**National Park Stakeholder Advisory Group – 5th meeting – 21 December 2022 – online**

**Draft note of meeting**

**Present**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Organisation** | **Name** | **Organisation** | **Name** |
| Cairngorms National Park Authority | Grant Moir | NatureScot | Heather Reid  Eileen Stuart  Pete Rawcliffe  Laura Campbell  Jennafer Rodgers  Ceara Webster |
| Disability Equality Scotland | James Davidson | Ramblers Scotland | Helen Todd |
| Europarc Federation | Carol Ritchie | Royal Society for the Protection of Birds | Isobel Mercer |
| Forestry and Land Scotland | John Mair | Scottish Campaign for National Parks / Association for Protection of Rural Scotland | Nikki Sinclair |
| Heads of Planning Scotland | Ian Aikman | Scottish Environment LINK | John Thomson |
| Highlands and Islands Enterprise | Neil Ross | Scottish Government | Jennifer Gibbons;  Nicholas Breslin |
| Historic Environment Scotland | Dara Parsons | Scottish Land and Estates | Stephen Young |
| Marine Conservation Society | Calum Duncan | Scottish Renewables | Mark Richardson |
| National Farmers Union of Scotland | Sarah Cowie | Trees for Life | Steve Micklewright |
|  |  | VisitScotland | Chris Taylor |

**Apologies** – organisations unable to send representatives to this meeting

Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority

South of Scotland Enterprise

COSLA (Convention on Scottish Local Authorities)

CEMVO (Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Sector Organisations)

YoungScot

Scottish Landscape Alliance

Social Inclusion Scotland

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7. **Welcome and introductory remarks**

The chair confirmed the meeting would again follow Chatham House rules but it would be recorded as a basis for the notes. In addition, this meeting’s papers are still confidential. The final versions will be published after NatureScot has sent the Advice to the Minister, but in the meantime they are not in the public domain.

1. **Notes of last meeting**

The draft note of the last meeting (No 4, 22nd November 2022) was circulated. It was noted that in section 3.2 the two current National Parks are listed the wrong way round. [*The meeting note has been corrected and the* [*confirmed version*](https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/2023-01/National%20Park%20Commission%20stakeholder%20advisory%20group%20-%20meeting%204%20-%20confirmed%20notes%20-%2022%20November%202022.pdf) *is on the NatureScot website*.]

1. **Views of Young People and People with Disabilities on National Parks (Paper 5-1)**

*Introduction*

This paper contains recommendations arising from the work we have done to engage these groups in developing our advice on National Parks. It is essential for us to include the perspectives of young people, disabled people and ethnic minorities, as the more views we have on this from these groups, the more accessible the space becomes for the future National Park/s when they are designated.

*Background*

A study of young people, conducted by Hickman and colleagues, has highlighted growing levels of ecological anxiety. It included around 10,000 young people across multiple countries of which the UK was one. The majority feel at least moderately to extremely worried about climate change, a fear that exists and is growing in young people. They also feel more a sense of betrayal than reassurance by governments.

This is relevant because if National Parks are going to be a vehicle to advance our ability to reach net zero, there is potential to reduce eco-anxiety in young people. Involving them in the process should help them get a sense of agency and they might see this as an area that can reduce the impacts of climate change and the sense of eco-anxiety. Involving them also repairs relationships between governments, government agencies and young people, and helps build a future that is hopefully less impactful on the climate. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12, is also relevant. This article specifically refers to children and young people, who will be affected in the future by decisions made by adults on their behalf, having the right to be heard.

According to research, the effects of climate change also disproportionately affect people with disabilities. At the same time, people with disabilities are often “on the fringe” of discussions and decision making on climate change and environment. Even when involved, they can be are systematically ignored, e.g. in relation to climate adaptation plans and policies. Disabled people might experience the effects of climate change more. Therefore, it is important for us to engage with disabled people in this decision-making.

CEMVO had planned an event on NatureScot’s behalf to engage with ethnic minority people/groups on the commission. Unfortunately, this did not happen due to scheduling conflicts and it was agreed that it would be better to undertake an engagement properly rather than rushed and without inadequate involvement.

It is an important to engage people from ethnic minority backgrounds as they generally have less access to green space in the UK. This includes the countryside, but also gardens and garden space. They are less likely to visit the outdoors, and there is a range of reasons for this: it could be cultural; it could be because they have a fear of experiencing racial discrimination when they go outdoors; and they might be less confident in their ability to actually go outside and engage with nature.

There is also a lack of diversity in the environment sector in Scotland, in this room for example. Therefore, this lack of voice means that they and their ideas are not heard in these kinds of strategic high-level decisions.

*Young people*

At a Young Scot engagement event held for us in late autumn, young people were asked two questions: What are the issues or challenges for young people in relation to National Parks; and what would make a successful National Park for young people?

