

18th August 2015

Ms Catherine Ferguson
Public Petitions Committee Clerk
Room T3.40
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh EH99 1SP

Dear Ms Ferguson

PE01556: A National Parks Strategy for Scotland

Ramblers Scotland has noted the above petition which has been lodged by the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland and the Scottish Campaign for National Parks. This petition is very relevant to our own interests and we would therefore like to offer our comments.

We were pleased to support the 'Unfinished Business' report produced by these two organisations in 2013 and expressed the hope that the Scottish Government would give serious consideration to the recommendations of this report. We have been disappointed at the lack of progress in national park development since 2008.

Scotland's natural heritage is widely recognised as a national asset and a magnificent setting for outdoor recreation which brings recognised benefits for our health and well-being. Our landscapes, mountains, ancient woodlands, rugged coastline, lochs and rivers all attract millions of visitors each year and nature based tourism is estimated to be worth around £1.4bn to the economy¹. We have long called for the government to consider setting up more national parks. We recognise their value in promoting rural economic development while also bringing higher levels of protection to our most treasured landscapes and our natural and cultural heritage, and acting as a focus for outdoor recreation. National parks bring significant social and economic benefit, directly through the work generated in park planning and management, but also indirectly through tourism. International visitors are especially alert to the location and opportunities provided by national parks as these areas encompass the best scenery, wildlife and facilities for enjoying the natural environment.

Where there is strong local support, national park status could be the key to restoring job prospects, promoting the aims of sustainable development and enhancing tourism opportunities. We believe that the seven potential areas identified in the 'Unfinished Business' report all deserve further investigation and urge the committee to take this case to the Scottish Government.

Yours sincerely

Jess Dolan
Director

¹ Scottish Natural Heritage commissioned report 398, Assessing the economic impacts of nature based tourism in Scotland (2010)

President: Dr Andrew Murray
Convener: James Lawson
Director: Jess Dolan