**SAG 5-4 Key issues emerging from the consultation**

1. This paper sets out the key issues NatureScot will need to address in our advice to Ministers. It draws on the on-going analysis of the responses to the consultation (paper 5-3), the views expressed at the consultation events and meetings (presented at the last SAG meeting and summarised again in Annex A); the bespoke engagement we have undertaken with key groups (partly summarised in 5-1) and also previous discussions at SAG.

**Key issues**

1. Overall, there is considerable support for new National Parks with only a few survey responses expressing opposition to them. This reflects the findings from our latest Nature Omnibus survey of public opinion which indicates that 89% of the population support the creation of new national parks with only 3% opposed. While not part of the current phase of work, we believe that 5-10 nominations may come forward next year from across Scotland
2. There are some key exceptions. NFUS have undertaken a helpful pole which suggests that their members are not generally supportive but recognising the political commitment to it are also seeking engagement in the development of more detailed proposals as well as the management and governance of new National Parks themselves. Similar reservations were made by some marine fishing interests at the consultation events.
3. Nevertheless, from the analysis of survey we have so completed, we are fairly confident that there is broad consensus in many of the areas we sought views on which is welcome. Many useful comments have also been made which we will present as part of our advice.
4. Inevitably, there are also a number of areas on which there are more mixed views being expressed which cannot be easily reconciled. The issues of most significance seem to be as follows.

*Purpose and Aims*

1. There is significant support for vision and mission and new overarching purpose, but mixed views on how best to deliver this in practice and concerns raised by land management groups, local authorities and community groups over the perceived *de facto* weakening of the last three aims. The latter is reflected by strong support for retaining the aims as they are currently worded which balances out the support for refreshing them. This issue is further complicated by the current approach in the Act. This separates the National Parks aims (*in relation to the area*) from the role of the National Park Authority *to ensure that the National Park aims are collectively achieved in relation to the National Park in a co-ordinated way,* so there is a need to think about both the purpose of National Parks and National Park Authorities.
2. Various options could be considered in order to resolve these inter-related issues and we will set these out for Ministers in our advice, but equally important will be early work on finalising the draft vision and mission which provides the overall context for discussions and agreement on them (see para 15 below).

*Sequencing and timescales*

1. We are picking up some nervousness from the consultation responses about the sequencing of the designation of a new National Park process and potential changes to the National Park legislation through the Natural Environment Bill. While it is intended that the latter will have been consulted on by the time the nomination process is underway, any changes will still only be proposals. This could also be true when the Minister issues the statutory proposals which will make the more detailed consultation required of the reporter more complicated and potentially subject to challenge.
2. We think these concerns can be addressed but it will need significant effort to plan the sequencing of work and build momentum of engagement and consultation with stakeholders (see para 15 below).

*Nomination and reporting phases*

1. While responses are generally supportive of the proposed selection criteria, we will need to think further about the statutory reporting phase and how it differs from the nomination process.
2. Having listened to the workshop discussions and read the consultation responses we are beginning to think that a different approach may be needed to better differentiate between these phases and to focus the nomination process in particular on the issues that matter for the evaluation. Keeping the nomination process simple and providing supporting to possible areas who want to put themselves forward will be critical.

*Policy relationships*

1. The relationships between National Parks and a range of other policy topics will need further detailed consideration.
   1. The Scottish Renewables Forum (and echoed by separate responses from some individual energy companies) have repeated their call for new National Park proposals to only be located within existing NSAs in order to protect renewable energy targets. Several responses also raised the issue of whether nominations which included large wind farms (or proposals for large wind farms) would be considered for National Park status while others noted that these could be encouraged by a new purpose/aims which emphasised net zero. While recognising the importance of meeting Scotland’s renewable energy targets (and the related policy developments in NPF4), we feel there is space to accommodate new National Park/s and large scale wind farms in all parts of Scotland but this will require a planned approach from Scottish Government to wind farm proposals in advance of designation itself.
   2. There is useful experience of how both agriculture and forestry management can evolve within the existing National Parks which we can learn from in considering new ones. A critical issue in delivering the faster step change required will be the alignment and delivery of national funding for these land-uses within all National Parks and how much these can be shaped to better address the priorities set out in the National Park Partnership Plan.
   3. To support nomination including coastal and marine areas to come forward, further work is also needed on the relationship between fisheries management, marine protected areas, highly protected areas and National Parks.
   4. Scottish National Parks have a unique set of aims that recognise the connections between our natural and cultural heritage and it will be important that we build on this strength in making the changes needed in approach. In the same way that we are looking to refresh the role of our National Parks in line with the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, we also need to take account of the considerable changes in cultural heritage policy since the legislation was enacted. The work started on refreshing Our Place in Time should provide the opportunity for this.

*Role of other designations*

1. The role of existing designations such as Biosphere Reserves and National Scenic Areas has also featured – both as potential National Parks and as alternatives to National Parks – and these synergies will need to be clarified further as part of the emerging proposals for 30x30. A more holistic policy framework may also be useful for the Minister in considering the long list of nominations

*Parks for all*

1. Equality and accessibility has emerged particularly strongly from the bespoke engagement work (discussed in 5-1 and at previous SAG Meetings) but is reflected more generally in the consultation itself. We agree that this strong desire for National Parks to be for everyone merits further emphasis and will need more detailed consideration both in the selection of new ones and the management and governance of all of all of them

*Engagement and consultation*

1. Finally, the discussion around all these issues highlight the need for future stages of the process to build on the engagement and consultation work started during 2022. As previously discussed by SAG, this will require
   1. a clear direction of travel for the vision and mission of National Parks and the relationships to 30x30 and other land-use policy areas – this will be needed alongside the next stage of consultation on the evaluation framework and nomination process; and
   2. an effective communication plan will be essential in 2023 - both for the National Park work but also more generally for the package of related commitments and legislative proposals in this area as a whole.

