

National Park Stakeholder Advisory Group – 4th meeting – 22 November 2022 - online

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) Pete Rawcliffe Eileen Stuart Laura Campbell Ceara Webster Jennafer Rodgers
Cairngorms National Park Authority	Grant Moir	Ramblers Scotland	Helen Todd
Europarc Federation	Carol Ritchie	Scottish Renewables	Mark Richardson
Heads of Planning Scotland	Ian Aikman	South of Scotland Enterprise	Jayne Ashley
Historic Environment Scotland	Dara Parsons Allan Rutherford	Scottish Environment LINK RSPB Scotland	Isobel Mercer
Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Authority	Gordon Watson	Scottish Government	Jennifer Gibbons Brian Eardley Tariq Nabi
National Farmers Union	Sarah Cowie	Trees for Life (Affric Highland)	Steve Micklewright
		VisitScotland	Chris Taylor

Apologies - organisations unable to send representatives to this meeting:
Community Land Scotland; COSLA; Disability Equality Scotland; Forest and Land Scotland; Land Commission Scotland Marine Conservation Society; Marine Scotland; Scotland's Landscape Alliance; Scottish Land and Estates; Social Inclusion Scotland

AGENDA

1. Update on consultation (NatureScot)
2. Feedback from outreach with underrepresented groups (NatureScot)
3. Towards a "vision and mission" for National Parks (NatureScot)
4. Next steps in the process in 2023 (Scottish Government)

DoNM 21st December 2022, online, 09.30 to 12.30

Introduction and notes of last meeting - chair

It was noted that the previous meeting notes were finalised via email exchange with the confirmed notes being on the NatureScot website. The Chair also thanked the Europarc Federation for organising a specific meeting on this topic to share experience with European colleagues from Parks and protected areas across Europe.

1. Update on consultation (NatureScot)

1.1 NatureScot provided an update and initial feedback on the consultation events.

Three online events were held: north, south and national. There was also an online meeting for the Outer Hebrides organised by the Council, an in-person presentation and Q&A with Highland Council's Climate Change Committee, and an online event with Planning Aid Scotland. A final event, for the cultural heritage sector, will be held on 25/11/22.

Numbers attending were around 30 for north, 15 for south, and 50 for national. There was a good geographical spread of attendance. There was also a good range of interests represented: local authorities, commerce, regional and national conservation bodies, land use, and recreation. The concept boards from the workshop sessions will be shared in due course. Outline notes of the events will form part of the background information in the Advice to Ministers.

In all the meetings, discussions were fairly positive. Those attending were generally supportive of establishing new National Parks and wanted them to make a difference both for nature and for people.

There were some interesting differences between the online meetings in terms of questions asked and ideas generated at the breakout sessions. We are still digesting the transcripts but our initial take is:

- the north events talked more about the practicalities of the process, including the role of local authorities;
- the south event raised more issues around the need to prioritise outcomes for people as well as nature, and fears over possible restrictions on land managers;
- the national event questions included concerns on how to engage local communities with proposals for new Parks when they may be very different from the current ones; about potential restrictions on fisheries if a new National Park had a marine element; and the balance between sustainable economic growth and visitor pressures.

Overall, the main concerns raised were around perceived risk of too much control, e.g. of agriculture or fishing; of not paying proper attention to commercial considerations; and of additional bureaucracy. There were also some concerns around the amount of work that a nomination might involve, especially as this is likely to be done by volunteer groups.

The main issues raised in response to questions at the events' workshop sessions were:

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.
- Clarity on role of local authorities.

1.2 Reflections from NatureScot

Thinking about what was raised at the events, and what it means for our advice and the process, there is something about:

- Confusion, uncertainty, or lack of awareness about what National Parks do in practice and how they operate, particularly beyond planning powers and rangers. How do we address that, particularly given the role the Minister wants about National Parks contributing to 30 x 30 and protecting nature?
- Some surprise about the lack of reference to climate change. It featured in the North but not much in many of the other discussions. This may partly be because the links have not yet been made between nature and climate in many stakeholder's minds.
- The consistent emphasis was about nature protection, nature recovery and visitor management.
- Outstanding national value is seen as the most important criteria. Is more needed in the nomination process to define that better, and how far do we go beyond the existing designations to do that?
- In discussion with Scottish Government, we probably need to differentiate carefully between the nomination phase and the reporter phase.
- Six criteria are quite a lot. We have had some discussion in the last stakeholder group meeting about whether we are asking for too much detail at this stage, and how do we make the process of nomination next year as simple as possible.
- Finally, the long-standing concerns from certain land management interests and certain parts of the fishing industry. How can we best address these, given the evidence that we now have about what National Parks do, and do not do, for businesses and communities?

1.3 Reflections from National Park CEOs

There needs to be clarity about the balance between nature and communities. The whole point of having a new National Park is the ability to do nature recovery and to benefit communities locally: those two things are not mutually exclusive. We have to be very clear about that, because many people still want to have that fight – surprisingly, but perhaps because it plays quite well on Twitter. The key thing is that, whichever area is picked, it is about doing things that are good for nature, good for climate and good for the local communities. We need to make that clearer in any vision and mission statements.

1.4 Discussion

There were many misconceptions in the consultation events about what National Parks actually are, and what is being proposed by the Minister in terms of a focus around nature recovery and net zero. For the process of asking for nominations there needs to be a planned communications process, perhaps with people speaking directly to communities, so they are absolutely clear particularly if a new Park is potentially quite different. It has been a great consultation, but lots of communication will be needed next as well.

One observation on the workshops is that you could see that many of people's positions were shifting and evolving over the hour or so. This points to the fact that many people have not had these conversations, and may have a low starting point in terms of understanding on

what a Park is and what a Park can and cannot do. There should be more of these types of conversations with a wider group of people.

Regarding tourism and visitor management, and short-term versus long-term opportunities: it is understandable given all the issues over the last couple of summers, but those are a result of a particular set of circumstances and are probably a reasonably short-term thing to be addressed. What about the longer-term opportunities for inspiring visitors and connecting them with nature and encouraging them to appreciate and conserve natural landscapes and habitats? This is slightly more longer term and ambitious, and may relate to the vision statement.

Clarifying some misconceptions in the vision and mission statement is important. There is some concern about adding aspects like “just transition”, which is an abstract term for the public and can be unclear about what it means in practice. There is a role for the vision and mission statement to set out opportunities around nature-based industries and sectors and skills and jobs over the next 50 years - a long-term vision about what these places could be delivering for people.

There is a question about the timescales for consulting on potential reforms to all national parks, and for the nomination process, and the potential overlap between them. How much opportunity is there to provide clarity, for those putting in bids, about what reform might actually look like? That would help to address some of the confusion about what national parks are for, and what will be expected of new national parks. [*Timing question covered in item 4, below.*]

1.5 NatureScot response

These are helpful reflections, chiming with our thinking. National Park discussions have often highlighted polarised views or dichotomy between nature versus people and environment versus development. While the climate-nature crisis has changed the nature of this debate, we still hear some of it in the discussions at these events. Communication and engagement is very important and we will certainly need to pick that up during 2023.

It also emphasises the importance of having the vision and mission statement earlier rather than later in the process. Having that as part of those discussions might be quite important, and is something Scottish Government will need to consider.

2. Feedback from outreach with under-represented groups

2.1 NatureScot provided a summary from a range of events.

Many of the points already mentioned were picked-up in these engagement events. Similarly, there were not clear links made with climate change, but there were some points related to net zero and the circular economy. There was also a point about uncertainty about what designation as a National Park actually means.

Disability Equality Scotland carried out a poll with their members on national parks, and they produced a full report. We will share the findings once we have final clearance. The report covered a wide range of issues such as support for national parks, how people felt about actually establishing one, and the main reservations people had if they were not in support of it.

There was also engagement with DPOs (Disabled People's Organisations) and access panels, and the use of those in decision-making. Access and inclusion covers perceptions, as well as facilities that make the park physically accessible. Access is not just the physical paths; it is also about information and signage.