By far the biggest issue was accessibility. As well as transport getting to the site, specific mention was made of accessibility for disabled people. Costs were noted in relation to the cost of designating a site and the cost of the equipment enabling young people to use it.

Other issues included having little influence on how National Parks were managed. For example, poor visitor management: if a space is overcrowded, it might make people less likely to want to visit. Vandalism would also be off-putting. Poor mental health could be a reason for not visiting, and/or a potential barrier that might prevent engaging with a site. There could be a lack of skills to actually engage with nature.

There was evidence of a lack of communication on our part, when the young people present ask what does being a National Park actually mean in Scotland, and does it make protecting nature easier or more difficult? We have a job to really make sure we are communicating this. This takes us back to more strategic questions about what we are doing this for; what are the aims of a National Park; and what are the actual benefits?

On the second question, about what a successful National Park for young people would be, accessibility was also the top priority. This was across a range of things such as the accessibility of the site and having equipment that makes the site accessible. The next most popular answer was around facilities, in relation to things like toilets but also information facilities, such as signage, and learning facilities for school trips.

Marine collaborations and marine National Parks were another big focus for this particular group of young people. They wanted a successful National Park to be in tune with marine targets and opportunities. This was also in relation to work: junior Ranger schemes, particularly the Loch Lomond and Trossachs scheme, were mentioned as inspiring to them. The opportunity to develop skills to engage with the outdoors was also mentioned, e.g. orientation and identification skills.

Some young people felt a National Park should prioritise biodiversity more, while others said it should be a balance between protecting wildlife, having access for people and providing economic support for the community through work. Another comment was around National Parks having a holistic view, in relation to contributing to the circular economy and waste management. They also felt a successful National Park would be engaging, with an increase in visitors, and that the policies would be enforced to deliver these things. It would also feel welcoming for young people.

*Disabled people*

Disability Equality Scotland provided a report for NatureScot. They do a weekly poll and in October the topic was on National Parks. The results are attached to paper 5-1. In answer to the question “do you support proposals to establish a new National Park in Scotland by 2026?” the majority said yes, but some responses said no.

The reasons they gave for their responses were in relation to the environment, economic potential, and health and well-being benefits. It was also around cost, which comes up from a variety of groups, but there are specific reasons why people with disabilities might feel this more acutely than the able-bodied. Research has found that disabled people, on average, faced an extra cost of £583 a month in 2019. This is called the disability price tag: it costs more to be in a disabled body than an able body.

In terms of costs for families with disabled children, the research says in the UK an additional annual amount equivalent to £4200 is needed for the families of a disabled child to have the same living standard as their matched families without a disabled child. When Scope did their research in 2019, they found that one in five disabled adults, and almost a quarter of families with disabled children, faced extra costs of up to £1000 per month. This is not a small number of people: about a fifth of Scottish people identify as being disabled. That is about a million people that will face these extra costs. Disabled people will feel the cost of living crisis much more acutely than people who are able-bodied. So we need to be able to communicate carefully how a National Park benefits people who are disabled.

The paper provides a summary of the key factors affecting access and inclusion of disabled people in National Parks raised by survey respondents. These relate to pathways, seating, buildings, toilet and transport. In relation to pathways, it is not just beneficial for disabled people to have flat and stable surfaces, but also people with prams or anyone who is unsteady on their feet. This is important because it helps people keep their independence: sometimes they cannot go to areas where they know there is no seating because that might put them in a wheelchair - and if that happens, any uneven services could prevent them from getting outdoors. On information and signage, there was an interesting range of language. Modes they wanted to be available included Braille, BSL audio descriptions, and Gaelic.

*Recommendations*

The paper makes a number of recommendations for further engagement and the planning and design of the new National Park. The key point remains that we need to continue to proactively engage with these groups throughout the process of establishing a National Park. This should be from now and, once it is designated, keeping that engagement going.

Future stages of National Park development will need to consider practically the aspects of accessibility and inclusion for disabled people related to pathways, seating buildings, toilets, transport and information and signage. We are also looking to create opportunities for young people to have influence over the way National Parks are managed. That could be youth boards or committees and prioritising accessibility of National Park sites in general.

*Questions and discussion*

Q) One thing is the question of options other than National Parks, particularly with the emphasis on accessibility. This is perhaps especially in relation to ethnic minorities, who tend to be very urban-based. Some of the statistics show that access to nearby open country seems to be particularly important. Indeed, in terms of familiarising people with the outdoors, having access to local space is arguably particularly important. What is the full range of options or mechanisms for managed countryside, if you want to call it that, which would be available to meet identified needs?

It is interesting to see the emphasis on marine, given the discussion about coastal and marine National Parks about 15 years ago. There was quite a lot of emphasis on access then. It highlights that the work done then is very relevant now.

