

## **Section 7: Special initiatives**

This section of the report summarises the information we received as a result of a number of special initiatives which we ran throughout the period.

### **Think-net on-line discussion**

SNH worked in partnership with The Highland Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and BT Scotland to promote an on-line discussion about National Parks. The discussion began in September 2000 and approximately 10,000 hits were recorded every month, with an average of around 65 visitors a day going beyond the home page. Some 220 contributions were made over the course of the debate by a very wide range of participants including: Local Authority councillors, planning officers, hotel owners, tourist board employees, factors, residents within the area and people overseas. During March, SNH also helped to organise a conference in Elgin to bring the contributors to the web-site together face-to-face. The event was attended by over 70 people.

Contributors to the web-site discussion were informed that, if they had views about the proposed Cairngorms National Park and specifically about the issues raised in SNH's consultation paper, they should send them directly to SNH. However, towards the end of the debate, the discussion moderators printed off the original text of all the contributions in the form of a report. A listings of the main themes which emerged during the debate is presented in Table 7-1. Copies of the full report are available from SNH on request.

**Table 7-1: Outline of the online discussion at [www.think-net.org.uk](http://www.think-net.org.uk)**

Discussion theme	Outline of discussion content
National Parks generally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The need for community involvement and participation in decision making</li> <li>• The need for National Parks to have a vision for the future</li> <li>• The role of gateway settlements in Park management</li> </ul>
Consultation on the proposed Cairngorms National Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information about the consultation exercise</li> <li>• The balance between national and local consultation on the proposal</li> <li>• How should we approach the related issues of the size/location of the Park, membership of the Board and the Powers of the new National Park Authorities?</li> </ul>
National Parks and the cultural heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotion of Gaelic and local dialects within National Parks as part of the cultural heritage</li> <li>• Culture as the cement which binds together so much of what makes the proposed National Parks special</li> <li>• Shooting and hunting as part of the cultural heritage</li> <li>• The difficulty of defining what the cultural heritage is</li> <li>• The balance between conservation of the cultural and the natural heritage and balance between the four aims of Scottish National Parks</li> <li>• Culture is about much more than language, and includes, for example, our archaeological heritage</li> <li>• Should we supply what visitors want or build on the local culture of the areas?</li> <li>• Why protect cultural heritage only in National Parks?</li> <li>• Support for the establishment of National Parks and what they can do for conservation and enhancement of cultural heritage</li> </ul>
Gaelic and Cultural Heritage in National Parks	<p>The working group at the Elgin conference developed the following recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The name of the National Park should be bilingual (e.g. “Cairngorms National Park: Pàirce Nàiseanta a’ Mhonaidh Ruaidh”) and widely used</li> <li>• Signage, interpretation and literature should be bilingual</li> <li>• At least one member of the Park Board should be appointed because of expertise in development and promotion of indigenous languages</li> <li>• The Park Authority should employ a Gaelic Development Officer and a Gaelic-speaking Ranger</li> <li>• The Park Authority should have an ethos that supports Gaelic language and culture</li> <li>• It is important that at least one archaeologist be employed by the Park Authority to ensure appropriate</li> </ul>

