

PE2089/C: Stop More National Parks in Scotland.

Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands submission, 21 August 2024

Thank you for your letter of 18 June 2024 regarding the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee's consideration of the above petition. I apologise for the delay in responding.

In your letter you have asked two questions: (i) whether we intend to carry out an independent review of existing National Parks including their economic impacts on businesses and industries within the two parks; and (ii) what action has been taken to ensure local consent for National Parks and how the Scottish Government verifies the evidence provided to it, particularly evidence about local support for new National Park proposals.

In response to the first point, there are no current plans for the Scottish Government to conduct an independent review of the two existing National Parks in Scotland. That is because National Parks are accountable to their boards and to the Scottish Government. The Scottish Parliament may also scrutinise the Parks' performance directly as it does with other public sector bodies.

National Park authorities are required to produce a five year National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) and their Corporate Plans are aligned to these. These Plans, including the aims and objectives within them, are signed off by Ministers. National Parks regularly report to their boards on performance against the aims and objectives within their Plans. National Park authority boards contain a mixture of Ministerially appointed, locally elected and local authority nominated members which adds a level of local accountability.

National Park authorities develop Annual Operating Plans once their yearly budget is known. These set out how Parks will deliver against their Corporate Plans and the NPPP. Delivery is monitored, evaluated and reviewed at regular official-level meetings between the Scottish Government and National Park authority Convenors and Chief Executives. Additionally, Park authorities are required to report on their delivery and performance through their Annual Report and Accounts which are laid before Parliament. As I mentioned in my previous letter, these are publicly available for 2022-23:

[Microsoft Word - 231218 Final Accounts 2022-23 \(cairngorms.co.uk\)](https://www.cairngorms.co.uk/Microsoft-Word-231218-Final-Accounts-2022-23)
[LLTNPA-Annual-Report-and-Accounts-2022-23.pdf \(lochlomond-trossachs.org\).](https://www.lochlomond-trossachs.org/LLTNPA-Annual-Report-and-Accounts-2022-23.pdf)

With regard to the proposal for a new National Park in Galloway I can confirm that, alongside the reporter investigation and public consultation into the proposal that will be undertaken by NatureScot, the Scottish Government is starting work on a series of impact assessments. These will include:

- a Business and Regulatory Impact Assessment (BRIA) to assess the potential costs, benefits and risks that the proposal may have on the public, private, third sector or regulators;
- a Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA) to assess the likely significant environmental effects of the proposal;
- an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) to assess the potential impacts of the proposal on the equality groups;
- a Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment (CRWIA) to assess the potential impacts of the proposal on the rights and wellbeing of children and young people; and
- a Fairer Scotland Duty assessment to assess how the proposal could potentially reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage.

These impact assessments will be evidence-based and their results will help to inform any final decision on whether a new National Park should be designated in Galloway. We will give the reports of each impact assessment careful consideration, alongside the report that NatureScot will provide following its investigation and public consultation. As I said when I announced the proposal, if there is to be a new National Park in Galloway, it must take account of local circumstances and help meet the needs of local communities.

Turning to your second question, NatureScot – as the Reporter - will now conduct an investigation into the proposal which will include extensive stakeholder engagement and public consultation. We want to hear people's views on whether Galloway should become Scotland's next National Park. NatureScot will engage with communities, businesses, public bodies and interested parties including representatives working within the agriculture, forestry and other land-based sectors given their importance within the area.

As we have outlined in the [National Park Proposal](#), the consultation should be participatory, inclusive and equality-focused. It should ensure that people living and working in the area have an opportunity to discuss the issues, consider the content of the proposal including the desirability of a National Park in the area and suggest any alternatives.

Any online consultation tools will of course need to be used with suitable care by the reporter to ensure responses are legitimate and to identify multiple responses by individuals or groups. In addition to online consultation methods, we anticipate the following elements to form part of this engagement and consultation work:

- A consultation paper seeking written responses on key elements of the proposals;
- A summary consultation leaflet seeking views on the key elements of the proposals distributed to all households in the proposed area;
- A series of independently facilitated public meetings and drop-in surgeries;
- Events and surveys for businesses and land management groups;
- Specific initiatives for young people and under-represented groups; and
- An independent evaluation of the effectiveness of the consultation process.

NatureScot will submit their findings to the Scottish Government by 28 April next year and the reporter's report will be laid in Parliament. If we decide to proceed with the National Park proposal – with or without modification – secondary legislation will then need to be developed, consulted on and approved by Parliament in order to designate the proposed new National Park.

I hope that I have addressed the Committee's questions and I apologise again for the delay in responding.

Yours sincerely,

Mairi Gougeon

Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands