National Park Stakeholder Advisory Group – 1st meeting – 12th July 2022

MS Teams

**Note of meeting**

**Present**

| **Organisation** | **Name** | **Organisation** | **Name** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland /Scottish Campaign for National Parks | John Mayhew | NatureScot | Heather Reid (chair)  Eileen Stuart  Pete Rawcliffe  Laura Campbell  Ceara Webster  Jennafer Rodgers Francesca Osowska |
| Cairngorms National Park Authority | Grant Moir | Ramblers Scotland | Helen Todd |
| COSLA | Robert Nicol | Scottish Renewables | Mark Richardson (part) |
| Europarc Federation | Carol Ritchie | South of Scotland Enterprise | Karen Jackson; |
| Forest and Land Scotland | John Mair | Scottish Environment LINK | John Thompson |
| Heads of Planning Scotland | James Miller | Scottish Government | Lisa McCann,  Brian Eardley |
| Highlands and Island Enterprise | Neil Ross | Scottish Land and Estates | Stephen Young,  Karen Ramoo |
| Historic Environment Scotland | Dara Parsons | Scotland’s Landscape Alliance | Sue Evans |
| Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Authority | Jane Cook | Trees for Life (Affric Highland) | Steve Micklewright;  Alan McDonnell |
| Marine Conservation Society | Calum Duncan (part) | Visit Scotland | Vicki Miller |
| National Farmers Union | Jonathan Hall | Young Scot | Kirsten Urquhart |

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

Community Land Scotland

Land Commission Scotland

Marine Scotland

Scottish Renewables

# Agenda

1400- 1410 Welcome and introductions

Part A

1410- 1430 Paper 1-1 Programme of work

1430-1445 Paper 1-2 Terms of Reference for the stakeholder group

1445-1500 Paper 1-3 Proposals for consultation

Part B

1500-1510 Paper 1-4 Establishing new National Parks – background

Paper 1-5 Analysis of responses to the online ideas space

1510-1540 Small groups session

1540-1555 Feedback from small groups

1555 -1600 AOB and DONM

# Welcome and introductions

1. Discussion with the Minister has emphasised the importance of this work It is seen as central in the Scottish Government’s response to the climate and nature emergencies, with Scotland’s National Parks being places that will actively demonstrate the transformational change needed in our approach and showcasing a just transition to net zero in Scotland. The national park debate has already resonated with the public, media and young people.
2. The discussions in this stakeholder group are a real opportunity to be part of a journey to help NatureScot shape advice to Scottish Government. We want to hear your thoughts, and it will be a two-way street of communication. This is a forum to have discussions, even if divergent. The Minister has been clear that “nothing is off the table” and wants to see fresh and bold thinking come forward.

# Part A – purpose and process

*Introduction*

1. The first three papers are important for setting the scene and context about what NatureScot has been asked to do, and how the stakeholder group will assist us in this task. There are no preconceived notions, other than the commitment to at least one new National Park being set up by 2026. There are no geographical areas in the frame at present. Wider changes our approach to National Parks will need to be considered, building on the experience of Scotland’s first two National Parks.

## *Paper 1-1 Programme of work*

1. Annex A of the paper summarises the first non-statutory part of the process leading to the nomination of specific areas for consideration as National Parks. A second statutory phase will be then be initiated by Scottish Minister to establish at least one National Park, including two further phases of intensive consultation on the specific area/s.
2. NatureScot’s role is to provide advice to Scottish Government on the future role of National Parks and how future nominations can be best developed and assessed to help deliver this. Scottish Government will then lead on the nomination process leading to the selection of specific areas for consideration and formal designation by Scottish Ministers. The timescale for NatureScot to develop its advice is short - November 2022. Therefore, we do not intend to commission research this time, so the information and experience in the Stakeholder Advisory Group will be very useful.
3. To help inform our advice we intend to consult on the issues, and proposals for this are set out in paper 1-3. We only have space for an 8-week consultation period rather than the normal 12 – however, we think this is acceptable given that an online dialogue has already been completed and provides a wider range of views to draw on (see paper 1-5). Further phases of statutory consultation will also be required as part of the designation process.
4. The paper identifies a number of assumptions for this work, including:

* There is now twenty years’ experience since the first national parks were established. We are not intending to review that, but we do want to learn from it.
* We consider that coastal and marine national parks are in the scope of the current task.
* There are other Scottish Government commitments, e.g. 30x30, nature networks, marine protected areas, NPF4 etc. that this task needs to fit with.

*Discussion*

1. How far should our discussions go into other management mechanisms such as Regional Parks and Biosphere Reserves given the increased importance of visitor management and increased use of recreational areas near towns and cities?
   * This is within scope, but cannot say how much. We can see how this evolves.
2. What is the difference between National and Regional Parks?
   * They are founded on different legislation with different purposes and powers. National Parks have government funding and separate governance structures. Regional Parks are run and funded by local authorities.
3. The new National Park work does not sit in isolation. There is the forthcoming Land Reform Bill; land rights and responsibilities, Biodiversity Strategy, an Agriculture Bill etc. The policy landscape is somewhat cluttered; how can we help join this up better to make it more choreographed than cluttered?
   * This needs to be a key consideration in our work. A good outcome from this process would be considering how National Parks could help deliver a more integrated approach to delivery of these agendas on the ground. We want the policy field to be less cluttered, not more cluttered. The Stakeholder Advisory Group is a good place to help think about how to make this happen.
4. National Parks need to be referred to properly in NPF4 - can this current process help achieve that? There are also Regional Land Use Partnership pilots: what can be learned from or linked to these?