Q) Echoing that point, this research is about National Parks but it is relevant to wider visitor management. The research should be actively disseminated to visitor managers and recreation groups across the country, rather than just putting on the website, because we can all learn a lot from it.

Q) Looking at the recommendations, it’s worth noting that the Cairngorms National Park has a youth board, volunteer Rangers, an access panel and an access forum. There is also an Equalities Forum, which as has taken forward quite a lot of those recommendations. There are also a lot of fully accessible paths and leaflets. A new National Park would need to set these things up. There is always more to be done, and that is budget-related in terms of how quickly you can do things, but a lot of what people are requesting is already being done.

Q) There seems to be an urban perspective in many of the responses. There is a sense that people were almost looking to slightly urbanise the natural qualities a National Park might have: a bit of a dilemma.

With the desire for information, there must be something clever we could do about interpreting National Parks, existing and future, through digital means. Apps could allow people, in situ, to get interpretation; e.g. if you want to know more about this, look at number x, and so on. This would reduce pressure on Parks to have lots of physical interpretation.

To emphasise the points around accessibility in the widest possible sense. It is not just physical access but other aspects including information, accessible formats and strong public transport links. But there also has to be proactive engagement directly with disabled people from the earliest possible stage. There may already be structures in place but disabled people feel they are still not being engaged.

Q) To emphasise the points around accessibility in the widest possible sense - it is not just physical access but other aspects including information, accessible formats and strong public transport links; there also has to be proactive engagement directly with disabled people from the earliest possible stage. There may already be structures in place but disabled people feel they are still not being engaged.

Proactive engagement with access panels and DPOs across Scotland is important. There is a long list of other organisations that could be engaged at the very earliest possible stage: the likes of Sight Scotland, Capability Scotland, Inclusion Scotland, and the Health and Social Care Alliance. DPOs’ members’ consensus is that they are still being excluded. That is why it is so important for that engagement to take place. It is important to remember that some people do not have access to digital devices; some disabled people do not have money to buy a smartphone. It is important to have physical formats for information as well.

Q) If we think National Parks are special, and most of the population lives in urban environments, they should be equally accessible to all sectors of the population. If we think Parks are important, we want to highlight, promote and showcase them. We need to ensure there are no barriers to any sectors within our society. These things are relevant to National Parks specifically, as well as more general points.

Q) Regarding costs, was the issue of the high cost flagged-up because the people in the survey did not really see the benefits to them of the National Parks? If we addressed some of these barriers and they had more value for people who might otherwise be excluded, would that change people's perspective?

*NatureScot reflections*

We acknowledge what has been said about disabled people still feeling excluded. We also see this with young people and ethnic minorities too.

Regarding increasing diversity, organisations such as Black Scottish Adventurers and Boots & Beards work with ethnic minority communities to get them into the outdoors. They do not just do expeditions in National Parks, they do them in local countryside because that is the easiest place to get people from ethnic minority backgrounds to. Collaborations with groups like that would be great because they already have connections with their communities. Bonnie Boots do it in a faith sensitive way for Muslim people, so they work around prayer schedules. Black Scottish Adventurers helps get new arrivals from African and Caribbean countries out into the countryside. We could bring those groups into these discussions as a way to get them involved in National Parks - they already do some trips to Loch Lomond.

While current Parks are doing things already, the recommendations are looking forward to new National Parks where these things will not be set up. The current Parks are well-placed to provide knowledge about what works and what does not work, which is always welcome.

Regarding costs and benefits, the poll by Disability Equality Scotland was standalone rather than part of a dialogue. Benefits need to be addressed more broadly, e.g. why this is good for our aims, that we are looking to achieve and why this is beneficial for specific groups with protected characteristics. This does not ameliorate the real disadvantages they might have because of these costs, but it feeds into the need for communications to be more open, articulate and focussed.

We tried to build some of this learning into the vision and mission paper, No. 5-4, so we can come back to these points later in the meeting. For information, NatureScot recently completed a public opinion survey. We included a National Park question and the figures were similar: 85% of the population as a whole are strongly supportive of new National Parks: that is an interesting message given the challenges that have just been discussed.

**4. Description of the approach to the survey analysis (Paper 5-2)**

*Introduction*

The eight-week consultation generated a good range of respondents, covering almost all categories, and t is helpful to get that range of responses to this quite long, technical survey.

A group of ten staff started the analysis as soon as the survey closed. All the questions were open text rather than tick-box, so even with a framework to deal with the responses, the analysts had to use their judgement.

We have still to complete the analysis, and do quality assurance through sampling etc. Therefore, the results that we will look at later in the meeting are preliminary and incomplete.

The report we produce from this will cover the range of views expressed; the views coming through as being the strongest held, but also an indication about the consensus around those views. We would be grateful at this stage for any comments and suggestions on this.

*Questions and Discussion*

Q) Congratulations on what seems to be a systematic, methodical, thoughtful exercise.

