



Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

Petition Number: [PE1556](#)

Main Petitioner: John Mayhew on behalf of SCNP and APRS

Subject: A National Parks Strategy for Scotland

Calls on the Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to prepare and implement a strategy to designate more National Parks in Scotland, including at least one Coastal and Marine National Park.

Background

The National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 sets out the following aims in relation to a relevant designated area:

- to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area
- to promote sustainable use of the natural resources of the area
- to promote understanding and enjoyment (including enjoyment in the form of recreation) of the special qualities of the area by the public, and to promote sustainable economic and social development of the area's communities.

The designated area should also be of outstanding national importance because of its natural heritage or the combination of its natural and cultural heritage, and have a distinctive character and a coherent identity.

Scotland currently has two national parks, established following statutory consultation. Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park was established in July 2002, and the Cairngorms National Park was established in March 2003. Each Park has its own National Park Authority with a 25 member board.

Scottish Government Action

In 2008, a Strategic Review of Scotland's National Parks was undertaken. The recommendations of the Review were consulted upon between November 2008 and February 2009, with a [National Parks Strategic Review Recommendations: Consultation Report](#) published in August 2009 setting out the decisions on the Review's recommendations. One of the key recommendations was that a short life National Parks Strategy Group be set up. The Consultation Report states:

“The National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 sets out the broad criteria which must be met and the processes to be followed in setting up new National Parks or amending the extent of existing National Parks. However the legislation does not provide guidance on the principles which Ministers might be expected to follow in deciding whether or not to activate the significant processes involved in formal assessments made under the Act. The remit of the Group will therefore focus on establishing:

- a) The principles involved in considering boundary changes to existing National Parks
- b) The principles involved in considering new National Parks”.

The Group was, however, not set up. The following PQ and answer explains:

Question S3W-34567: Richard Simpson, Mid Scotland and Fife, Scottish Labour, Date Lodged: 16/06/2010 To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made on establishing a national parks strategy group chaired by the Minister for Environment.

Answered by Roseanna Cunningham (23/06/2010): I have decided to defer any decision on setting up the group until after the next spending review.

Scottish Parliament Action

Two Parliamentary debates have taken place since the publication of the Consultation Report. In November 2009 the following motion was debated:

Motion S3M-05110: Roseanna Cunningham, Perth, Scottish National Party, Date Lodged: 02/11/2009. Scotland's National Parks: That the Parliament commends the contribution that Scotland's two national parks make to sustainable social and economic development and to delivering the Greener Scotland agenda; notes the outcome of the National Parks Strategic Review, and welcomes the proposal to set up a National Parks Strategy group to guide future strategy for Scotland's national parks

The Official Report from this debate is available [here](#).

In November 2013 the following motion was debated:

Motion S4M-07932: Claire Baker, Mid Scotland and Fife, Scottish Labour, Date Lodged: 04/10/2013. National Parks, Unfinished Business: That the Parliament welcomes the recent report by the Scottish Campaign for National Parks and the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland, Unfinished Business: A National Parks Strategy for Scotland; notes that the report states that “Scotland's landscapes rank amongst the best in the world”; further notes its claim that “there are further areas of outstanding importance for landscape and recreation in Scotland worthy of National Park designation, and that this would best be done in the context of an overall agreed national strategy”; understands that the report identifies seven areas that should be considered for designation as a national park: the Ben Nevis/Glen Coe/Black Mount area,

the Cheviot Hills, an area based around Mull, Coll and Tiree, Galloway, Glen Affric, Harris and Wester Ross; believes that, by protecting the environment, attracting tourists and providing social and economic benefits to the communities that they serve and the rest of the country, the national parks at Loch Lomond and the Trossachs and the Cairngorms have proved to be successful in meeting the aims set out by the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000, and notes calls for a Scotland-wide debate on the way forward for national parks

The Official Report from this debate is available [here](#).

The following PQs are also relevant:

Question S4W-20921: David Stewart, Highlands and Islands, Scottish Labour, Date Lodged: 29/04/2014 To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to develop new (a) land and (b) marine national parks.

Answered by Paul Wheelhouse (14/05/2014): Scotland's National Parks are two of Scotland's greatest assets. The Scottish Government fully recognises the valuable contribution that they make to our tourism industry and wider Scottish economy, and the vital role that our National Park Authorities play in managing the parks, in supporting sustainable rural development, in promoting and enhancing the visitor experience, and ensuring that the parks stunning landscapes and special qualities are conserved and enhanced for future generations.

While the success of our national parks is unquestioned, we believe it would be wrong at this time to raise expectations regarding the designation of others, particularly at a time of significant real terms reduction in both resource and capital funding available to the Scottish Government. While we would not rule out a further designation at a future stage, this would only be appropriate if there was a clear view expressed as to what model of new national park is being proposed; what its objectives were; whether a robust business case demonstrating its financial sustainability was demonstrated; and clear evidence of community and local authority support was made. As there are no current proposals which meet these tests, the Scottish Government has no current plans to designate further national parks in Scotland. Instead, we believe it is essential to continue to focus support on our two existing parks, to continue to deliver excellence in the visitor experience and to maximise the contribution they make to meeting local and national objectives, and in support of the statutory aims agreed by the Scottish Parliament.

Question S4W-17143: John Lamont, Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire, Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party, Date Lodged: 12/09/2013 To ask the Scottish Government what progress it has made on examining the benefits of a national park strategy.

Answered by Paul Wheelhouse (26/09/2013): Scotland's national parks are two of our greatest national assets and the Scottish Government fully recognises the valuable contribution they make to our tourism industry and

wider Scottish economy. Our national park authorities, working closely with a range of partners, play a vital role in managing the parks, in supporting sustainable rural development, in promoting and enhancing the visitor experience and ensuring that the parks' landscapes and special qualities are conserved and enhanced for future generations.

The Scottish Government's priority, at a time of a 10.9% real terms reduction by the UK Government in the Scottish Government's Fiscal Department Expenditure Limit (DEL) over 2010-11 to 2015-16, which includes a 26.6% capital budget reduction, has been to focus support on Scotland's existing national parks. This includes supporting their five-year Partnership Plans and investing substantial capital in visitor infrastructure and facilities, rather than on the development of a separate national park strategy.

The Scottish Government has noted the recommendations made by the Scottish Campaign for National Parks (SCNP) and the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland in their report 'Unfinished Business', and the welcome commitment to national parks in Scotland that this represents. However, the report's recommendations, including the call for new national parks and the development of a national park strategy, must be viewed in the context of the current financial climate and the Government's focus on supporting our existing national parks. This matter was discussed with representatives of SCNP and the Association for Protection of Rural Scotland when we met on 5 September 2013.

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18 March 2015

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