CEMVO (the Council for Ethnic Minority Voluntary sector Organisations) will speak with their members at their local energy Scotland event about national parks. They are also circulating the consultation with their members and their ethnic minority environmental network, which will encourage wider participation in the consultation.

The event with Planning Aid Scotland was with a wide age range from young people to those past retirement age. There were interesting discussions about large-scale developments, such as commercial wind farms, which current planning policy does not allow in National Parks. Their opinions were that there should not necessarily be a blanket ban if it could support the local economy, provide employment opportunities and contribute to net zero; but ultimately those places must be good to live in.

An event run with YoungScot gathered insights from young people in Scotland on the following two questions:

- What are the issues or challenges for the young people in relation to national parks and
- Two, what would a successful National Park look like for young people?

Some of the key issues or challenges that young people identified were access – the main one that emerged - including transport and access for people with disabilities.

Other concerns included a lack of influence on the management of National Parks; the expense of a new National Park, which was also shared in by some other under-represented groups; and concerns around vandalism, and an aversion to spaces if they were overcrowded or had poor visitor management. They also said National Parks had the potential to be boring and suggested having some engaging events: not just for enjoyment, but also for the wellbeing. The wellbeing aspect for young people is an answer to the second question.

They mentioned balance of access for people, support for local communities and protection for protected spaces and for wildlife. There could be a question of language here, as they were not necessarily framing this as an “either / or”. When they say “balance”, they are saying they want it to be an equitable consideration of social, ecological and economic needs. They do not see them as opposing functions.

Young people also said that they wanted National Parks to be places that provided opportunities for them in terms of employment and contributing to young Rangers programmes. They want them to be places that would equip them with appropriate kit and skills to engage with the outdoors, and have good management by enforcing policies. They also thought a successful National Park is one with a holistic approach where the circular economy is built into the National Park, e.g. with its waste well –managed. They wanted a variety of activities to be available, and have education and information facilities as well. There is quite a diverse range of young people and disabled people's perspectives.

2.2 Reflections from NatureScot

The work in designating the first two National Parks had quite a strong youth engagement component and it's great that we are now building on this and also the Europarc youth manifesto work of recent years. “Captain Cairngorms” was one of the motifs that young people from this Park area came up with!

Thinking about 2023, and then 2024 and 2025, how do we build on these initial discussions when we get into the detail? This is the start of the journey rather than the end. We also need to emphasise some of this content when we present our Advice to Ministers, as they will want to hear views from a range of stakeholders rather than just the “usual suspects”.

3. Towards a “vision and mission” for National Parks

3.1 NatureScot introduced paper 4-1 on a vision and mission for National Parks

One of the survey questions is whether there should be a vision and mission statement, and what should be the content. So this is very much a “starter for ten” to help us in developing our thinking, but it will all help us with our advice to Scottish Ministers.

- We have reviewed international experience, including the meeting in France that Europarc hosted. The headlines from that review is that a “vision and mission statement” is common for individual National Parks - any park plan or partnership plan will have this for their area. This applies less at the national level, though many countries that have National Park services or partnership organisations will have them in various degrees; see the annexes in paper 4.1 for more. Most statements focus on the traditional role of national parks, for conservation and enjoyment, rather than the integrated aims we have in Scotland. They tend to be quite short and narrow rather than longer and broader as we might need.
- Surprisingly few link strongly to biodiversity strategies in terms of objectives or timescales. So there is not necessarily much of a read-across between what is in the national strategy for biodiversity and what is in the vision and mission statement.

We would welcome any more examples, whether they are vision and mission statements for National Parks or other organisations.

The paper proposes a number of elements that a vision and mission statement should cover. We have also proposed two timescales, to match the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2030 and 2045, and the Climate Change Emission Strategy to 2045.

We are interested in reactions to what we have put in terms of the scope of a vision and statement. So:

- Was it what you expected?
- Is there anything significant missing? and
- How much detail should the statement go into at this stage?

We have provided an example of the German approach to this, which almost goes beyond the vision and mission statement to standards and quality criteria. It covers a lot of ground, so we may not wish to go down that route, but we are interested in views on that. In addition, it may need to be earlier rather than later in the process - we would be interested in views on that.