Q) Echoing the point to congratulate NatureScot on an excellent piece of work. It was a very complex undertaking and your analysis has come out well. One disappointment was the lack of response from the academic world: might there be some explanations for that? Was it just a lack of contact and might there be anything to do in terms of follow-up to try and get some of the research issues that might revolve around the designation of National Parks?

*NatureScot reflections*

This is a good point, given the Europarc conference in October highlighted the closeness between academic institutions and protected areas across the continent. There should be an opportunity to replicate a little bit more of that here. There was one academic who attended one of the online events.

**5. Survey Analysis – First cut (Paper 5-3)**

*Introduction*

This is still work in progress. We have still to do some editing and quality assurance as we go through this process. We are interested in views on whether this style of presentation is useful, or whether alternative approaches could be used. We intend to publish the final version of this analysis alongside our advice.

As the paper contains about 80 pages of summary tables, we have attempted to produce a summary of summaries. The tables systematically have been rated as red, amber or green. Green shows the areas where there is the strongest consensus. There could be some divergence of views and some detail to work through, but generally, the direction of travel was clear. Orange is an intermediate category where there is generally consensus, but also several comments and some questions. We will need to present those more systematically in the final advice. The areas where there is least consensus, or the strongest views emerging, are shown red. Paper 5-4 goes into the detail of those.

Starting with the green category of strongest consensus: this included key elements of leadership and the vision and mission statement. There was an interesting range of views about future potential as well as current value, strong support for revising duties on public bodies, and better use of existing powers. Of key elements of the selection process, five of the six selection criteria were strongly supported

Going onto the orange category, many comments were generated, but no strong challenges to what was in the consultation paper. On question 10, consideration of alternative options for National Park aims, not many alternatives were suggested, but we need to look at those carefully. On the selection criteria, the added value of a National Park generated a range of views, some polarised. This comes back to the overarching purpose issue, because people were picking-up on what do is meant by ‘added-value’ - in respect to nature recovery, Just Transition and net zero, but also in relation to added-value for the other aims, and the balance between those. In responses to question 26, the actual selection criteria were supported. Again, what did they meant in practice, and how much detail, and how they are quantified or not, raised a range of views and many detailed comments.

Question 38 on “Other issues” is a bit of a blanket category. One of the issues raised is about funding given the cost of living crisis etc. None of the issues that came up in the responses to this was a show-stopper though – we will just report on those as we as we prepare our advice.

The red category contains a small number, but critical for the areas where there is least consensus or strongest concerns being raised. Stakeholder Advisory Group members are unlikely to be surprised by any of this, because they have been themes of previous meetings. There was strong support for an overarching purpose for National Parks, along the lines of what was in the consultation paper about nature recovery and a just transition to net zero; but quite a lot of questions about what it meant in practice and how it worked with the other four aims. There was also an underlying theme about what were the “nature/ climate” and “people” outcomes we want from National Parks, and the balance between the two. There was quite a lot of support for refreshing the aims to make them more modern, but also some concerns that that was going to be complicated. In addition, some concerns that we would under value or throw-out some of the aims while we were doing that.

There is also the big question about how we put that together in the legislative package, with quite a range of views on the options expressed, with no clear consensus.

There were quite a lot of comments about changes to existing powers and functions, and some interesting commentary about the ability for Parks to designate areas as part of a Park Plan – “nature recovery zones”. Interestingly, there was no discussion about specific powers in relation to climate change, but a range of comments was made across the five areas that we had suggested in the consultation paper.

Finally, there is some thinking to be done about proposals for new powers and functions. Again, there was quite a lot of commentary, some of it polarised, about what any new powers and functions should be. We are picking up the concerns of the land management community in particular around the control of the freedoms they would have in a National Park compared with other areas. Paper 5-4 picks these up in a bit more detail, and also some discussion from the other elements of the consultation, particularly the consultation events, but also the SAG meetings.

*Questions and Discussion*

Q) Picking up on one point because it is fundamental: if we are going to tackle the challenges of nature recovery and just transition we are going to have to look again at the relationship between public and private interest in the use of land. Linking that too strongly with National Parks could actually be damaging to the National Park cause. If people think that their rights will be limited if they are in a National Park then that is really problematic. The real message, if we are going to deal with climate change and the biodiversity crisis, is that we are going to have to look at limiting people's rights to the use of land more widely.

*NatureScot response* That has come through as a bit of a theme, which we have also been aware of in terms of all the other work around land use, 30 by 30 and the other legislation that is coming in the next couple of years.

**6. Key Issues emerging from the consultation (Paper 5-4)**

This is not NatureScot's advice at the moment, but this is your chance to influence what it may be further if you wish. The paper takes the various elements of the consultation, i.e. the survey results, the consultation events, the discussions at Stakeholder Advisory Group, and the various events including meetings and the cultural heritage sector event we held with BEFS with support from Historic Environment Scotland.

