**National Parks Stakeholder Advisory Group**

**Confirmed note of meeting eight – 10th October 2024 – online**

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| **Name** | **Organisation** | **Name** | **Organisation** |
| Allan Rutherford  Dara Parsons | Historic Environment Scotland | Andy Ford (deputising for Grant Moir | Cairngorms National Park Authority - |
| April Armstrong | Confor | Gordon Smith | VisitScotland |
| Campbell Gerard | Crown Estates Scotland | David Miller | James Hutton Institute |
| Simon Fieldhouse | Dumfries and Galloway Council | Gavin Corbett | Ramblers Scotland |
| Erin Goldie  James Hall  Craig Iles | South Ayrshire Council | Jane Ashley  Karen Jackson | SOSE |
| John Thomson | Scottish Environment Link | Mhairi Dawson (deputising for Sarah Cowie) | NFUS |
| Megan Amundson | Scottish Renewables | Nathan Bryceland | Scottish Land & Estates |
| Nikki Sinclair | APRS and SCNP | Kat Jones | APRS |
| Ailis Watt | RSPB | Carol Ritchie | EUROPARC Federation |
| Jill Robbie (Chair)  Eileen Stuart  Peter Rawcliffe  Laura Campbell  Jen Deane  Charlie Shentall | NatureScot Board Member  NatureScot | Jenny Gibbons  Brittany Brown  Victoria McCann | Scottish Government |

*Apologies: Kirstin Urquhart- YoungScot, James Davidson - Disability Equality Scotland; Gordon Watson - Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority*

**Agenda**

1) Welcome and introductions

2) Updates

* Scottish Government - legislative proposals
* NatureScot - progress with engagement and plans for consultation

3) Key issues for the consultation

* Area options
* Engagement with the land management sector
* Dealing with misinformation

4) AOB and DONM (January tbc)

**1) Welcome and introductions**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. It would consist of two parts with questions during each. For the updates there would be presentations from Scottish Government and NatureScot on the progress so far. Then the key issues for the consultation would be led by NatureScot.

**2) Updates**

**2.1 Scottish Government** provided an update on plans for potential changes to the legislation, including consultation on them.

**Question - What was Scottish Government’s definition of Sustainable Tourism?**

SG - when the consultation on the proposal was sent out, the wording included was not finalised wording – ‘Promote public understanding and enjoyment of the areas cultural and natural assets’ … ‘supporting sustainable tourism and visitor management, inclusion, and improved accessibility for all’. SG further stated that sustainable tourism can mean different things to different people. As proposals for the Natural Environment Bill develop SG will continue to work on the definition which has to be clear in legislative terms.

**Question - Explicit recognition of recreation in the aims of a new National Park would be helpful.**

SG provided assurance that that point has been noted.

**Question: what is the timetable for the Natural Environment Bill?**

SG explained that due to the way Parliamentary procedure works, they are unable to provide any more information at present on the precise timing of when the Bill will be introduced.

When the Consultation analysis report comes out, it will provide more context over those proposal that have been supported and those that have less support.

**2.2 NatureScot** – provided an update on progress to date and plans for consultation, speaking to the paper previously circulated (

There are three main phases of the Reporter work: the first pre-consultation phase, triggered by the Ministerial announcement on 22 July 2024, runs to the end of October 2024. From November 2024 to January 2025 there will be a formal consultation. The third phase is preparing and submitting advice to Government.

The current phase is about providing information and raising awareness of the proposal for a new National Park and what it could entail, emphasising that it is not a done deal. We are in ‘listening mode’, and fact finding with a range of organisations.

Of the ten key elements of this stage detailed in the paper, eight have been achieved, albeit the delivery of the household leaflet was delayed due to issues beyond NatureScot’s control.

Of the remining items, number six the drop-in surgeries – has not happened in the timing expected. We are now lining these up for the consultation period consultation itself. With hindsight we consider this could be a more helpful time for these. Item seven, connecting with the range of businesses and their engagement work in progress and we are working closely with SOSE and the rest of Team South of Scotland on this.

There are links in the paper to the Reporter Plan, which will be updated this month with the latest contacts made. NatureScot is grateful for the contact details and help provided by the South Ayrshire, East Ayrshire and Dumfries and Galloway Councils alongside the Biosphere Reserve.

NatureScot is confident that the work so far will provide a solid basis for the consultation itself. Next steps are gearing up for the consultation phase. Six items are listed in the paper: the consultation surveys will be online with the short consultation also being prepared. A paper version of this short version will to be sent to addresses in and near the area proposed in the bid for a new National Park in Galloway.

Alongside the survey there will be public open consultation meetings facilitated by independent consultants. These will take place at five geographic hubs throughout the area, with satellite meetings spreading out from each hub. The stakeholder engagement on a national and regional level will continue. In addition, there will be bespoke engagement for young people, ethnic minorities, and disabilities groups and others to make sure NatureScot reaches a wide a range of people who want to talk about the proposal and express their view.

