or enforce the existing legislation.
* If “have regard to” refers to Park Plans, new legislation could be more active – public bodies must help *implement* park plans, for example. There is no point in having legislation that doesn’t do anything. In general, tourism businesses and landowners ‘get’ what the Park can do for them – “the brand”. It’s different for public bodies which are sectoral and how they work in an area that is spatial. The charitable sector is also interesting as it can face implications about how they wish to present themselves and they have membership considerations too.
* There can be challenges dealing with public bodies: we can’t do it differently here, just because it’s in a national park, because it will set a precedent for my organisation. There is also frustration in seeing duplication which could have been avoided if things were more joined up. The biodiversity duty covers only a small part of the Parks.
* There is a challenge putting a responsibility on an organisation – we cannot be impose things on other bodies that have their own budgets and priorities, so it implicates the ability to collaborate. And saying ‘you must’ could be difficult to achieve in practice given resources.
* Notes that CNPA (and presumably LLTNPA too) has been very good at consulting over its plan which is where you get engagement with public bodies. It is easier for an organisation to understand their role in the plan by involving people in designing it together rather than just being told what it will be. The trick is to get others involved in the preparation of national park plans.

*Other*

* Where would the national parks fit with the role of regional land-use partnerships, and the powers, aims, and governance structures of both? The RLUP pilots include the national parks. What is the hierarchy here and what differentiates regional partnerships from a national park? The query extends to spatial planning too. Previously this was national park and Local Authorities but now it is more complex. We cannot discuss powers etc. in isolation and we need to know where things fit in the process. In a current park, the park Board will be the Regional Land-use Partnerships so that simplifies things in the park. The point still stands outside the park.
* Legislation changes may make us miss the 2026 date. Are we able in the timescale able to actually make changes to primary legislation to tackle some of the issues that might be needed? How much is really up for grabs?
* We need to get the policy right and then look at what needs to happen to achieve this.

Is it possible then, that what we are hoping to achieve by 2026 is one part of a bigger picture?

* In the current parks, communities are fundamental; they are already feeling the effects of the decline of nature. Doing more for nature isn’t about not doing this with communities. The work we are doing would be harder without the communities within and near. They need to be involved and not in silos, and national parks are places where we can make this happen.
* Paper is concise which is appreciated. Answers to questions are yes, yes and yes. The options seem to assume changes to powers but why? Assume we are retaining existing purposes in the original Act – and sustainable development needs to be core / kept - otherwise we are unclear why we are changing and what we are changing to. What would we be looking for more powers to deliver? We need a coherent network of protected areas so we can see these national aims being met across the whole landscapes of Scotland, and the role other designations play in the suite. The network needs to be part of an overarching vision. It’s good to see the Austrian example of that, but each Austrian national park is individual. Happy to share models from European perspective.

**Scope of the evaluation criteria/process – SAG paper 2-2**

***Introduction***

1. In developing this paper, we have looked at European experience but we are also recognise that we are trying to do something that is at the vanguard of “co-production” of National Parks which brings together a bottom-up approach to their selection while also addressing national aspirations. The criteria in the paper starts with existing legislative conditions but these could be subject to change. We are not talking yet about how the evaluation process would work, just the criteria and how they could be assessed.
2. Taking each of the criteria in turn

* The outstanding national importance for natural and cultural heritage criteria has implications for some areas we are looking at in terms of quality and extent – and now or in the future. Also how we measure it, how much of an area should be of a certain quality, and interaction with other policies such as regional land use partnerships and renewables.
* Need and added value: how do we tie that down for new considerations like nature recovery and just transition?
* Degree of support: should local support be part of the evaluation for pragmatic reasons, or not? And if so, how is it taken into account?
* The final criteria proposed is in there because of the timescale we have. The first two national parks had staff teams in place and strategies but we do not necessarily have this so we may need a twin track approach to manage proposed national park areas that are more ready and those that are not.

**Discussion points**

*Outstanding national importance*

* Representativeness and national parks as exemplars. If you are serious about that, then you need national parks that represent different types of landscape across the country, so you can demonstrate what sustainable development and sustainable land use look like in different contexts.
* Under item 8, outstanding national value – the term ‘best’ is not necessarily the most helpful. Perhaps should be ‘all’ so it is representative not judgemental.
* The whole point of national parks is that they show the best. What support can existing national parks give to proposed new areas on governance etc.?
* The extent to which the cultural heritage contributes will vary. Borders has significant component and other areas maybe not as strong. Scotland already has very well developed cultural and environment designation suite. Happy to discuss these aspects further.

Need/Added Value

* The criteria do not quite convey the point about engagement with people and management for / with communities. It’s in the last criteria but it could be read too simply. Instead, the criteria focus on pressures rather than opportunities. Is it about population as a whole (which it should be) or more about engagement of different communities?
* Agree it could be about creating a nature-based area that supports community development. They could be worded more positively or less negatively.
* Endorse what has been said about job creation potential. Do not interpret nature-based too narrowly - jobs that come may not be jobs in the environment but necessary ones like teachers and doctors who may be attracted by the high quality of the area.
* Sustainability (credentials and commitment) is lacking – it appears in criteria in other countries.

*Local support*

* The local support aspect needs thought - what will it look like? How would you assess and judge what counts as support? The Land Reform Act has a ballot - could use this but this may be too complicated for national parks?

Other

* In terms of criteria, can add international experience, e.g. France and Switzerland. It can be tricky to measure what is there now what the potential is. Needs to be a balance between both elements submissions. Try to find a measure that weighs both of these aspects up will be important.
* There is a lot going on in the Land Reform space – has any thought been given to how it could affect things? There is more and more public interest in management *and* ownership of land. What may come out of new land reform legislation is that any unit receiving public money may need to produce a whole farm plan that would be subject to public scrutiny. How do we stitch these together so they are complimentary and without overcomplicating things?
* Whom is this for? Which audience are we speaking to? There is a danger of intimidating people who would otherwise come forward. Whom are we asking to nominate areas – there may be a danger of folk not nominating if it is too complicated. Two stages of inviting candidate places and being clear on the decision process.

**AP1 All** to provide any additional comments on the papers on or by 24th August.

**AP2 All** let us know of any events or meetings the consultations could piggyback on, asap and by 24th August

**AOB and DONM**

1. Next meeting to be 1st September, online.