Headlines include the clear support for new National Parks. Perhaps this is inferred, as we did not ask that specific question, but there is generally a lot of interest in exploring the idea of new National Parks. If we get the process right in 2023, a selection of nominations could come forward - maybe 5, maybe up to 10, which is all very positive.

There are a few exceptions. The National Farmers Union of Scotland (NFUS) undertook a members’ poll that was a useful approach to the consultation. NFUS members are sceptical if not opposed to new National Parks; but if they do happen, they want to be fully involved in the discussions about their designation, and engaged in their management. We also got a hint of that from the marine interests and particularly the fishing interests who engaged.

The paper summarises a number of key issues that will form the core of the difficult bits of our advice, and sets out a direction of travel for them. The paper also proposes key elements of a vision and mission statement. This is still work in progress and we are really interested in comments on it.

*Purpose, Aims and Powers*

There is obviously a range of options here, set out in the paper. The key question for NatureScot is whether we make a recommendation for any one particular option.

The strongest thing NatureScot will be saying at this stage is probably around the importance of that vision and mission statement and getting it into the process as soon as possible, alongside the nomination process. The two strongest messages that have come out is the uncertainty about what changes are being considered and how does that affect how new National Parks will work; and the other is about the selection process, which we will come to later.

It is really important that we have an overarching vision and mission. Do we put it in the overarching purpose for National Parks? Clearly we do. Do we put it in the legislation? We probably do. Do we require changes to the aims because of that? We probably do. That is the direction of travel we will be exploring in our advice.

One of the things that has become clearer from the consultation responses is slight confusion between a purpose for National Parks and the purpose of the National Park authority. We tried to separate that in the vision and mission, but it is one of the areas we're going to have to focus on when deciding which route is best to recommend.

*Questions and Discussion*

Q) This relates more to your slide. It is that we should not see cultural heritage as a policy relationship. Cultural heritage is in the legislation etc.as it stands. It is part of the basis of National Parks in Scotland and not just a policy relationship but more fundamental.

*NatureScot response:* That is a fair comment. The way we have packaged it, and the way the paper evolved, it has crept into a policy area section. There is a policy dimension to it, but we certainly accept your point that it is fundamental to the purpose and aims. The point of a vision mission statement is not to refine the aims at the moment, but to try and set the outcomes. If we could agree on the outcomes, we will make much better progress towards revising the aims.

Q) One thing, possibly linked to the aims, is the unhelpful, I think, linking together of natural and cultural heritage. There needs to be something very clear about nature and climate, and also cultural heritage. But if we put them both together it gets confused as to what that means. Where does that best sit within a revised set of language around the aims, and the overarching purpose of the National Parks and the purpose of the Park Authority - as you've written them with the existing aims? The wording around nature-positive and transformative nature restoration need to be effective and clear.

*NatureScot response:* We are trying to work out the best place for nature and culture within our Advice, and that set of wording around aims would make a lot of difference and would help with the purpose.

Q) Our main concern is that cultural heritage keeps getting pushed to the side. What we can address in the wording might be the relationship between the two, and I think that is what is coming across. I don't know if we have a strong feeling about the putting together or the pulling apart, but we probably do have a strong feeling about the identification of the relationship between the two, and the fact that they are inextricably linked in real life.

Q) The “vision mission” still needs to be worked on: it is quite jargon-y, technical and corporate. All the right components are there, and it is right to differentiate between the different levels. We need consistency in terminology. It is somewhere between a vision and a mission: is a mission even required, because the mission is described in the aims? But the need for a clear vision came out in some aspects of the consultation. It is a question of aligning the purpose of the vision, where we want to describe National Parks as part of a delivery mechanism as well as an entity in their own right. Consider further differentiation of the different levels of vision and mission - and learning from experience from Europe where there are good examples.

Q) It is perhaps not surprising to see where some of the areas of least consensus. What is positive here is the direction of travel; we support this core focus on the nature recovery elements. It was interesting that there was strong consensus on the elements for leadership even though there was not consensus on that leadership role for nature recovery.

These contradictory aspects highlight the importance of getting that vision and mission statement right, and out there as soon as possible. It is a good start but perhaps currently has too much jargon. It is important the vision and mission statement is concise and not too technical. There could be additional guidance alongside this, which would set out more detail around roles and responsibilities or the powers and functions, and interpretation about that purpose, the aims, and how they relate to one another.

The aims should be seen as mutually supportive. With the overarching purpose of nature recovery, communication within and outside the National Parks needs to be sufficient about the need for investment in the just transition elements - and also addressing some of the other issues within the parks around housing and so on. The recommendation around a communications plan for 2023 is important as well.

