



Scottish Council for National Parks

**IUCN**  
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**Honorary President**  
John Foster CBE FRSGS

**Chairman**  
Robert G Maund BSc Dip TP FRTPI (rtd)

The Barony  
2 Glebe Road  
Kilbirnie  
Ayrshire KA25 6HX

Tel. 01505 682447  
email rgmaund@thebarony.demon.co.uk

Scottish Charity no. SC 31008

CEH consultation  
Natural Environment Research Council  
Polaris House  
Swindon  
SN2 1EU

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Dear Sirs

### **THE FUTURE OF THE CENTRE FOR ECOLOGY & HYDROLOGY.**

The Executive Committee of SCNP has discussed the proposed restructuring of CEH and welcomes the opportunity to respond.

The Scottish Council for National Parks (SCNP) was formed originally in 1943 and operated until 1967, when it was stood down as a result of the setting up of the Countryside Commission for Scotland. It was reconstituted in 1990 following the publication of the CCS's report on the 'Mountain Areas of Scotland' for Government, which recommended the creation of National Parks in Scotland. The SCNP's primary aim is to promote the protection, enhancement and enjoyment of nationally outstanding areas that are National Parks, or are appropriate to be designated as such, or are of sufficient merit to warrant special protection. This is manifest in our support for good stewardship of the country's best environmental assets and encouragement of sustainable methods of development, particularly within areas of national park potential. SCNP is a recognised Scottish Charity.

We should make it clear from the outset that we regard CEH as a very valuable resource of national significance. In particular, we regard the Banchory Centre as a vital resource in Scotland, one which has justifiably earned a national and international reputation for the quality of its output. Its location on the edge of the Cairngorms National Park has given the opportunity to carry out research on the sensitive area that the Park was established to protect and continues to inform and benefit the future planning and management of the Park.

The intention to reduce CEH staff from 600 to 400 shows a complete lack of joined up thinking at a time when the Prime Minister has said that climate change and issues of sustainability are the biggest and most important problems facing mankind. We should be investing more, not less, in this scientific work. In his letter inviting responses, Professor Thorpe assured everyone that should the proposals go forward, CEH will do all it can to maintain business as usual during the transition period. Anyone who has been through a reorganisation on this scale will know that this is meaningless nonsense. However committed and professional staff are, the logistics of moving locations, homes and families and the threat of being one of the 200 who are to lose their jobs, will damage morale, produce lack of continuity and inevitably reduce the output and quality of what the organization was



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set up to achieve.

Scotland is already faced with the disruption and loss of environmental skill that is coming about with the move of Scottish Natural Heritage to Inverness. The management of SNH is currently grappling with severe staff losses and giving urgent consideration to the prioritization of work, acknowledging that they will not be able to maintain their usual level of service in the short to medium term.

It is ironic that at a time when Scottish Ministers have decided for policy reasons (however mistakenly) to move SNH out of Edinburgh to bring new jobs and investment to the Highlands, NERC is proposing to move jobs and investment out of the Highlands and concentrate their efforts in Scotland, in Edinburgh. More joined up thinking?

It would appear as though NERC is being forced into this reorganisation of CEH by the actions of government Ministers and decisions already taken on levels of funding. Lord Sainsbury is on record as saying that much more of the work will now be done by Universities. Whilst this may or may not come about, we should not destroy or dramatically reduce our scientific capability but have a planned co-ordinated transfer if, after open and rational consideration, it is decided that the future efforts in this work would be better placed with Universities. This morning's *Scotsman* shows otherwise and suggests Scottish Universities in particular are going to be struggling for funds to maintain core functions in the face of rising staff costs. At present we have a UK wide institution of proven excellence with the ability to consider priorities for research across the country. We can ill afford to lose such a capability.

If, as it appears, NERC is having its funding reduced or curtailed and in response is proposing to cut back CEH, the Council should not allow Ministers to shelter behind it but should say openly what is happening so that the public can respond to a real consultation rather than one where the parameters have already been decided.

SCNP wishes to express its serious concern at the proposed reorganization and in particular at the proposed closure of the Banchory Centre which would be particularly damaging to our efforts here in Scotland.

Yours faithfully,

Chairman.