



The Mountaineering Council of Scotland

The Old Granary
West Mill Street
Perth PH1 5QP

PE1556/I

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

27 August 2015

Dear Ms Fergusson

PE01556: A National Parks Strategy for Scotland

The Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCoS) is the national representative body for mountaineers, hill walkers and ski tourers with 12,500 members. We also represent the interests of the 75,000 members of the British Mountaineering Council, the representative body for England and Wales, which supports our work. Our members contribute significantly to Scotland's rural economy.

According to VisitScotland research, the majority of visitors come to see Scotland's marvellous landscape. Many would accept that Scotland has some of the finest mountains and wild land assets in the world. National park status would ensure that many of these assets will be respected and safeguarded for future generations to enjoy.

We support the petition lodged by the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland and the Scottish Campaign for National Parks. Whilst our support is consistent with that given for their *Unfinished Business* strategy in 2013, it is also based on current research with our members, which demonstrates their overwhelming support for stronger protection for Scotland's mountains and wild land, protection which would require changes to Scottish Government policy.

Unfinished Business clearly articulated the benefits attaching to national park status and set out criteria against which future parks should be assessed and further areas considered to meet those criteria. At the time, we wrote to the then Minister for Environment and Climate Change to express our support for the strategy and urge implementation of what were then manifesto commitments. Our letter stated: "The Year of Natural Scotland is the right time for the Scottish Government to make a real commitment to the development and implementation of its own strategy to designate more National Parks in Scotland."

We are therefore disappointed at the apparent lack of progress made by the Scottish Government in following through its own prior commitments relating to national parks.

We do not believe that it is impossible, even in the present financial climate, for the Scottish Government to commence work on the development of a national parks strategy, which would demonstrate that it recognises the value of such assets and that it has a commitment to their protection. *Unfinished Business* provides a basis for that work to commence.

We support the petition and join the petitioner to call upon the Scottish Government to prepare a strategy to designate more of Scotland's land, coast and sea as National Parks.

Yours sincerely,

David Gibson
Chief Officer