Given the strength of the case for increasing the number of Scottish NSAs after approaching a half century of no change, we were surprised by both the Scottish Government’s refusal of the request and reasoning expressed. That is, by virtue of renewable energy being prioritised because it is ‘carbon free.’ Although governments have the right and responsibility to construct an energy policy, the consequences when imposed have to be addressed in order to comply with relevant UK and International Laws and Conventions. So with respect, using an energy policy as a reason for refusal is irrelevant to reviewing the extent of NSAs for their own sake. Conversely, such a reason for refusal attracts the undoubted and well known adverse impacts of that policy, providing reasons to re-visit the decision as follows:

As energy policy has been cited, in respect of renewable technologies, it is important for the sake of transparency that the Scottish Government provides proof of the claims made. In the case of wind power these involve those made involving CO2 emission savings and benefits. In addition to impacts on landscape and the rising evidence of adverse effects on our tourism sector, economic aspects include that this year on windless days; all installed turbines contributed barely 1% of our needs - with the few remaining coal fired and gas plants having to provide the shortfall sometimes amounting to 70%. An enormous expansion of the grid to serve wind power installations. As Scotland knows from the controversial Beauly to Denny power line, it is ugly, and the cost is exorbitant for the public purse to cover. Crucially, neither the CO2 lost in construction, nor the CO2 lost in mining rare earth metals and transportation from overseas, are measured.

Of additional relevance is the expert view of Euan Mearns, BSc.PhD an analyst and geochemistry expert (Honorary Research Fellow, Aberdeen Uni.) of the current CO2 picture, effects and industry claims, who states—

"...in 2014 the UK produced 471 M tonnes of CO2. Without wind power UK emissions would have been 485 M tonnes CO2. Hence wind abated 2.9% of the total. Given the environmental and economic penalties involved this is wholly inconsequential. Secondly, renewables enthusiasts tend to calculate CO2 abated by calculating directly how much gas or coal would have been burned to produce the renewable electricity, in this case 33 MWh. This is over simplified and ignores system costs associated with integrating intermittent renewables such as degraded efficiency of fossil plants that are required to ramp more frequently and more steeply, the additional grid and transmission costs, energy storage and providing energy to keep turbines moving when it is calm (this is done to protect bearings from stress should the turbine stand still)." And—

"Efficiency and energy efficiency are good for economic growth and true economic growth will cause emissions to rise. I use the term “true” to distinguish manufacturing and useful services from derivatives trading that is largely emissions free. If wind and solar were to make a significant
contribution to saving emissions it is because they are inefficient and their
deployment may ultimately cause recession that will lead to reduced CO2
emissions. At the moment their backs are being covered by fossil fuel
energy stores. But wait until the blackouts begin and productivity plunges.
CO2 will follow the economy down.”

It is not unreasonable for ourselves and the Committee to be in possession of
any existing and officially recognised figures. Therefore as a freedom of
information request AKCC has asked the Scottish Government to provide
what information is held, from independent sources, which are used by their
departments and officials to prove that wind power saves CO2 emissions and
provides benefits outweighing intermittency losses and shortfall coverage.

2. A further relevant response submitted to a Forestry consultation (see Future
of Forestry in Scotland https://consult.gov.scot/forestry/future-of-
forestry/consultation/view_respondent?sort=excerpt&order=ascending&_b_in
dex=480&uuld=417428143 ) serves to enhance the need for more NSAs as it
outlines the reasons why such protection is required. It remains important as
a means to achieve vital goals where this is concerned. Points covered
include that forestry and peat are the two main sources of carbon capture. It
also refers in the 1st paragraph of question 10 after ‘See Ramsar protection:’
to a short but extremely important film which we consider highlights why a
refusal to carry out a review of NSAs is unwise. Much of our forestry and peat
lands are integrated and in serious need of real protection. The current
practice of industrialising our forests and peatlands is releasing vast quantities
of CO2 into the atmosphere.

The deforestation and loss of peat that has already occurred in Scotland to
facilitate wind energy production, is a vast loss of a natural, irreplaceable,
major carbon store; a complete contradiction, when reducing CO2 emissions
is apparently the goal of installing windfarms. In respect of forests and the
sphagnum moss, peat formation drivers hold significant amounts of slowly
released water held for long periods in the uplands before finally filtering
towards the lowlands. The degree of natural regulation provided contributes to
important prevention of downstream flooding - also purifying the water before
it enters the reservoirs and the rivers. An increase in NSAs would provide
added protection for more of these ‘at risk’ areas. Again, Loch Awe is a prime
example of such.

3. Turning to the Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) submission, that SNH do not
consider revisiting the decision on provision of new NSAs a priority, does not
mean that the Scottish Government is prevented from instructing an arm of
their own administration from instigating a review.

