

SCOTTISH NATIONAL PARKS STRATEGY PROJECT

Public Petition PE01556 – A National Parks Strategy for Scotland

Responses to Written Submissions

This document responds on behalf of the Scottish Campaign for National Parks (SCNP) and The Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland (APRS) to the written submissions on Public Petition PE01556 received by the Scottish Parliament's Public Petitions Committee since the last time it considered Petition PE01556 in June 2015.

Scottish Government

We note the Minister for Environment's written submission dated 9 July 2015. The Minister states that Scotland's two existing National Parks "have been a great success" and "make a hugely valuable contribution to tourism, conservation, rural development and the wider Scottish economy". We agree, which is one reason why we consider that the Scottish Government should explore the possibility of extending this success and benefits to other areas of Scotland worthy of National Park status.

The letter further states that Ministers "remain committed to work with communities to explore the creation of new National Parks", but cites no specific actions taken to fulfil this 2011 manifesto commitment. We hope that the Committee might wish to invite the Minister to attend a future meeting to give evidence on this and to respond to our other points raised below.

The Minister's letter refers to our plans to prepare additional research reports to provide further detail of our proposals. We have published two such reports so far:

- 1 [*The Socio-Economic Benefits of New National Park Designations in Scotland*](#) and
- 2 [*Future National Parks in Scotland – Possible Governance Models*](#)

Both of these reports can be found, along with several other key documents, on the [Scottish National Parks Strategy Project webpage](#). We do encourage Committee Members to read them; alternatively I would be happy to supply hard copies if Members would find this helpful. We are currently working on two further topic papers covering tourism and volunteering, seeking to illustrate some of the wide range of public policy goals which National Parks can so effectively support.

Our [*Possible Governance Models*](#) research report was published in September 2015. It seeks amongst other objectives to address concerns raised, including by Members of the Petitions Committee and by the Scottish Government, that setting up more National Parks could be complex and costly. The report argues on the contrary that smaller National Parks in remote less populated areas of Scotland, such as Glen Affric in the Highlands or the northern Cheviots in the Borders, would inevitably have lower budgets, fewer staff and simpler governance structures than our two relatively large and complex existing National Parks.

The flexibility built into the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 provides significant scope for a variety of approaches depending on the character and needs of the area concerned, whilst maintaining the balance between national significance and local accountability. It also enables the designation of both terrestrial and marine National Parks. This kind of flexibility is echoed in the Minister's letter which describes "a number of modest changes to governance arrangements, including greater use of

shared services and smaller Boards” made over the years to the existing National Parks. The research report argues that as the seven additional National Parks proposed by SCNP and APRS extend into only one or two Council areas, they could each cost as little as £1.5m to £3.0m per annum to run, with no more than 10 to 30 staff and 8 to 13 Board members.

Finally, the Minister’s letter cites the reasons given by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar for its failure to back the proven support for a National Park by local people in the Isle of Harris. However, support from the local authority is not one of the criteria required for designation by the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000; indeed historically such support has rarely been forthcoming in relation to the establishment of National Parks in Britain, with the sole positive exception of Loch Lomond & the Trossachs.

Ramblers Scotland

We are grateful to Ramblers Scotland for providing a written submission. We welcome their ongoing support and share their disappointment at the lack of progress in National Park development since 2008. Their letter makes an eloquent case for more National Parks on the grounds of landscape, recreation and rural development, one which we wholeheartedly endorse.

Mountaineering Council of Scotland

We thank MCofS for providing a written submission. We appreciate its continued support, particularly as this is backed up by recent consultation with its membership **who clearly seek better protection for Scotland’s mountains and wild land.** We therefore share its disappointment at the apparent lack of progress by the Scottish Government in fulfilling its manifesto commitment. We agree with the important point made by MCofS that it would not be particularly costly for the Scottish Government simply to start the process of preparing a strategy for more National Parks, even in these times of financial stringency. MCofS also refers to VisitScotland research which shows that **the majority of visitors come to see Scotland’s marvellous landscapes,** arguing that more National Parks would ensure that more of these assets will be respected and safeguarded for future generations to enjoy. We consider that extending our National Parks family could help to support Scotland’s ambitious targets for expanding our crucial tourism industry. The Committee might wish to invite VisitScotland to comment on this.

Woodland Trust Scotland

We thank WTS for providing a written submission and welcome its continued support. Their letter once again highlights the Scottish Government’s unfulfilled manifesto pledge and supports the proposal that it should prepare a national strategy. This is backed up by a relevant example from its own area of expertise, in that it considers that the two existing National Parks clearly demonstrate a proper strategic approach to the planning and management of woodland and forestry, given the widespread benefits that these assets bring. The clear implication we take from this example is that such an approach has the potential to benefit other types of land use and other areas of Scotland worthy of National Park status.

John Mayhew
Petitioner

on behalf of SCNP and APRS

16 October 2015