3.2 Reflections from the chief executives of existing national parks.

Loch Lomond & the Trossachs

This is a good time to be asking us about vision and mission, as one park has just published its park plan and the other is working furiously on its. The range of topics in the paper fit with what is on our minds.

The words I am using most when discussing our park plan are trajectory, pace, focus and priorities. Trajectory is about what we have to do in the next five years to achieve the outcomes and milestones for reducing emissions and carbon sequestration. That is driving a lot of the policy and thinking for our own targets. Both Parks have done a lot of work about what needs to happen in the next five years - what is our glide path around restoring nature. The paper refers to the target dates for climate emissions reduction and restoring nature and both Parks are very focused on those dates.

Pace comes from some of our existing documents, such as our future nature strategy, that use frank language about where we are in terms of the state of nature and the need to do more. That is captured in the vision and mission statement, and I think all national parks need to be focused on that.

The focus and priorities are needed because my own National Park in its early years was perhaps tried to do too many things. We need to focus on the right things to make the biggest difference. We are having conversations about what is the best use of our time and resources over the coming years, particularly with the major national challenges around climate and nature. This is also about communities. Our communities are feeling the effects of climate change, so it is very much about engaging with communities and landowners. I broadly welcome the fact that there is some kind of unifying vision. I think the art is allowing enough flexibility for each National Park, existing and new, to play to its strengths and opportunities within such a statement.

Cairngorms

We have the long-term vision that has been in previous Park Plans, ensuring the National Park is enjoyed and valued by everyone, where nature and people thrive together. It is probably not far off what we are trying to do it collectively in terms of national parks overall.

One of the key things the paper needs to think about is the aspects that are not nature or biodiversity, and how they fit in. That is maybe the difference between what government wants a Park Authority to focus on, and what partners need to contribute. This is for aspects like transport and housing that are key to people who are living in the park, and visitors who come to the park, and how those things fit together. It is about trying to trying to weave that into the paper more. Some of the links in the paper are interesting. Overall, having a vision and mission for National Parks, once you got three or more, is crucial.

There is a question about what government wants the Park Authority to do. Is there something about the future, which might provide greater clarity for people? What is the role of businesses within the park? What is the role of land managers or public agencies in the park? This could provide more clarity that might be useful.

There is a nature impact too, all caused by climate. That is something we have to get across. If we are going to tackle nature and climate, it is about communities, and the impacts we are trying to address. That could be highlighted, maybe as case studies. In the Cairngorms, a good example of this, and how nature, climate and communities all come together could be Storm Frank, which caused huge damage and cost a lot of money for Ballater.

3.3 Discussion

A vision and mission statement are different. We should not miss the point of a vision. It needs to be inspirational, concise and understandable. In some respects, it needs to be abstract because a vision reflects values.

The mission is where we focus towards targets, because the mission will ground the vision in practical outcomes. If we're going to have a vision for national parks in Scotland, it should be about process and about values, not necessarily about actionable outcomes - that needs to come later, through a mission and objectives. There needs to be good communications skills to make it short and inspiring.

The vision and mission have to be consistent across all the national parks, new and old. Perhaps the existing ones need to transition over time with their strategies.

The statement should be brief. There is no need for long debates, or getting tied up on the technicalities, the main thing is to capture the essence. The statement is needed before the nomination process starts, so that people understand what they might be committing to. It needs to talk about leadership and innovation as a role of National Parks, and a sense of urgency to deal with the biodiversity and nature crises. It needs to be holistic, embracing nature, climate, economy and people, with nature recovery leading all of those. It should apply to the Park as a whole, and all the agencies including the authority should have a legal duty to deliver. It should also be for NGOs or landowners who have a role to play, but government agencies in particular need to get behind the purposes of a new National Park.

There is a lot of detail in the paper, which perhaps is not needed. On the other hand, the line about what National Parks are recognised for, as places of education, experience and recreation for all of Scotland's people, is not quite strong enough. There needs to be much more about the engagement needed to bring people in. It should reflect the fact that the National Parks have a lot more resources for visitor management than any other body in the country. By 2030, there should be a lot more about bringing people into the park and making the parks for everyone.