SNH on Page 1 of the reply mentions “40 areas considered to be….. of
unsurpassed attractiveness which must be conserved as part of our natural
heritage.” It is to its credit that SNH has managed these NSAs since 1978.
However the suite is in effect exemplars of the finest landscapes and there

1 Energy Matters blog. CO2 Emissions Reduction, Renewables and Recession. (Posted 7
September 2015)
now needs to be openness to recognition that there are other areas of “finest landscapes” (page 1, bullet point 3), equal to the NSAs, and deserving of NSA status and designation. The reason for this is that there is more pressure on the landscape, particularly from windfarms. This would not have been envisioned in the 1970’s. It is fair to say that there is now also clarity of how important the landscape is to Scotland’s international renown and tourist economy. This openness must not be set aside for management or enhancement reasons relating to current NSAs. The need for protection of other “finest landscapes”, peatlands, eagle territories, etc. etc. is pressing.

Furthermore, when examining the SNH submission it is clear that in fact, SNH did think there was “a case to examine” about a review.

SNH’s ability to fulfil their task in respect of our threatened landscapes has been seriously weakened by restrictions on which applications they can become involved. ‘Serving two masters’ by virtue of addressing the needs of the national heritage/environment and abiding by government policy has produced a situation in which imposing political will is against the national interest. Despite this however, SNH have indeed raised recent landscape and other concerns about a number of s.36 applications. The danger being recognised is that the system as it stands is failing to provide adequate protection for areas which would benefit from being either taken into existing NSAs or National Parks. It is an inescapable fact that there are economic, environmental and social benefits to be gained by having more National Scenic Areas and National Parks. The latter currently comparing very unfavourably with Norway’s 44 against Scotland’s shameful two.

The DPEA² are currently dealing with applications for section 36 consents of which examples follow:

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² Planning and Environmental Appeals Division
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wind Farm</th>
<th>Planning Authority</th>
<th>SNH response</th>
<th>DPEA Case Reference Number</th>
<th>Basis of objection (summary)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linfairn Wind Farm</td>
<td>South Ayrshire Council</td>
<td>Objection</td>
<td>WIN-370-1</td>
<td>Significant adverse effects on the qualities of the Merrick Wild Land Area (WLA) resulting from the proximity and prominence of the proposal to the WLA. SNH also object to the proposal due to adverse impacts on Knockgardner Site of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caplich Wind Farm</td>
<td>The Highland Council</td>
<td>Objection</td>
<td>WIN-270-7</td>
<td>Significant adverse effects on Wild Land Areas 34 (Reay-Cassley), 29 (Rhiddoroch-Beinn Dearg-Ben Wyvis) and 32 (Inverpolly-Glencanisp) and on the special qualities of the Assynt-Coigach National Scenic Area. SNH also stated that they objected on the grounds of the impacts on the River Oykel Special Area of Conservation (Atlantic salmon and freshwater pearl mussel) but that this objection would be withdrawn if appropriate conditions and mitigation were adopted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Sonachan Wind Farm</td>
<td>Argyll &amp; Bute Council</td>
<td>Objection</td>
<td>WIN-130-2</td>
<td>A significant adverse effect on the landscape character of north Loch Awe, impacting on distinctive regional character and an important gateway into Mid Argyll and Lorn which contributes to national identity and sense of place. SNH stated that they can identify no mitigation which will address this objection.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to those of SNH, the highly respected Mountaineering Council of Scotland’s (MCS) submission to WIN-130-2 (Upper Sonachan) is an example of their position on such applications. They have been involved in West Garty and Dorenell wind farm PLIs as well as others. It would be useful for MCS to be invited by the Committee to comment on matters arising from this Petition and the submissions of both the Scottish Government and SNH.

*All of the above information feeds into the need for more NSAs which would help to provide a layer of extra protection for such areas.*
A new press release received might also be relevant for the Committee in that it refers to Scotland being criticised for not fulfilling its obligations in relation to environmental justice:  http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/mop6/in-session_docs/ECE_MP.PP_2017_CRP.6_E_United_Kingdom.pdf

Conclusion.

This Government will clearly wish to be seen honouring the twin obligations of ‘First, do no harm’ and that of the vital precautionary principle. These however, require flexibility within chosen agendas and having the capacity to reverse decisions after receipt of emerging information justifies that need. This will demonstrate both full understanding of the subject in hand and a commitment to democracy rather than standing accused of wilful blindness.

As it is not unknown for the Scottish Government to revisit initial responses, AKCC feel justified in trusting that the evidence presented in this further submission will, upon reflection, and in the national interest, attract a change of heart on the need for reviewing the current NSA numbers, their sizes and locations in Scotland. Being open to public view, such a mature decision would enhance governmental claims of openness, transparency and listening ability. A further refusal would unfortunately, serve to establish the opposite case.