	<p>protection and interpretation of archaeological sites</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The group felt that boundaries of the proposed Cairngorms National Park approximating to SNH's Option B were close to the best</li> <li>• In conclusion, the group felt that that the Cairngorms area will be a wonderful National Park, precisely because it is so unique. It is a place of wonderful landform and ecology, superb for outdoor recreation and beautiful in the extreme. When the cultural heritage is added to that, taking in stories, Gaelic place names (many of which tell stories themselves), songs, poetry and legend (of which there is a fantastic amount), we get a heady and exciting mix of the very best of Scottish-ness.</li> </ul>
Tourism and National Parks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tourism in National Park has to be based on sustainability, managing environmental, economic and social well-being of the area.</li> <li>• How do we develop appropriate marketing of the Park?</li> <li>• The structure of Area Tourist Boards within National Parks</li> <li>• Will National Parks bring more visitors and if so, what facilities should be provided?</li> <li>• What do visitors to National Parks actually want?</li> </ul> <p>The working group at the Elgin conference developed the following recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide low level infrastructure like litter bins, improving signage and upgrading car parks</li> <li>• Encourage influential movers and shakers to promote the area</li> <li>• Establish a Cairngorms National Park portal web-site as gateway to demonstrate what the area has to offer</li> <li>• Promote the Park to local people, especially young people and encourage them to be ambassadors for the area</li> <li>• Encourage all relevant public agencies to work closely together</li> </ul>
Housing and National Parks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The effect of the Park on housing prices and the effect on local people, especially first time and young buyers</li> <li>• A need for disincentives to buy second homes in the area (increased Council Tax was often suggested)</li> <li>• The need for and provision of affordable housing</li> <li>• The relation between housing and other local services such as schools, libraries and shops</li> <li>• Planning policy: where should housing be built and who should make the decisions?</li> <li>• The need for consistency across the National Park and for higher standards of design, whilst allowing for variety and organic growth, according to local circumstances and built heritage principles</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Balancing the need for housing with protection of integrity of the landscape</li> <li>• The need for good design of new houses in Scotland out with National Parks</li> </ul> <p>The working group at the Elgin conference developed the following recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial assistance should be given encourage co-operative/shared ownership housing units and support facilities (especially for young people).</li> <li>• Develop brown field sites in advance of green field sites</li> <li>• Contribute towards better landscaping of housing developments</li> <li>• Undertake research into better planning policies related to density and location of housing, and also prepare examples of housing design and layout</li> <li>• Provide financial assistance to obtain affordable housing</li> <li>• Increase Council Tax for second houses, to increase the amount of finance available to support local housing</li> </ul>
Rangers and National Parks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gaps were identified in relation to land management, environmental education and recreation management functions delivered by ranger services</li> <li>• Need for more co-ordinated ranger services in the Cairngorms, but there were mixed views on the merits of a unified Cairngorms NP Ranger Service</li> <li>• Acknowledgement of the benefits of diversity in service provision, and meeting the needs of local circumstances</li> <li>• Should Park rangers wear uniforms so that they can be easily identified?</li> <li>• Mixed views on the role of private ranger services</li> <li>• The need for high and visible standard</li> <li>• Concern over creation of a two tier ranger service - in National Parks then the rest</li> <li>• Need for agreed management procedures for cross-boundary working</li> </ul> <p>The working group at the Elgin conference developed the following recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rangers in the Park should be: identifiable and recognisable; easy to contact when you need to; useful when you do contact them; approachable; integrated with the community; credible land managers; knowledgeable about the Cairngorms; present on the ground; Located where there is demand for their services.</li> <li>• Looking at the current provision of ranger services in the Cairngorms, most attention needs to be given to</li> </ul>

	making them identifiable and recognisable (badges and vehicle colours), provision where they were needed (e.g. Glen Feshie), and boosting their presence on the ground (rather than in offices).
Administrative structures of National Parks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Land management and recreation management were regarded as key functions for the National Park Authority</li> <li>• General consensus that the planning function should remain with the Local Authorities</li> <li>• The need for high design standards</li> <li>• Need for close cross-working arrangements between local planning authorities and the National Park Authority</li> </ul>
Realising the vision of National Parks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotion of a positive image for the area</li> <li>• Gaining support from the range of landowners and other interested parties</li> <li>• Supporting agriculture, forestry, fishing and estate management</li> <li>• Managing and promoting the area considering conservation, and sustainable management principles</li> </ul>
Young people and National Parks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cairngorms Partnership Youth Manifesto</li> <li>• The need for environmental education and involving young people in everything that the Park is about</li> </ul>
Low-flying policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disturbance is caused by high-speed, low-level aircraft pilot training. Is this appropriate in a National Park?</li> <li>• Recognition given to the value of military training</li> <li>• Support for military aircraft training in the area on the grounds of its economic benefits</li> </ul>
Roadside development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification of shortfalls in visitor service provision available on the Trunk Road from Perth to Inverness (A9)</li> <li>• Need to enhance visitor facilities through the provision of high quality service points</li> <li>• Rejection of proposals for roadside service station developments on the A9</li> <li>• Is it desirable to have a roadside service station marking the gateway to the National Park</li> </ul>
Offices and economic development in the National Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need for dispersal of National Park offices and operations around the area of the National Park</li> <li>• Use of IT may enhance effective remote working, but lack of broadband telecommunication links may restrict this</li> <li>• Need to promote the aims of the Park in terms of office design, use of materials, and energy efficiency.</li> <li>• Suggestion that the Park authority should maximise the existing facilities for conferencing in local hotels, outdoor centres and village halls.</li> </ul>
Path management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on care and maintenance of existing routes</li> <li>• Emphasis on enhancement of lower level access opportunities rather than remote trails</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Production of path information leaflets to educate visitors</li> <li>• Full training should be given to local people to build and maintain paths</li> <li>• More funds should be allocated for the maintenance of footpaths</li> <li>• Paths should be provided for all abilities and others for dedicated use by cyclists and horse riders</li> </ul>
National Parks in other countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Denmark's nature parks involve people through a 'friends of the Park' scheme and specialist guided walks</li> <li>• Threat of economic development on natural wilderness experience evident in the USA</li> <li>• Good visitor services available in Chile</li> <li>• Australia has over Parks preserving over 5% of the continent</li> <li>• African National Parks world famous for their wildlife</li> <li>• Some National Parks suffer from commercialisation, especially around the edges</li> </ul>
Predator control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Predators are part of the bio-diversity too</li> <li>• Prey species, in the absence of natural predators, may not get any commoner because the mortality imposed by predation may simply occur by other means - starvation and disease for example</li> </ul>
Creating employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The need to raise awareness about the potential employment opportunities in the management of the natural environment</li> </ul>
Other National Parks in Scotland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ben Nevis Hill, Glencoe and the Cuillins all suggested as National Parks</li> <li>• Support for a Hebridean Islands National Park</li> <li>• Marine National Parks should be designated to manage fish farming, super-quarries, oil tanker pollution and wildlife watching vessels</li> <li>• The whole of the Highlands and Islands suggested for inclusion as one National Park</li> </ul>

