

# Title: Protected Areas Committee Annual Report 2022/2023

**Date: 22 June 2023**

| **Purpose:** | Decision |
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| **How does this link with our corporate priorities of improving biodiversity or delivering nature-based solutions to climate change:** | The work of the Protected Areas Committee (PAC) is relevant to both improving biodiversity and delivering nature-based solutions to climate change. |
| **Summary:** | This paper presents a summary of PAC activities from April 2022 to March 2023.  The PAC met three times during this period:  3 October 2022 - Closed Session  10 February 2023 – Open and Closed Session  31 March 2023 – Closed Session  In addition the PAC met twice in January, along with additional Board members, to sign off NatureScot’s advice to Scottish Government on National Parks. |
| **Recommendations:** | Board are asked to endorse the contents of the paper reflecting the work undertaken by the PAC during the past year. |
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| **Sponsor:** | David Johnstone |

## Purpose

1. This paper has been prepared to update the Board on the activity of the PAC since the last annual report. This update covers the period from April 2022 to March 2023. The previous Annual Report was submitted to the Board in May 2022.
2. Over the past twelve months the PAC has focussed on:
   1. Protected Areas Review and 30x30 Framework
   2. HMPAs
   3. Red Rocks and Longay MPA
   4. Caithness & Sutherland Peatlands - extensions to protected areas

## New Committee Members

1. The PAC membership was revised following the October meeting, due to new Board members starting. David Johnstone took on chairing the Committee. Aoife Martin and Nikki Yoxall continued on the Committee. Pete Higgins stepped down and Dr Jill Robbie and Prof Jaboury Ghazoul joined the Committee.

## Protected Areas Review and 30x30 Framework

1. NatureScot have been commissioned by Scottish Government to deliver Nature Networks and 30x30 programmes. These frameworks are being developed through a co-design process and will be consulted on in summer June 2023.
2. The PAC considered the work on the development of the 30x30 Framework and how this contributed to delivering the recommendations from the Protected Areas Review. The work on 30x30, Nature Networks, Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, Ecosystem Health, CAP reform and Feature Transitions is helping us make progress on the recommendations.
3. The PAC considered how this work intersected with a range of other work underway including Highly Protected Marine Areas; Scottish Biodiversity Strategy; legislative reform (the natural environment bill and agriculture bill); CAP reform; strategic deer work; National Parks commission; green finance; and organisational development.
4. The PAC reviewed the draft Framework document developed by staff. The Committee were very supportive of the principles in the paper and agreed that it was taking us in the right direction to address the nature and climate crisis. They agreed to sign off the draft on behalf of the Board.
5. They noted a number of areas where the PAC would welcome further discussion in the future as this work develops. The committee offered their help in the next stages of the development of this work, both in their specific areas of expertise and with oversight of the whole policy area for NatureScot.

## HMPAs

1. The PAC were briefed on current work on HPMAs. The HPMA guidance drawn up by the marine team reflects IUCN categories and EU guidance. These have been signed off by NatureScot and JNCC and submitted to Marine Scotland, who are leading work on HPMAs on behalf of the Scottish Government.
2. At the time of the time of the meeting (Oct 22) it was anticipated that the site selection process would conclude in September 2024 with site designation taking place in 2025-2026. The role for the committee was noted as being to sign off formal advice on HPMAs in nearshore waters in autumn 2024 and flag up key issues to consider throughout the process.
3. The committee discussed potential issues that need to be considered during this process.

## Red Rocks and Longay Possible MPA

1. The Committee were given an update on the consultation on the possible MPA which had had a largely positive response. Following the consultation Scottish Government confirmed that the permanent management measures for the site came into force on 9 February 2023.

## Caithness & Sutherland Peatlands - extensions to protected areas

1. The PAC considered the proposed notification of extension to ten peatland SSSIs in Caithness and Sutherland. These sites also underpin the Caithness and Sutherland SAC, SPA and Ramsar sites. NatureScot’s role is to make a decision on the notification of the extension of the SSSIs. We then also advise Scottish Government on the extension to the European sites.
2. The extensions are being proposed to include ground that has been restored through a LIFE project. A condition of funding was that we should consider extension of sites in the future to take in areas that had been restored.
3. The PAC agreed to confirm the notification of the eight sites where no objections have been received. We have received an objection to the extension of two of the sites. The PAC agreed to send a Committee representative to visit the site and asked staff to provide recent photographs of the proposed extension areas. The Chair of the PAC met with staff and a representative of the land owner on site at the end of March to view the proposed extensions. A further meeting to consider the representation from the land owner and make a decision on the notification is due to take place in May.