Q) There is, unsurprisingly, a tension between the idea that National Parks are protected landscapes with a high level of human influence, and the process we are striving towards, which is nature restoration and, arguably, re-wilding. We need to be clearer, and communicate what we want National Parks to protect and what we want to restore. The overarching purpose you have identified is for that to apply to all agencies in the National Park, and it needs to go beyond ‘have regard to’.

A limited amount of the Cairngorms National Park is farmed in-bye land, with a wider area of extensive grazing within the Park. However it is not the dominant land use. Some of the farming in the Park is following ‘regenerative’ principles. As an agenda for new National Parks, how does it attract that sort of change within that sector, which needs to change and become more progressive? There are signs that the National Park designation attracts owners that want to be more transformative. So it's setting an agenda and getting people to coalesce around that agenda - but the people already there might feel this is all being imposed upon them.

*NatureScot reflections -*

There has been a focus on the new direction for nature policy in Scotland, and now globally with the COP biodiversity agreement this week. But the world of cultural heritage has changed significantly since the National Parks Act was drafted. This needs to be reflected in future discussions. Even the term ‘cultural heritage’ may be wrong in this context.

The aims are mutually reinforcing, but there is something fundamental about how the vision and mission is conveyed. As well as the pursuit of those aims in a mutually supportive way.

We have not discussed Section 9(6) (the so-called ‘Sandford Principle’). This should be the ‘backstop’ option rather than the bulk of work in National Parks.

Despite its simple framework, unpicking of the legislation could be quite complex. We would need to work out the key changes required. Perhaps the main thing for us in our advice is not to be too prescriptive, but rather to set the direction, as the government will want to consult on those proposals in due course. Being clear on the outcomes we want will be important.

*Questions and Discussion*

Q) Linking natural and cultural is pretty fundamental with the nature of the land in Scotland, which bears millennia of human imprint - and we may want to change that imprint. But what we are going to achieve is something will still be a lived-in and managed landscape. While expressing that relationship as natural and cultural heritage may not be the best way of doing it, it is an absolutely fundamental point that we are looking for a more harmonious relationship between people and the rest of nature, and that's what that's what National Parks should be trying to demonstrate. There will be a big element of nature recovery in that, without question, possibly with nature recovery zones. But what we are really looking for, particularly to demonstrate to the country as a whole what a greener future means, are better relationships between people and nature. This has to respect the human values that are enshrined in our landscapes as well as the natural values. We want to build on that for the future. Tinkering too much with the existing legislation could set us backwards when we should be trying to go forwards.

Q) Having them both so people and nature thriving together - absolutely. However, putting natural and cultural heritage together, with the same weighting [means] cultural heritage is used to argue for no change, about remaining in aspic: my tradition should be kept. Yet we also want to see nature restoration and climate adaptation and so on. If you have them both together you are setting up a fight within one aim. Culture should be in there, but linking those strongly together means that there is no clarity. One person's cultural landscape is another person's degraded moorland. There is a need to unpack that because at the moment it makes it difficult to deliver some things within National Parks.

Q) Around the vision, there was a concern that a single vision for all of Scotland's National Parks and areas would not reflect the diversity and the different priorities these areas may have. It is going to be difficult to nail that down and be all things to all people. But we need to respect and reflect different priorities.

From the farming perspective, something that we have seen throughout the consultation process and the biodiversity strategy as well, is that the aims are not necessarily clear to people who are going to be affected by them. That is a real concern - the uncertainty, the fear that something is going to be imposed on them that is going to change their way of life.

Simplifying and removing jargon from the aims will help to communicate these to a wider audience and help bring people on-board. There could be different language used for policy makers to that for and a wider audience of famers, landowners and others in the Park.

Q) Looking at the responses for the purposes and aims, it seems that the positive responses are from potential visitors and concerns are raised from people who are using and managing the land. What the constraints might look like, when they are trying to make a living – and these businesses support a huge part of the rural economy. We need to figure out how we work together to achieve those aims and ensure everyone is part of the conversation.

*NatureScot reflections -*  
This rich commentary and the cultural heritage discussion in particular has been useful. The issue may be about the operation of section 9(6) rather than the aim itself. There is potential that section 9(6) could be changed, rather than the aim, but this will have to be looked into.

We take the language issue seriously. The advice is currently written in policy terms, so it's not trying to be simple or straightforward. What would be helpful, would be some more specific comments on the outcomes in the vision and mission statement, and whether those are clear and comprehensive enough in policy terms. Obviously, the time-scale for that is now quite short.

When we revised the vision and mission it considered how it might work in practice. The last section, on how parks would work to deliver, is now quite important in terms of how the aims come together and the role of public bodies and ministers in making that happen. What has also come out clearly from the consultation, unsurprisingly because that is how national current National Parks are operating, is about the role of the parks, communities and businesses in the delivery of a park plan.