* We will need to consider these issues in developing this advice. It was noted that there is reference to new National Parks in the current draft of NPF4.

1. Will we be reviewing the purposes of National Parks?
   * This is within scope and the online consultation feedback already provides a range of views on this key issue. The National Park aims themselves are quite broad so perhaps we should focus on the functions and powers of National Parks and what specific roles new National Parks should be asked to play rather than the aims themselves.
2. Will we look at experience elsewhere?
   * Yes – the Europarc Foundation has already offered to help with this and input from others in the stakeholder group would also be very welcome. One example is Belgium, which has recently developed an evaluation framework and nomination process for considering new National Parks. We can learn from this and elsewhere and apply as appropriate.

## *Paper 1-2 Terms of Reference (ToR) for the stakeholder group*

*Introduction*

1. The ToR is fairly standard for such a group and draws on the one NatureScot established for developing its previous advice on coastal and marine national parks.
2. Not everyone can be represented on the group - the key challenge is having a group which has the necessary range of organisations to include the wide range of views on this topic while being of manageable size – circa 25. For organisations not on the group, there will be other engagement and consultation opportunities.
3. Four meetings are planned. Those in August/September, when most of the thinking will be done, are quite close together. We recognise that availability for those attending will be an issue, given the short timescale. The Minister has a strong interest in this work and may wish to attend – perhaps the next meeting.
4. Papers, and unconfirmed minutes of the meetings, will be put on the NatureScot website. Provisional agendas for the next meetings are in the annex to the paper. Please add comments on these as soon as possible. Ideas and contributions for additional papers would also be welcome.
5. The Minister has specially requested we ensure that all-abilities groups are represented on the stakeholder group and we would welcome thoughts on how best to achieve this. It was suggested that the CNPA’s Equality Panel could be useful network to link into as it is representative of many of these interests, including some from relevant national organisations.

*Discussion*

1. Do crofters need to be better represented?
   * Current thinking is this could come at a later stage depending on areas nominated. We will also be looking to HIE, Land Commission Scotland, NFUS and local authorities to reflect these interests in our discussions. Further consultation with Crofting Commission will also be considered as part of the consultation with specific sectors.
2. The marine sector is distinct: do we raise that now as a likely location so proposals can be worked-up in time? Should we include the Crown Estate on the group too?
   * Coastal and marine National Parks are in scope though we recognise that this raises issues in terms of engagement with marine interests. For the earlier coastal and marine National Park discussions, there was a long list of stakeholders involved. For this task, we have only identified Marine Scotland and the Marine Conservation Society as the key leads for this sector and we will need to consider with these two organisations how best to engage the wider sector.
3. A number of other specific suggestions were made for inclusion on the stakeholder group including ethnic minority groups; “gypsies / travellers” groups (Romani/Romanichal people and Irish Travellers) given their strong links to the land; built heritage interests such as BEFS; UNESCO designations (e.g. Biosphere Reserves, Geoparks and World Heritage Sites); and those with experience of living within National Parks.
   * We will consider these suggestions further, though our preference given the size of the group is to look at ways to engage with these interests as part of our wider engagement and consultation work.

## *Paper 1-3 Proposals for consultation*

*Introduction*

1. Various elements are planned including an online consultation; geographically based (south, central and north being most likely) events and meetings with sectoral interests (land managers, marine, historic environment etc.). We also intend to develop bespoke arrangements to engage with under-represented groups, possibly linking to parallel work on the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and “30x30”. We are also very open to “piggy-backing” on existing events and meetings where this make sense. The mapping of stakeholders in the annex of the paper is at a very early stage and we would welcome comments and additions to it.
2. In taking forward this work, we should bear in mind that it is the start of four stages of consultation which become progressively more detailed and locally focussed, and we need to pave the way for that. The more clarity at each phase of consultation on what is being asked and who needs to be involved, the better.

*Discussion*

1. There was support for the approach taken, with caveats. Stakeholder engagement is often the Achilles’ heel if it is not done well. Focus on framing the questions and understanding their purpose: clarity is needed first before the detail. Neutral organisations such as Europarc have experience of external facilitation and could assist with elements of this work. YoungScot would also be happy to help to ensure that young people are engaged in a meaningful and supportive way.

* While NatureScot has considerable skills and experience of consultation work in this area to draw on, we are very open to support from members of the stakeholder group and will take up the offers made.

