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The Scottish Parliament
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29 May 2025

Dear Edward,

New National Park Decision

This afternoon in Parliament, I set out in a statement that the Scottish Government has decided not to proceed with the designation of a new National Park in South West Scotland.

As you are aware, NatureScot – in its role as the statutory Reporter – carried out an investigation into the proposal which included a 14 week public consultation process.

Over five thousand surveys were completed and more than one thousand people attended events that were held across Galloway and South and East Ayrshire. Sector-led consultation meetings took place with representatives from the farming, forestry, tourism, renewables and conservation sectors. NatureScot also held meetings with the three local authorities and with community councils.

NatureScot analysed the findings of the consultation and provided advice and recommendations to the Scottish Government on 5 May. These have been set out in a report which has today been laid before Parliament and published on the Scottish Government's website: [National Parks - Landscape and outdoor access - gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-parks-landscape-and-outdoor-access/pages/2.aspx).

The report sets out that, of those who engaged with the consultation, 54% of responses opposed the National Park proposal and 42% of responses supported it. The majority of consultation responses – 77%, were completed by people living and working in Galloway and Ayrshire. Taking account of local responses alone, 57% opposed the proposal while 40% were supportive. The report notes that support was greatest among environment, recreation and tourism sectors, whilst landowners, land managers and those working in the farming, forestry and renewable energy sectors had the strongest reservations.

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Based on the evidence gathered during the investigation and the findings of the public consultation, the Reporter's advice is that the proposal does not have sufficient clarity, nor has it garnered sufficient local support to proceed to the next stage of designation.

The Scottish Government has listened to the views expressed by local communities, organisations and businesses. We have carefully considered the advice and recommendations of the Reporter. We have weighed up the arguments for and against the creation of a new National Park in the area, taking account of the potential economic, social and environmental factors, and we have come to the conclusion not to proceed with the designation of a National Park in Galloway and Ayrshire.

The consultation has raised some really important issues that people in Galloway and Ayrshire care deeply about. As I said in my statement today, what is important going forward is that we take note of the issues, concerns and opportunities that have been raised and that we place a renewed focus on delivering for the people of South West Scotland.

As I am sure you will agree, there are very strong foundations to build upon, with strong regional partnerships and structures already in place. In addition to the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere, there is the regional land use partnership and framework, the Natural Capital Innovation Zone and the responsible tourism strategy, all of which are supported by the region's economic partnership and South of Scotland Enterprise.

In its report, NatureScot has put forward some recommendations for ways in which these existing arrangements could be further strengthened. SoSE has also suggested an alternative approach, drawing on the unique assets and existing structures in the South of Scotland. We now need to take the time to reflect and give these suggestions deeper consideration.

And in the meantime, the Scottish Government remains firmly committed to working in partnership with local communities and organisations across the southwest of Scotland to reduce carbon emissions, enhance and restore nature, bring forward investment and deliver growth and jobs that enable the area and its people to flourish

MAIRI GOUGEON

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