Q) Given what we are asking the park authorities to do, can we figure out a mechanism by which significant landowners can be more proactively encouraged to engage? We need to bring people willingly to that co-ordinating role the parks can provide.

Q) Engagement is important and needs to be early to be meaningful. This will ensure people feel things are being done with them rather than to them.

*Selection process* -  
Clearly, a lot of concern is being expressed about the tight time-scale for new National Parks. There is also a raft of other interrelated legislation and policy developments at the same time. Scottish Government colleagues are well aware of that, and are gearing up to a valiant effort in 2023, but it will need to be resourced, and a range of bodies around this table will need to play a role in supporting that too.

It is also important in relation to the nomination phase. We have had discussions with potential areas and local authorities asking what happens when. This needs fed into the recommendations around communications. It also requires a considerable planning effort around sequencing and time-scales. Given the online discussions in particular, we need to rethink the nomination process and make it much simpler. There has already been a discussion about what we want a new National Park to do. Asking nominees a simple question around that is going to be important. We would leave the technical aspects such as outstanding national value, powers and governance, to the reporting phase.

There was also interest in how the nomination process can be supported. We will have to think quite creatively around that. There were also questions around other designations, e.g. a biosphere reserve could do this if it was properly funded. There is a need to be clearer around National Parks versus other designations. The work going on in Scottish Government around 30 by 30 will shed some light on that in due course. We need to provide some advice in those areas.

*Questions and Discussion*

Q) We want something bold and different now for the National Parks, which is coming out quite strongly. There is the drive of the minister to get this through, and certain legislative opportunities coming up as well. Let’s not be put off by the time-scale. Secondly, around the selection criteria, it needs to be made really clear to the people who are going to nominate areas what the purpose of a new National Park is. That might help those driving nominations to think carefully if it is what they really want. If they are working on a traditional National Park model, people might nominate for something that they might not end up supporting in the future. Communications need to be really clear.

*NatureScot response.* Yes, we need to be as upfront as possible, as early as we can in 2023 before the nomination process kicks off. There are people asking us if they have missed the boat, and has it all been decided? We are having to tell them to wait until the second-half of 2023. But it is really important that we get that communication right from now.

Q) There was a suggestion there might be a public consultation on some of these proposals, next spring or summer. Is that still the plan ahead of the Natural Environment Bill?

*NatureScot and SG response*

The time-scale is obviously very challenging and ambitious, but we take on-board the need to make sure there are very clear communications throughout the process. That includes if there were to be any proposed changes to the aims, powers and functions of National Parks: there would be a consultation around that and a very clear communications plan around that. We will look at the views and advice around things like vision and mission statement and how that could be used as part of the communication to any areas that want to bid.

If any changes are proposed, there would be a public consultation around that. Obviously, it would depend on the final advice, and whether we are talking about anything that would be statutory or not. Our current thinking is that we would consult on the selection criteria, the evaluation framework for new parks, and any proposed changes to the way that existing and new parks function. That would take place as a sort of joint package, but it is not set in stone. We need to reflect on that when we get NatureScot's advice. But nothing will happen without a public consultation which will obviously be another opportunity to communicate.

*Policy relationships*

Moving on to policy relationships, we have touched on land and forestry management. In the advice we suggest the importance of being able to influence and engage farming and forestry; we talk about restorative farming and restorative forestry; we also talked about cultural heritage.

Renewables came out quite strongly from the consultation, mainly from renewable interests expressing concern about National Parks in the way that NPF4 is phrased, blocking potential wind farm developments in Scotland, and the threat that could pose to meeting our renewable energy targets for climate change. That is one element of it. There is also an element from discussions with potential areas: can my area include a wind farm, given the current policy, and what about proposals that are currently featuring in the area? Do they count against my nomination or not? And what about the flurry of proposals that are likely to come forward since then NPF4 has been confirmed? There is something quite fundamental in here about how renewables or energy policy and National Parks sit. We are trying to find a way forward on that, and in the paper we say that there is space for both things and they might not be mutually exclusive. But it needs to be clear, and that clarity is probably needed before the process of designation is complete, and preferably before the nomination process. That is quite a tall order.

The other issue is around marine management. Quite a few places are thinking about nominating, and are asking if they can include marine and coastal areas and what would that mean in practice? From fishing interests in particular, we have been asked what would National Parks bring apart from more trouble for us, given we are already in trouble because of highly protected marine areas coming, as well as greater management of marine protected areas. They talk about a spatial squeeze, which is similar to the renewables issue.

We have not had much discussion with the Stakeholder Advisory Group around this. But there is a risk that areas will not come forward because it’s not clear what it might mean. We need to be clearer about the coastal and marine component and the relationship of existing designations for nominations to think about. Those are two big issues late in the day.

*Questions and discussion*

Q) For marine and coastal, and because the stakeholders using that space launch from land, there are other tools as has been alluded to. In response what is now an ocean emergency, we have focused on getting improved protection for priority features outside Marine Protected Areas and nature-friendly fishing.