The section around visitors talks about the need for visitor management and visitors' carbon footprint to be reduced, which is all good and laudable. However, it positions visitors as a thing to be managed rather than how Parks can engage, inspire, educate, enthuse and increase understanding and conservation. The more people around the world that are alert to the issues of the flooding in Ballater and the impacts on nature, the more chance we have of finding solutions. Switch it round to talk less around visitors needing to be managed and more around what role National Parks can play in reaching out, inspiring and connecting people with nature. National Parks are part of the Scottish brand and part of the message when showcasing Scotland around the world. There are all sorts of issues where Scotland is, and can be, leading the way, not just tourism. National Parks have that kind of big, outward facing profile and we can talk about that in the vision and mission.

There needs to be a lot more emphasis on the protection of existing communities within the Park and specifically existing businesses. One of the main concerns is that the rural economy and rural ways of life have been there for many years and are going to be fundamentally changed. Therefore, a bit of certainty and clarity over what the National Park is going to do for these communities to boost their livelihoods is necessary. It also needs to be clear that it will not be imposed on a community, but in collaboration and with engagement.

The key element that says land management practice and sea use have begun to move towards net zero does not recognise what is already happening. Instead, it should say it is continuing to move towards net zero.

A vision and mission statement should not be too restrictive. It should be useful to explain what the National Park is trying to do. Also, importantly, what the add-on benefit is. It could also recognise there could be differences between them, i.e. not one-size-fits-all.

The paper is a good start, and welcome the strong focus on the nature recovery element. There are many good points covered in the potential content section. Has the term "nature positive" been discussed as an equivalent to net zero? It is becoming increasingly embedded internationally and in Scotland, and is reflected in the Scottish Government Economic Strategy. Would it be useful to reflect this as an equivalent goal to net zero in this document?

The read-through to the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy is welcome, but there could also be read-through to the forthcoming nature targets in the Bill, so that it is clear that National Parks need to contribute towards those targets.

Agree about making this quite a quick process and not go around the houses.

There needs to be enough time to influence the nominations process to make it clear to local groups what is going to be required or expected of them.

3.4 Reflections from NatureScot

What probably comes out is the need to give communities greater emphasis in the vision-mission. How to involve them though through co-production and delivery etc. needs to be stronger.

We also need to tease out the vision versus mission elements and align with the SBS. We will check what language the SBS, and other relevant documents, use, to feature in the vision for National Parks.

The other big take-away is about the urgency of this, and not doing it in a way that takes forever. We need to think about that with Scottish Government colleagues and whether we produce a draft as part of our Advice to government - and if so, what further discussion we would need before we did that.

4. Next steps in the process in 2023

4.1 Scottish Government introduced paper 4-2 about the timetable and next steps

We are very grateful to the advisory group for their input into the work that will inform NatureScot's analysis report and advice to Ministers. That advice will do two things: it will inform the development of an evaluation framework that will have the selection criteria for new parks; and it will provide advice around any potential policy or legislative changes.

In the spring of next year, the draft evaluation framework will be published for consultation. That consultation step is very important to ensure that the evaluation framework is open and transparent, that it meets the aspirations of stakeholders for new National Parks, and to make sure that there is no unintended bias within the framework. We would welcome the advisory group's collective input and views on the framework ahead of that consultation.

Once the framework has been finalised, we will invite nominations from local areas and interest groups. We would expect that nomination process to be launched in late summer or early autumn. We would expect local areas to have about six months to develop and submit their proposals. We note what has been said at consultation events that it is important to have clear guidance, and to put support in place for local areas during the nominations process. We will take note of all the ideas and views that have come forward from consultees in terms of what sort of support would be helpful to them. We also note the points made earlier about communications and having a very clear process for that.

We would welcome views and input from the advisory group on the guidance and the support package that we are looking to put in place. We would like to come back to the group with these before they are launched.

Looking further ahead, our expectation is that an independent panel would be established to consider any nominations that come in, and to assess them against the framework. This panel would then provide advice to Ministers on the area or areas that are deemed most suitable to be taken forward for designation as new National Parks. It would then be for

ministers to approve an area or areas to be taken forward, and that is when the statutory designation process would commence, at some point in 2024.