**Question: There is a need to make sure everyone in the region is clear about the process.**

NatureScot noted that work done to date has provided a solid foundation for the consultation phase, though they is more to do. We also recognised both the passion and heat in the debate and some misunderstandings on both sides, while there are a lot of people in the middle who just want more information. The open letter from SOSE and others had been proposed to help with this. NatureScot asked for comments on how best to achieve that with stakeholders.

**3) Key issues for the consultation**

NatureScot outlined the intended contents of the consultation, noting the need to avoid in the presentation of the consultation the suggestion of the proposal being a fait accompli. Issues included:

* Area options
* Engagement with the land management sector
* Dealing with misinformation.

**Question: When doing the leaflet drop, how much of a buffer was added to the proposed National Park area as detailed in the proposal?**

The leaflet was posted to addresses within the indicative area proposed in the bid, and postcode sectors that overlapped with it. This means that some areas, quite a distance from the bid area, were included in the leaflet drop.

**Question / note: agricultural regulation in national parks.**

Existing National Parks’ function is to form voluntary partnerships to steer, marshal and co-ordinate the vision of the National Park. They are not a regulator. The regulation and legislation are exactly the same either side of the Park boundary. It is about looking for the opportunities for collaboration within the Park.

**Question/note: facilitating engagement with the land management sector.**

Both sides need to be careful over the language being used including phases such as misinformation or dirty tricks. The early stage of the reporting work inevitably means that much of the detail is absent. Along with the sense of perception that the new National Park is a done deal, this creates a vacuum. On being asked how they thought the wording can be approached, their sense was to move quickly to the consultation stage.

**Question/note: tailoring of language and approach for the urban areas such as Stranraer**

The question is whether the population centres feel the same connection to different functions of the land than rural population, and what shared priorities were there. Is there merit in tailoring the message to urban areas differently to address that difference? NatureScot recognised there was a need to tailor the consultation process to take account of these differences. The independent consultants engaged for the formal process are highly skilled in both urban and rural environments. NatureScot will be carrying out engagement with young people and groups that may not normally engage in this sort of consultation.

This point made was valid but considered that urban areas in rural settings are very closely linked to their surroundings, providing services to most of the rural area around them. With diversification of the rural economy, that linkage between the urban and rural becomes more important. It needs to be explored further in rural areas by land managers and the rest of the community, as there is another division has been created as the level of employment in agriculture and forestry has declined.

Confidence was expressed that NatureScot has recognised the need to tailor their approach to account for the many different communities within the proposed area.

**Question: To what extent was the area to include any marine and foreshore elements in its boundary?**

NatureScot intention was to extend the boundary along the terrestrial part of the coastline. There is possibly a discussion to be had whether to extend below the mean low water mark but recognise there are a whole host of marine designations and stakeholders to consider if doing so, and perhaps it would not make sense to cross that boundary.

**Question: name and messaging**

As this proposed National Park has been called the Galloway National Park, many Ayrshire residents have taken that to mean Dumfries and Galloway and are not aware that it could extend into East and South Ayrshire. There needs to be stronger messaging in the consultation about the fact that East and South Ayrshire are in part included in the proposed area.

It was noted that the Cairngorms National Park covered a number of different council areas and it took time and effort to establish a more common identify for the Park area. The key point is once the Park is established, its coherence and identity can help shape the name. People around the core of the Cairngorms National Park face the same issues in and around the Park regardless of which council area they are in.

NatureScot asked for comments on how to frame the land management issues in the Consultation document. NatureScot would also welcome more information on how best to engage with different sectors and what other sectors we should be engaging with.

It was suggested that those working in maritime interests like fishing, and offshore wind farms, might be a sector that may not come to mind when looking at the consultation.

**Question/note: avoiding overlap of public bodies**.

One of the major functions a National Park can fulfil is facilitating dialogue, and co-ordinating between a range of public bodies. For example, one of the Biosphere’s most valuable roles has been to get the people in the Ayrshires to talk to people in Dumfries and Galloway as they shared a lot of common interests.

**Question/note: length of the Consultation.**

The forestry sector’s busiest time is over the consultation period. There is also the Christmas break affecting the amount of time available, particularly for a long consultation paper.

NatureScot responded that the length of consultation period will be kept under review. We will look at a mid-length consultation paper, and possibly bespoke surveys for some sectors..

**Question: would there be a requirement to respond to every question in the survey?**

NatureScot replied that the survey does not require full completion. The long, detailed survey would suit organisations more than individuals and NatureScot recognises the need for different levels of detail.

**Question: when would the consultation start?**

NatureScot is aiming for the week beginning 4th November 2024.

**Question: what planning powers will the proposed Park have?**

There are two current models - Loch Lomond and the Trossachs has with full planning powers and the Cairngorms National Park has development planning and call-in powers for development management.

For this proposal, the aim is for powers that suit the area and there will be options provided in the survey.

**4. AOB and DONM**

There were no items of AOB.

Date of next Meeting was originally proposed for January. On reflection, a date in December was agreed as more appropriate so the progress with the consultation process can be reviewed. NatureScot to arrange this.