**National Parks Commission SAG 1-1 - Programme of work**

**Aim of Paper**

1 This paper introduces the programme of work being progressed by NatureScot to develop advice to the Scottish Government on new National Parks.

**Commission and outline plan**

2 NatureScot has been commissioned to provide:

* Advice to Ministers on what National Parks are expected to deliver for Scotland, drawing on a range of view from stakeholders and the public
* On-going support to the non-statutory process of establishing an evaluation framework and nomination process to identify the area(s) to be progressed to National Park status during the lifetime of the current Parliament.

This follows the Bute House Agreement and Programme for Government 2021 commitment to the designation of at least one new National Park during the lifetime of the current Parliament.

3 Any proposal for the designation of a new National Park in Scotland is considered under the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 (“the 2000 Act”). However, as the provisions of the 2000 Act only come into effect once a written proposal is submitted by Minsters, there will need to be an open and transparent nomination and evaluation process to assess potential candidate areas, to allow Ministers to make that proposal to Parliament. Before a nomination process can start, and to set the criteria against which nominations will be evaluated, there is a need to identify and build consensus with stakeholders over what National Park status should achieve for Scotland.

4 The Cairngorms and Loch Lomond & Trossachs (LLTNP) had already been identified as the likely locations of Scotland’s first national parks. Therefore, beyond the consultation associated with enacting the 2000 Act, there was limited discussion as to the expectations of what National Parks should deliver for Scotland. Now, nearly 20 years since LLTNP was designated, it is right and proper that before a new Park is designated, consensus is reached on the most appropriate role and functions of a National Park, particularly in addressing the twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change.

5 Delivery of new National Park(s) are not only goals in their own right, but must be seen in the context of wider Scottish Government Strategies and Commitments, including:

* The Environment Strategy 2020 with its outcome that ‘Scotland’s nature is protected and restored with flourishing biodiversity and clean and healthy air, water, seas and soils’.
* Delivery of The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, not only for meeting protected areas targets, but contributing to wider biodiversity goals
* A key component for realising commitments in the Programme for Government 2021
* to prevent any further species extinction and halting declines by 2030 and significant progress in restoring the natural environment by 2045.
* ensuring every Local Authority area will have a nature network of locally driven projects to improve ecological connectivity
* supporting the restoration and expansion of Scotland’s rainforests
* by 2030 ensuring that at least 30% of Scotland’s land and seas are managed for nature
* Delivery of Scotland’s national planning framework and land-use strategy, including the development of regional land-use partnerships
* Implementation of Scotland’s visitor management strategy

**Discussion**

6 This is an exciting and challenging commission for NatureScot, but it is only part of the first non-statutory phase of work needed to allow Ministers to initiate the statutory phase. The time available for it is limited and we will need to move quickly now to engage and consult on and finalise our advice by the end of November 2022. We also need to do this in a way which facilities futures stages of the engagement and consultation.

7 The commission is quite general in terms of scope of the advice we are being asked to offer. This will evolve over time, but our starting point includes:

* We have been specifically asked by the Minister to consider how (new) National Parks can do more to address climate change and nature recovery, while contributing to a range of other Government priorities.
* The starting point for this work is the existing framework legislation, which while providing a common framework also provides considerable scope to develop different approaches to new national parks;
* We are not reviewing the existing national parks, but we will need to draw on their experience in developing our thinking and this could include proposals for changes to the legislation
* In line with our [advice](https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/2017-07/Publication%202006%20-%20SNH%20Advice%20on%20Coastal%20and%20Marine%20National%20Parks.pdf) on this topic in 2006, consideration of coastal and marine national parks are in scope, though wholly marine national parks are not;
* While our focus is on national parks, we may need to be aware of other related management mechanisms.
* We do not have time to commission new research but will instead want to draw on relevant experience from the UK, Europe and elsewhere.
* The programme only allows 8 weeks for consultation. We think this is sufficient at this stage given the earlier online Dialogue on the topic and bearing in mind the further stages of engagement and consultation ahead.

8 Finally, it is worth emphasising that the Minister has indicated that at this stage there are no pre-conceived ideas about areas in which a new park or parks should be located, instead she is keen on a process which encourages debate and attracts a range of high quality nominations worthy of consideration.

**Recommendation**

9 Stakeholder group members are asked to:

* Note and discuss the commission and outline programme of work
* Identify any issues or opportunities for this work and suggest any support they can provide to address these

**NatureScot**

**July 2022**

**Annex A**

**Indicative Process for Delivering the Evaluation Framework and Scrutiny of Areas Nominated for National Park Status**

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| **Non-statutory**  **Phase** |  | Target date  (end of) |
| Stage 1  *National Discussion* | Crowdsourcing of ‘Expectations’ for National Parks using Scottish Government *Dialogue* online platform | May 2022 |
|  |  |  |
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|  | Refinement of ‘Expectations’ through face to face engagement supported online by *Citizen Space* to establish Role and Function of National Parks in Scotland – NatureScot to lead | November 2022 |
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|  |  |
| Stage 2  *Evaluation Framework* | Delivery of Evaluation Framework for New National Park(s)  - SG lead | March  2023 |
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| Stage 3  *Nomination & Evaluation* | Nomination of Proposed areas and Evaluation against Framework, including support for putting together a nomination  - SG let and managed contract | August  2023 |
|  |  |  |
|  | Nominations evaluated against Evaluation Framework by Independent Panel and report to SG  - same contract as above | September 2023 |