The concept of course, for marine National Parks goes back to 2007. Back then, people were asking the same questions. The range of stakeholders was saying we want to achieve National Parks in terms of true sustainable development according to Brundtland principles and so on. Other stakeholder were saying we can do both.

There would be a strong case for a coastal and marine National Park. A National Park would provide something, for whatever part of Scotland might be most suitable for it, in terms of allowing coherent ecosystem-based planning and delivery, almost like quasi regional marine planning. There needs to be discussion about what it actually means, because if you have a suite of National Parks in Scotland, given the world-class coastal and marine we have, it would be an obvious omission if that suite did not include a coastal and marine one.

Q) On the renewables point, National Scenic Areas tend to be on the west of Scotland and rather rugged in character. It would discount a lot of parts of Scotland from putting forward nominated areas. It seems to set a limit on what kind of landscapes we think are worthy of National Parks from the start.

There is a ban on large-scale onshore wind within National Parks now, and we are talking about a new designation on an area which is not a National Park at the moment, so there may be large-scale wind farms within the new National Park. We would not dismantle any existing wind farm, but would new renewables onshore and indeed offshore be granted? Many people would quite welcome a planned approach from the Scottish Government on onshore wind development: there is a sort-of plan on where they would go in the marine environment, but not onshore.

Q) On the renewables part of this, would small-scale renewables be allowed in a National Park? That contributes to the sense of contradictory policy aims, where people are asked to transition to net zero, but a way in which they can do so would not be permitted if they were in a National Park. This leads to the general sense of contradictory policies and also a sense that National Parks are perhaps rooted in stasis and preservation rather than development and moving forward. Those issues have to be addressed.

Q) This is not necessarily about marine or renewables, but when considering National Parks, will it align with the national strategy for economic transformation? For the greener part of those aspirations and environment strategies such as climate change and biodiversity strategies, National Parks are clearly a delivery mechanism. Ensuring that clear alignment is necessary. There are also sectoral areas such as the food and drink strategy. There are important industries or sectors within National Parks, and where there is already a framework or strategic outlook for that sector it needs to be referenced, to make sure there is an alignment of policies.

One that has not particularly been highlighted is tourism, and sustainable tourism in particular. This is a very significant sector, particularly for any sort of visitor management within the National Parks. We need to make sure there is cross-referencing, and showing the value and benefits of National Parks as part of the delivery of these other aspects, as well as aligning to the larger national strategy for economic transformation.

Q) On the issues raised around renewables, it can be quite a delicate subject. We want a new National Park, but we also need renewable energy at a time of cost-of-living and energy crises. This is a difficult topic and a tough one to manage, decipher and deliver consensus on. In terms of some of the points around policy, the national planning framework’s overarching principle is that climate change and the energy crises should be guiding all planning decisions in Scotland. Also published in the last two hours or so is the onshore wind policy statement by the Scottish Government. This perhaps answers some of the policy directions and questions that have been raised. There are also the various environmental bills and other things coming forward in the new year; renewables can work in tandem with these, though it is not an easy challenge and you will never please all the people all of the time.

*NatureScot response*

These points are well made. On the economic strategy and tourism in particular, we are focusing on the issues where we lack a clear consensus or there are polarised views. We will have to build a way forward into our advice.

I should also perhaps have referred earlier in discussion of paper 5-1 to the Glover proposals. That is the review of protected landscapes in England which – among a range of issues – talk about the need for Parks to do more to engage all people, and in an equitable way. The draft advice paper contains some recommendations both in terms of how that might be done, but also in terms of a process of engagement. We also need to see this reflected, and we have built some reference to that in the vision and the outcomes for 2030 and 2045.

One issue where there is quite strong consensus and support is the need for on-going engagement and consultation. This is definitely something we need to work hard at. Even in the fallow months, when nothing is going on at least visibly, the nomination process will require almost constant dialogue over the next year with groups who want to come forward with nominations. They still have many questions.

Scottish Government will lead on the recommendations for the draft vision and mission statement and the communication plan for the National Park work. In terms of the raft of Bute House Agreement proposals which would come forward next year, and on which there will be a lot of consultation, we need to be as clear and coordinated around communicating all that as possible. These two issues are key so we have highlighted them in this paper.

If you could look at the vision and mission statement in Annex B and note if there two or three things which would improve it from your perspective, that would be really helpful.

Q) Regarding the presentation of the survey information (paper 5-3), it could be a much more interactive document, where you can move and reference the material that you want to reference next to your summary. The information is useful but it should not be presented outside this group in its current format.

**Chair’s closing remarks**

I would like to thank everybody who has helped with this meeting and with consulting members and helping us with the consultation events. The advice will be much stronger because of all of that. Thank you to everybody.