We would also be consulting on the future policy and role of National Parks: what they should be delivering for Scotland and whether there should be any changes to their aims, vision, functions and powers. We would welcome input from the advisory group at that time. Our plan would be that the consultation on the evaluation framework would run in parallel, or perhaps be part of the same consultation, with any consultation on potential changes to the powers and functions of National Parks. We would look to make sure that any guidance and communications from the Minister and from government in general, would help any future areas wanting to put in a nomination to be very clear about the future direction.

If any legislative changes were proposed, these could be included in the Natural Environment Bill, if timings for that permit. We will come back with more clarity on that in the New Year.

We would really appreciate the advisory group considering the proposals that we have made in this paper for future involvement in the process and to highlight any other additional contributions that could be helpful.

4.2 Discussion

- Q Just an observation about the sequence of these different questions. It is quite difficult to develop an evaluation framework at the same time as thinking about those high level issues like the aims, powers and functions as well, at about the same time, looking at nominations. In particular, there is an issue around the potential need for legislative changes and how that is going to work.
- A Yes, there is a lot to look at, but there is a real opportunity to reflect on all the experience and good work that has happened in our current two Parks. There is also the chance to look to the future to see whether there are things that could help the Parks achieve their goals. The best thing we can do, when we consult both on the evaluation framework for new Parks and any possible changes to the way that Parks operate, is to do that in a very clear way.
- Q The concertina of the time scale is slightly worrying. The two questions on the evaluation framework and changes to legislation are actually good, but quite different questions that could be directed to two quite different audiences, although there is, of course, an overlap. Has there been sufficient stakeholder analysis done in terms of whom this consultation is being directed to? A stakeholder analysis is necessary because you want to make sure you have the right people in the room answering the right questions that are pertinent.

In addition, the current consultation has created momentum and positivity - so alongside your timeline there needs to be a communication plan. Even if there were not an active consultation, there should still be some communications about what is coming, for people to anticipate and be ready for that consultation.

Do you envisage that later consultations will follow a similar process with meetings and other activities, or be more passive and online?

- A Regarding sufficient stakeholder analysis, we welcome views on that. A communications plan is part of our planning - we see it as positive that the consultation work so far has created a good momentum. We should build on that and continue the elements that have worked well. We would be interested in your views of whether we will have a similar process going forward.

We envisage stakeholder analysis and more refinement as we get into the more specific questions. Reflecting on some of the messages we got from the online events, and that we are likely to get through the consultation responses, we probably need to look a bit harder at businesses in the Parks, the land management sector in its various guises, and the marine sector if that becomes relevant. We will be able to analyse responses to the consultation and highlight to Scottish Government and Ministers where we have not quite reached the parts that we would want to reach, and make recommendations around that.

There are things we could do better as we go through this. It is a good idea to have regular dialogue for the communication plan. Something may even be needed monthly during 2023 to help stakeholders keep track of what is going on. We appreciate it is only one of many things that are coming from Scottish Government, and we need to give some thought to that.

- Q There are places that are just at the start of thinking about nomination versus places that have produced reports and have lots of information. They should not be disadvantaged by that either, but some thought should be given as to how to support places that are at the beginning.
- A It may be reassuring that some of the biggest concerns are from the areas with long-standing campaigns. We need to find a way to engage with both long-standing campaigns and also the newcomers. That probably requires a slightly different set of things.

Final thoughts and next meeting

We are expecting a high response rate to the consultation, which is what we wanted, but is pretty challenging in terms of the timetable ahead.

There is a relatively short period to do the assessment and bring something back to the advisory group. The next meeting is on the 21st December. We will aim to get the papers out at the end of the week before. At that meeting, we want to do two things:

- we will say what we've done for the analysis, for you to scrutinise and challenge; and
- for the draft advice to Ministers, we will be highlighting what the key issues are, where there is consensus, where there is no consensus, and potentially some of the lines of thinking we might be developing.

Please e-mail us with any further thoughts on today's meeting papers, and any additional organisations that you think it would be useful for us to talk to.