**National Parks Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting - 22 November 2022**

**Designation of new National Parks in Scotland – Update from Scottish Government**

**Aim of Paper**

1. This paper sets out the programme of work for 2023 that will be led by the Scottish Government to prepare for the designation of at least one new National Park in Scotland by 2026. It also highlights key moments where we would welcome input from the Stakeholder Advisory Group.

**Future of National Parks in Scotland – NatureScot advice**

2. NatureScot has been commissioned to provide advice to Scottish Ministers on what National Parks are expected to deliver for Scotland and on the development of an evaluation framework and nomination process in order to identify the area(s) to be designated as new National Park(s) during the lifetime of the current Parliament.

3. NatureScot’s advice will draw upon the views and contributions of the Stakeholder Advisory Group, as well as the ideas and views expressed through the online public consultations, the stakeholder engagement events and meetings, bespoke surveys and relevant experience from the existing National Parks in Scotland, the UK, Europe and internationally.

**Next steps**

4. The next steps are as follows:

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| Milestone | Timescale (indicative) |
| **Development of Evaluation Framework** and **consideration of any legislative changes to aims, powers and functions of National Parks** (including public consultation) | Winter 2022 – Summer 2023 |
| **Nominations and Assessment** of proposals for New National Park(s) | Summer 2023 – Winter 2023/Spring 2024 |
| **Reporter Investigation** (including public consultation on proposals for new National Park(s) and advice to Minister) | Spring 2024 – Winter 2024/Spring 2025 |
| **Designation Order(s)** (including public consultation, parliamentary scrutiny and order coming into effect to designate the new National Park(s)) | Winter 2024/Spring 2025 – Spring 2026 |

5. NatureScot’s analysis report and advice for Ministers is expected by the end of January 2023. This advice will inform the development of an Evaluation Framework which will help the Scottish Government to evaluate nominations fairly and transparently in order to identify the next area or areas to take forward for designation as National Parks. The advice will also help the Scottish Government to understand how existing and new National Parks can best be supported in their work to do more for nature, for climate action, for visitor management and for the communities that live and work within National Parks.

**New National Park(s)**

6. The Evaluation Framework will be published in draft for consultation in Spring 2023. This further period of consultation is important to ensure that the draft Evaluation Framework is open and transparent, that it meets the aspirations of stakeholders for new National Parks and that there is no unintended bias that might lead to the favouring of one area over another. **We would welcome the Stakeholder Advisory Group’s collective input and views on the Evaluation Framework ahead of this next period of consultation**.

7. Once the Evaluation Framework has been finalised, the Scottish Government will invite nominations from communities, local authorities or interest groups. We would expect the nomination process to be launched in the late summer/early Autumn of 2023.

8. We would expect local areas to have around 6 months to develop and submit their proposals. The Scottish Government will ensure there is clear guidance provided around the nominations process as well as support for local areas looking to put forward a nomination. **We would welcome the Stakeholder Advisory Group’s collective input and views on the guidance and support that will be provided for local areas wishing to submit a proposal.**

9. It is our intention that an independent panel will be established to consider nominations and assess them against the criteria in the Evaluation Framework. This panel would then provide advice to Ministers on the area or areas that are most suitable to be taken forward for designation as National Park(s). It will then be for Scottish Ministers to approve the area or areas to be taken forward to the statutory designation process which would commence in 2024.

**Roles and functions of National Parks in Scotland**

10. The advice from NatureScot will also shape future policy on the role of National Parks and what they should deliver for Scotland. Where applicable, any changes to National Parks’ aims and functions would be consulted upon next year. **We would welcome input from the Stakeholder Advisory Group at that time.** If legislative changes are required, these could be included in the Natural Environment Bill, if timings permit.

**Action**

11. Stakeholder Advisory Group members are asked to consider the proposals in the paper and highlight any additional contributions that could be helpful.

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