1. It was agreed that we need to be clear about the role of consultation at each stage of the process leading to designation of new national park. The local consultation work undertaken by the Galloway National Park Association on the development of their proposals for a National Park in Dumfries and Galloway took many sessions. Scottish Environment LINK would be happy to share experience from that.
   * We need to give further though to the stages of consultation and engagement envisaged and again offers of help on this gratefully received. We could perhaps be challenged on whether the proposals in paper 1-3 are creative enough. But the crucial stage for this will be nomination phase which needs to be open, transparent and engaging both locally and nationally.

# Part B - content

## *Paper 1-4 establishing new National Parks – background paper*

*Introduction*

1. This paper briefly provides some background information on National Parks to help get everyone in the stakeholder group up to speed and begin to think about some of the key issues we will need to explore in developing our advice.
2. Scotland’s national parks have a unique set of aims. Because of this, they are widely regarded as leaders in connecting people and nature. At the same time, the policy context for National Parks has changed and the language used to describe what they do has evolved significantly.
3. Scotland’s National Park legislation is enabling, and provides a framework for different arrangements to be put in place for each individual Park. It is quite flexible. The scope for developing different arrangements has yet to be fully tested as the requirements for the first two national parks were broadly similar.
4. A key question to resolve is whether our next National Park should be similar or different to the first two? If different, how so? To help identify the most appropriate area for a third or fourth Park, we also probably need a policy direction or more strategic approach which sets out what we want National Parks to deliver. Could a new Park do more for the climate and nature emergencies and if so what does this mean in practice? Any new national park needs to be make a difference - the Minister has suggested you should be able to tell the difference as soon as you are over the boundary of a Park.

## *Paper 1-5 Analysis of responses*

*Introduction*

1. The number of responses to the National Park challenge put it second behind Covid topic. The ideas and responses can still be viewed at [www.ideas.gov.scot](https://www.ideas.gov.scot/) then click on Previous Challenges and The Future of National Parks in Scotland.
2. Some comments were supportive, some were challenging. The need for a local say came out as a strong theme. As did a Park as a catalyst for economic development, visitor management, and accessibility i.e. public transport etc. There was support for nature restoration including ‘true wilderness’, but also for living and working landscapes.

*Discussion*

1. There is quite a lot about natural and cultural heritage in the legislation but not much about built heritage, despite that often being a valued part of how people enjoy a place. Also not much about future heritage: what might future heritage icons be, given the aspects of our landscape that are rapidly changing?

* The language used in the legislation does feel quite dated. Nevertheless, the Act has a definition of cultural heritage that includes built heritage. Using this language is probably alright as long as we know what we mean by it, and are aware of that when talking to other groups.

# Small groups’ session feedback

1. The four groups each considered three questions arising from paper 1-4:
2. Are we looking at similar National Parks to the first two?
3. What should our overall strategy for National Parks look like?
4. What role should National Parks play in tackling the climate emergency and nature recovery?
5. They were asked to feedback, highlighting;

* One issue where there was strong agreement
* One issue where there was weak agreement.

Group 1

1. Other designations are also important; what makes a Country or Regional or National Park suitable for a particular place?
2. National Parks should be test beds for new thinking, something that is beginning to happen in the existing parks.
3. Climate emergency should not just be about peatland restoration, but also dealing with waste, active travel and so on.
4. Young people and their enthusiasm is important, but that quickly raises questions of accessibility without relying on private cars.
5. Could NatureScot develop a map, ruling some areas in and some out (as previous reports have done)?

Group 2

1. Looked at the second question first; it links to other objectives and designations. National Parks have coordinating role but this could switch to more of a leadership role.
2. Access to National Parks for all is important.
3. Nature should be more prominent; the pivot towards which other things occur sustainably.
4. National Parks as examples. Nature-based solutions, ecosystem services and so on; and bringing in private finance to help.
5. Current National Parks are good examples of place-based work and management.
6. Are we looking for a suite or representative habitats through the set of designations?
7. A new National Park should be appropriate, not just different for difference’s sake.

Group 3

1. A new National Park has to have climate and nature at core.
2. A new National Park should be ambitious and different.
3. A balance between wielding power and encouraging and enabling is needed; where that is ‘right’ will differ.
4. There are probably two broad approaches: hierarchical - where nature and climate change are prime - or multi-benefit.

Group 4

1. We need a strategy to inform decisions about future national parks.
2. The criteria for designating a National Park emphasis outstanding national importance. But is the park about what it is today, or what it will become?
3. A National Park should be an exemplar for people, inclusion and community.
4. National parks are key parts of Scotland’s attraction for visitors
5. Should there be a completely separate Park for marine?
6. NatureScot will consider the discussion and any further comments received on the papers. The papers for the next meeting are likely to focus on:

* Park aims
* What the elements of a broad strategy might look like.

# AOB and DONM

1. The next meeting is proposed for Wednesday 17th August, in Edinburgh. Timing likely to be mid-morning to mid-afternoon. The Minister may wish to attend for part of the session.
2. It would be useful to know, as soon as possible, who would be able to attend this meeting in person.
3. We are grateful for the offers for help. It would be useful for any further suggestions for sub-group meetings, ideas for stakeholder engagement, information or papers etc.
4. Thank you to everyone for all the contributions today.