## **The Corridor Project: Highland Perthshire Communities Partnership**

SNH was approached during the consultation period by the Highland Perthshire Community Partnership, an umbrella body for Community Councils in the area, who were aware of local concerns about the potential impact on their area from lying between two potentially large National Parks. We agreed to fund a special programme of community-led consultation, which resulted in a report being submitted on the opinions and attitudes towards the so-called corridor effect. SNH also made a commitment for a further study of the implications of National Parks for adjacent areas.

A total of 13 organisations and their members were involved including: Aberfeldy Community Council, Church of Scotland-Aberfeldy Partnership, Dull and Weem Community Council, East Loch Erich Deer Management Group, Glen Lyon and Loch Tay Community Council, Kenmore and District Community Council, Mid Atholl, Grandtully and Strathtay Community Council, Perthshire Tourist Board (Pitlochry members), Rannoch and Tummel Community Council, Scottish Landowners' Federation, Tummel Area Conservation and Development Group, Upper Tay Development Group. Methods used included meetings, drop-in sessions, and the opportunity to provide written or verbal feedback about the proposals through the facilitator.

### ***Should a National Park be designated in the Cairngorms?***

General scepticism was noted about the proposed creation of a National Park, this way based on the intended and likely effects and the politics behind the proposal. There was little consensus about what the effect of designation would be ranging from “practically none” to “significant”. Concerns were raised about the possibility of conflicting Park aims.

### ***What area should a National Park cover?***

There was widespread support for the National Park in the Cairngorms area being kept small in the first instance, as this would minimise the effect on the Highland Perthshire area. It was felt that there was a strong Highland Perthshire identity and there was broad support for marketing the area on that basis. However several respondents did feel that northern Highland Perthshire should be included, and one group (Perthshire Tourists Board), favoured inclusion of the largest area option, including Pitlochry.

Opinion was evenly divided about whether the Highland Perthshire area would benefit or be disadvantaged from lying between the two proposed National Parks. Some saw the area's central location as being of benefit in terms of tourist numbers. Others were concerned that visitors would pass through the area without contributing to the local economy. There was also concern that the area could be affected by relatively fewer restrictions on activities, and this might lead to damage to the area, if it was outside of a National Park.

### ***What Powers and Functions should the National Park Authority have?***

A range of views were expressed, including:

- conservation should be given priority along with appropriate measures for access;
- there was some disquiet about some of the proposed powers, including bylaws, compulsory purchase and campsite provision;

- differing planning policies and restrictions within and outside of National Parks should be avoided; and
- there was strong support for planning remaining with local authorities but the need for close liaison with National Park Authority was highlighted;

### ***Membership of the Board of the Park Authority?***

It was suggested that a Park Authority Board of 25 members would be too large to be workable. There was little enthusiasm for representation by councillors but there was support for a higher proportion of directly elected local representatives than had been suggested in the SNH consultation document. Many respondents indicated concerns about how representative of communities the membership of the board could be.

### ***Name of the National Park and other issues?***

A number of other issues were raised in the report, including:

- fears were expressed that funding will be diverted from existing initiatives into the National Parks to the detriment of Highland Perthshire;
- the additional funding that had been identified for National Parks was considered by some to be insufficient; and
- concerns were expressed about the impacts of the introduction of bylaws within the National Park and the effect on Highland Perthshire;