

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition PE2089: Stop More National Parks in Scotland

The petitioner is calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to:

- Suspend any action to create further National Parks in Scotland.
- Instruct an independent review on the operation of the current National Parks, including assessment of the economic impacts on businesses & industries within the two parks including, but not exclusive to, farming, forestry, crofting and angling.
- Conduct a consultation with representatives of rural businesses & Community Councils in order to help to frame the remit of said independent review.

Background – proposals and process for designating a new National Park in Scotland

- The Scottish Government has [committed to designating a new National Park in this Parliamentary term](#). In May 2022, The Scottish Government [consulted on a draft nominations and appraisal framework](#) which sought views amongst other things on the role that National Parks can play in restoring nature, tackling climate change, promoting sustainable land use and supporting public and community wellbeing. Following this, NatureScot was asked to provide detailed advice to the Scottish Government following a stakeholder engagement process. This was provided in February 2023.
- The [Strategic Environmental Assessment \(SEA\) on The Future of National Parks in Scotland was published in September 2023](#) and states that “These consultations have shown that many people want to see new National Parks in Scotland. They also highlighted the important leadership role of National Parks in tackling the interlinked crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, whilst also welcoming visitors and supporting local communities and businesses”.
- Formal nominations were invited on 12 October 2023 with a deadline of 29 February 2024. The Scottish Government [announced that five nominations were made and will be appraised](#) – for the Scottish Borders, Galloway, Lochaber, Loch Awe and Tay Forest.

- The [Scottish Government has set out the process for approval of a new National Park](#). It states:

“any new National Park should be designated in response to local community demand. It should also support progressive development, address the climate emergency in the way we use our land and improve public and community wellbeing”.

“Nominations for new National Parks will be appraised in spring 2024. If at least one nomination is selected to become a new National Park, a statutory process will then begin. A reporter will be appointed to lead an investigation and consultation on the National Park proposal and to produce a report. This report will be published and laid before Parliament.”

- The Scottish Government [Appraisal Framework Guidance](#) sets out further detail. For example, it sets out strategic aims for new National Parks which include contributing to green skills and jobs, nature restoration, nature-friendly farming and climate action. Assessment criteria are set out across a range of areas. In relation to tourism pressures for example, one of the assessment criteria is that “Proposals clearly demonstrate potential of a National Park designation to support sustainable tourism that contributes to net zero, nature positive society, improves community wellbeing and delivers shared prosperity”.

Background – existing National Parks and underpinning legislation

- There are two National Parks in Scotland; Lomond & The Trossachs National Park was established in 2002 and Cairngorms National Park was established in 2003. A [brief history of their creation can be found on the NatureScot website](#). Scottish Natural Heritage (now known as NatureScot) [provided advice on the creation of these two National Parks and how they should operate in 1999](#) following a review, including a brief review of international experience.
- The statutory aims of National Parks in Scotland are set out in [section 1 of the National Parks \(Scotland\) Act 2000](#) and are:
 - (a) to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area,
 - (b) to promote sustainable use of the natural resources of the area,
 - (c) to promote understanding and enjoyment (including enjoyment in the form of recreation) of the special qualities of the area by the public, and
 - (d) to promote sustainable economic and social development of the area’s communities.

Section 9(6) of the 2000 Act states that, if it appears to the National Park authority that there is a conflict between the National Park aims, the authority must give greater weight to the first aim (to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area).

- The [NatureScot website sets out detailed information on the governance and powers of National Parks](#). Each National Park has a National Park authority, which are executive non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) reporting to Scottish Ministers, and are responsible for writing a national park partnership plan. They have powers to further the Park's aims through for example: entering into management agreements, making bylaws and management rules, providing grants, advice and assistance, buying and managing land, making access arrangements and providing information, education and ranger services. Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority is also responsible for deciding all [planning applications](#) in the National Park area. The [planning system](#) in the Cairngorms National Park is managed by the Cairngorms National Park Authority and the five local authorities which operate in the National Park, with the Park Authority 'calling in' and deciding those applications which are big or important to the National Park.
- The 2023 Scottish Government consultation [on Scotland's Strategic Framework for Biodiversity](#) included proposals to amend the above 2000 Act to "strengthen the leadership role of National Parks in tackling the interlinked crises of climate and biodiversity". Detailed proposals are set out in the consultation (pp78-88).
- NatureScot [has a webpage on 'The Value of National Parks in Scotland' which includes information about impacts of National Parks across a range of areas. It states:](#)

"Our National Parks support thriving local economies, manage millions of visitors and protect the natural environment for the benefit of current and future generations. They play a significant role in generating and leveraging investment, creating new employment opportunities and bringing communities together to address local priorities".

Stakeholder views on a new National Park

- The Scottish Campaign for National Parks is a Scottish charity campaigning for the designation of new National Parks (including specific campaigns for new National Parks in the Scottish Borders and in Galloway). It has published a number of reports including a 2013 review of the potential benefits of new National Parks (updated in 2018), and more recently, reports looking in more detail at proposals in specific areas e.g. in 2019 the charity published a commissioned report on [the potential socioeconomic impacts of a new National Park for Galloway](#).
- The National Farmers Union Scotland (NFUS) [published a blog in October 2023 raising concerns about a new National Park](#), noting mixed views from its Members, and called on a new National Park to "prioritise agriculture

and food production”. More recently, [in February 2024 NFUS set out its opposition to a new National Park based on a consultation with its Members](#), stating concerns that a new National Park could “increase bureaucracy and stifle growth, innovation and development”, increase access-related issues, reduce housing availability for the local population and prioritise tourism and visitor access over farming.

- The Lochaber submission was coordinated by [the Lochaber National Park Working Group \(LNPWG\)](#) and [the full submission can be found online](#). The submission sets out how a new National Park in the area could support rural communities and sustainable tourism and align with national goals such as net zero. The bid has also [faced local opposition from the campaign group Lochaber National Park – No more](#) (the petitioner) with [some media reports describing the nomination process as having been a divisive issue](#) for rural communities.
- Other nominations have generated some local debate with groups and bodies taking a range of positions. [In the Scottish Borders, councillors voted in December 2023 not to support the nomination](#). East Ayrshire councillors [voted in February 2024 in support of the creation of a National Park in Galloway](#) citing the potential opportunities for neighbouring communities and community development.

Scottish Parliament action

- The creation of a new National Park [was discussed briefly with stakeholders in the Net Zero and Transport \(NZET\) Committee on 9 January 2024](#) as part of a broader evidence session on the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and draft Delivery Plan.

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The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

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