**NatureScot advice**

1. NatureScot advice on these issues will be developed in the light of SAG discussions today and the further work on the analysis of the consultation we will undertake during the next four working weeks. It has been agreed that a sub-group of the board including the Chair will sign off the advice.
2. Given the importance of the vision and mission in resolving many of these issues, we have undertaken further work on it following the previous discussion at the last SAG meeting. A revised approach to its key elements is set out in Annex B for consideration.

**Recommendation**

1. SAG members are asked to:

* **Discuss the key issues identified in the paper and how they can best be resolved.**
* **Identify any other key issues which we need to specifically address in our advice.**
* **Provide further comments on the key elements of a vision and mission for National Parks presented in Annex B.**

**NatureScot**

**December 2022**

**Annex A – Summary of the high-level feedback from the consultation events**

*What do we want a National Park to achieve?*

* Balance between protecting nature (including nature recovery) and communities.
* Ability to consider and plan for the long term and work at a broad scale.
* Better visitor management.

*How should we go about implementing such a National Park?*

* Be clear about what it would and could achieve.
* Proper funding and resourcing
* Avoid duplicating other designations and mechanisms.

*Selection criteria*

* Outstanding national importance was the top ranked criterion in all the events.
* Possible tension between some criteria, e.g. what extent should ‘potential’ have against current state of an area?
* No missing criteria were identified.
* Degree of local support needed unpacking

*Providing support for the nomination process*

* Funding help – for meeting rooms, staff time etc.
* Clarity on what nominations would be assessed against. Including guidance, with examples if poss.
* Clarity on role of local authorities (e.g. if they have more than one nomination in their area).

**Annex B – Key elements of the vision and mission for National Parks**

**Vision**

National Parks are celebrated as Scotland’s green prints for large-scale nature restoration and for their contribution to the just transition to the nature positive, net zero nation we need to be. They are special places where nature is thriving and enjoyed by all; nature based solutions drive forward the urgent action needed to address climate change; and where the sustainable use and enjoyment of the natural and cultural heritage are at the heart of community well-being and prosperity.

**Outcomes**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Overarching Purpose of National Parks  Or  Purpose of the National Park Authority | To secure transformative nature restoration and contribute significantly to the just transition to a nature positive and net zero Scotland  Or  To ensure that the National Park aims are collectively achieved in a co-ordinated way that secures transformative nature restoration and contributes to the just transition to a nature positive and net zero Scotland | |
| Aim | By 2030 | By 2045 |
| *Conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area* | * A suite of national parks in place representing many of the best of Scotland’s nature and landscapes and our ambitions for it * Peatland is restored, native woodlands have expanded and the health of other natural habitats on land and sea is improving allowing more species to recover * Positive synergies between natural and cultural heritage are recognised in managing the landscape change required and help to reinforce the Parks’ special qualities | * Nature is thriving in and around National Parks * National Parks are significant carbon sinks for Scotland * The living and working landscapes of the Park are in good shape, and provide a sustainable livelihood for the people who manage them * National Parks are a core part of Scotland’s nature, active travel and public transport networks * All of Scotland’s people have opportunities to visit; learn about and care for Scotland’s National Parks * The communities of the Park are happy, heathy and resilient * Scotland’s National Parks are recognised as a role model in nature recovery and a just transition to net zero for Scotland and elsewhere in Europe |
| *Promote the sustainable use of the natural resources of the area* | * Land management practice and sea use has accelerated their on-going transition to net zero * Opportunities to reduce carbon emissions through well located and designed development have been taken * Land managers have the skills and support needed to deliver restorative farming and forestry |
| *Promote understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the area* | * National parks are recognized as key places for nature-based education, volunteering and recreation * Visitors to National Parks leave no trace and travel-related carbon emissions are reducing * People enjoying National Parks are more representative of all the diversity of Scotland’s population |
| *Promote the sustainable social and economic development of the area’s communities.* | * The 2030 aspirations for developing sustainable tourism are realised * The well-being of Park communities is increasing – people are healthier and the Park economy provides opportunities for all * There are more opportunities for young people to stay, live and work in their Park |

**How National Parks should work to deliver these vision and outcomes?**

* National Parks should be recognised as playing a key role in the implementation of the SBS, meeting statutory nature targets and delivering 30x30 and Nature Networks. Their contribution to the refreshed Our Place in Time should also be recognised
* National Park Authorities should provide the leadership and be funded to work at the pace required to deliver the step change needed in delivering the vision and outcomes
* National Park Partnership plans should provide the green prints for just transition to a nature positive net zero Scotland both for their areas but also as exemplars for other parts of Scotland
* The Park’s communities and public and private sector organisations should all play a key role in the development and delivery of the Park Partnership Plan
* National Park Plans should be endorsed by the cabinet with national funding streams positively facilitating priorities identified in the National Park Partnership Plan