



Spring 2007

SCNP is a non-political organization but inevitably is affected by politics. At the time of writing, subject to any legal challenges, the elections are over and we have a minority government running the parliamentary show. It is clearly going to take time for things to settle down and for us to learn what impact there will be on our hopes for further national parks and, in particular, the possible delay to any coastal and marine national park for which we have such high hopes.

In the main Party manifestos,

Labour said they would '*establish Scotland's first marine and coastline national park, and consider whether any further land areas merit designation for national park status.*'

The Lib-Dems would '*build on the wide support, in principle, for a coastal and marine national park.*'

The Greens said they would '*extend the Cairngorms National Park boundary and establish Scotland's first marine national park.*'

The Conservatives said nothing about national parks.

The Scottish National Party, which secured the largest number of seats in the new parliament, said nothing about national parks in its manifesto. This is perhaps, particularly disappointing because their former leader, John Swinney, had promoted a bill in the last parliament to change the Cairngorms boundary to include the Perth Highlands as recommended by SNH.

As there is to be a minority government, it is to be hoped that proposals for further national parks, land based or coastal and marine, do not become the meat in the political sandwich as opposition and government jockey for position. The need to provide the best possible management for Scotland's finest landscapes and most sensitive habitats, is far too important for that to be allowed to happen.

Robert Maund
Chairman

A plaque for Brian.

On 10 April, there was a small ceremony at Milarrochy Bay on Loch Lomondside to celebrate the life of Brian Parnell, our former Hon. Secretary, Vice-chairman and Chairman and to recognize the

important contribution he made to securing national parks in Scotland. The gathering was addressed by John Foster, Hon. President. Nine members of Brian's immediate family were present together with Lady Isabel Glasgow, our former Chair and now a member of the Park Board, Bill Dalrymple, Chief Executive of the Park Authority and members of the SCNP Executive. The Park Authority did us proud by providing, adjoining the Rangers Centre, a high quality bench into which the stainless steel plaque is inlaid.

Clyde Muirsheil Regional Park.

We were very pleased to learn in March that SNH had confirmed the Renfrewshire Heights SSSI. We hoped this would bode well for the final decision on the proposed Special Protection Area. For reasons which are difficult to fathom, the issue is still with Scottish Ministers and, with all that must be done forming a new government, it seems unlikely that it will be a high priority to reach a decision.

Coupled with this threatened set-back, **SPP6:Renewable Energy** was published in its final form in March. It seems apparent that those wanting a plan-led approach have lost out to the developer-led proponents. For every encouraging reference to good planning there is a caveat and escape clauses which will be seen by the wind energy industry as an encouragement to press on if a scheme is financially profitable. There seems to be virtually nowhere that could be said categorically to be safe from windfarm developments, notwithstanding what is in development plans.

Another disturbing aspect of the last administration's way of handling its responsibilities on windfarm applications is illustrated by the Corlic Hill application in the Regional Park in Inverclyde. The application was made under the Electricity Acts to Scottish Ministers and opposed by Inverclyde Council. This triggered a Public Local Inquiry which closed in April 2005. The Reporter's findings were, we understand, given to Ministers in September 2005. 20 months on and nothing has been heard other than a parliamentary answer acknowledging that if Ministers reached a decision based on material not produced at the Inquiry, then the Inquiry would have to be re-opened. It seems inconceivable that if, as we suspect, the Reporter recommended refusal and Ministers agreed, a decision would not have been made by now. So what were they up to which justifies such a delay?

It is interesting that Kenneth Gibson (SNP), who defeated Allan Wilson (former Minister for turbines) in Cunninghame North, has pledged his support for the campaign to prevent the industrialisation of the Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park by wind turbine developments.

Loch Lomond and the Trossachs NP.

In December last year, the Park Authority submitted the National Park Plan to Scottish Ministers for approval and this was subsequently received in March this year.

In addition, the bye-laws which had been so controversial, were approved at a similar time with a clear indication that the impacts should be monitored and the situation re-visited in 3 years. The issues of the use of the loch by sea-planes and jet-skis, therefore, remain unresolved. The longer they are established, the more difficult it will be to address the problem in the future. Peace and tranquility are vital components of any national park – here they remain in jeopardy.

The next major push will be on the Local Plan for the Park. The intention is to have the Issues Report out by the end of this year, consultation in mid 2008 and approval by the end of 2008.

Cairngorms National Park.

The Cairngorms Park Authority's National Park Plan, submitted to Scottish Ministers in December last was approved in March. The Local Plan now comes centre stage and could reach adoption by October 2008

One issue which could have impinged on both the National Park Plan and the Local Plan, was the bill put forward to the last Parliament to extend the Park boundary to include the Perth Highlands thus restoring the boundary to that originally proposed, after much thought, by SNH. In giving evidence to committee before the session on the Bill in parliament, the Park Authority seems to have taken a neutral, administrative approach to MSPs questions, emphasizing that they were doing what they were set up to do and not expressing a view on the merits or otherwise of the proposal. The Bill has now disappeared from view and it seems very unlikely that the issue can be reconsidered now before the quinquennial review next year. In SCNP's view, there was a strong case for putting a reasoned professional response to MSPs which accepted SNH's original reasoning for the wider boundary whilst drawing attention to the consequences in terms of funding and staffing.

The Public Inquiry into the Beauldy-Denny overhead powerline proposal is now well under way. The John Muir Trust, the Ramblers Association Scotland, the National Trust for

Scotland, the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland, the Scottish Wild Land Group, and the Mountaineering Council for Scotland under the title the Beauldy-Denny Landscape Group are opposing the proposal.

Coastal and Marine National Parks.

The elections for the parliament in on 3 May impacted on rational consideration of the Coastal and Marine National Parks consultation. The then Minister, Ross Finnie, was making gloomy noises about the strength of feeling against the idea and saying it may all have to be reconsidered. This vociferous opposition has come from the fishing interests who fear more restrictions on their activities, the crofting community who seem to be concerned about impact on their way of life and Highlands and Islands Enterprise (who are essentially a government funded agency). HIE seem to think that having a national park will impose higher standards of development which the economy of the area cannot cope with.

The reality is different. The outcome of the public consultation has been published and is much more positive with over 70% of responses being in support. It is just unfortunate that in the run up to an election, the media concentrates on dissenting voices and negative criticism even though they are not representative of the wider view of the majority. Nothing will be decided for some time now and much will depend on whether the new government has the will to take the idea forward.

AGM: 20 April 2007.

At the AGM, Bill McDermott became Vice-chairman in succession to Duncan Campbell. Duncan has stepped down after 10 years sterling work on the Executive, for which we are very grateful. Attendance at the AGM was modest but the talks afterwards by James Fraser and Prof. Callum Roberts were very rewarding. Professor Roberts' warnings on what we are doing to the oceans and marine life, should be required reading for all MSPs.

Executive Committee.

Since the Winter Newsletter, the Executive has met on 15 February, 13 March 2007 and 15 May with a further meetings scheduled for 19 June and 24 July.

Responses to E-mail survey.

Thanks to everyone who replied to the survey, and particularly to those who agreed to receive material by e-mail in future. The next Newsletter after this will be distributed by e-mail to those who agreed to it. Additional e-mail subscribers are always welcome!

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