



Summer 2007

Pursuing a Strategy for National Parks across Scotland.

In 2004, SCNP issued a paper calling for the preparation of a strategy for future national parks. Whilst consultation with interested parties elicited support in principle, the only body with a remit to take action is the Scottish Executive and no action has been forthcoming.

Because of the way the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 was drawn up as enabling legislation for action by Scottish Ministers, future national parks could well be dependent on decisions based on political advantage rather than environmental necessity.

SCNP has now decided that we must act to generate community support in those areas worthy of national park status whilst at the same time drawing on the support of the major environmental organizations in Scotland.

The need for a strategy.

It is a matter of profound irony that a country whose landscapes, on any measure, would rank amongst the best in the world in scenic value, and which produced John Muir, father of the national park movement, has been so slow to realise its own potential.

National park status is the highest environmental accolade nationally and internationally. National parks have been under consideration in Scotland since at least 1879 when James Bryce began a campaign in Parliament. In more recent times, the Ramsay Report of 1945 recommended 5 national parks and 3 reserve areas. In 1990, the Countryside Commission for Scotland recommended 4 national parks consistent with the Ramsay Report. With the passing of the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 the way was clear for the first national parks in Scotland, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs in 2002 and the Cairngorms in 2003.

The first two parks were virtually self selecting because increased accessibility and growing visitor pressures without a management regime to address environmentally sustainable development issues, was threatening fragile habitats and wonderful landscapes.

To follow on from those important first steps however, requires a re-examination of the earlier work to see to what extent it is still valid and the adoption of consistent criteria to decide which areas need to be included in future parks. Only by adopting a clear, understandable and consistent approach, will the public have confidence in the case being made and lend their support.

What has changed since the Ramsay Report?

The 5 national park areas and 3 reserve areas in the Ramsay Report remain valid today. They were:

Proposed National Parks:

- Loch Lomond and the Trossachs;
- The Cairngorms;
- Loch Torridon, Loch Maree, Little Loch Broom;
- Ben Nevis, Glencoe, Black Mount;
- Glen Affric, Glen Cannich, Strath Farrar.

Reserve Areas:

- Moidart, Morar, Knoydart;
- Ben Lawers, Glen Lyon, Schiehallion;
- St. Mary's Loch.

It is likely, however, that applying consistent criteria based on current appreciation of landscapes and habitats, will lead to a significant increase in the size of areas to be designated. This has already happened with Loch Lomond and the Trossachs and the Cairngorms National Parks.

In addition, the Flow Country over which there has been significant and insensitive afforestation in recent years, has been recognised as a major environmental resource because of the extensive blanket bog. Many scientists consider this to be as significant in carbon capture terms as the tropical rain forests. It now has NNR status. This together with other archaeological and built heritage issues suggest that the Flow Country is also worthy of consideration for national park designation.

Consideration should also be given to Dumfries and Galloway recognising the merits of the Galloway Forest and Mountains together with the Solway Firth Coast. It is not without significance that there is a groundswell of support for national park status coming from groups within that community.

Finally, ideas for coastal and marine national parks reflect a major shift in appreciation since the

Ramsay Report and must be taken into account in any strategy and form part of a package of proposals for early implementation.

How do we make it happen?

In order to carry out such a programme of work, we will have to raise funds to be able to employ staff. Our own fund-raising efforts have met with modest success and we decided to seek the help of a professional fundraiser. After advertising, shortlisting and interviewing, a preferred fundraiser was found. A successful application has been made to 'Awards for All' for sessional consultancy fees (£2550) which will cover the risk element of a fundraising campaign should our fundraiser be unsuccessful. The money sought (of the order of £150,000) would be to fund a three year project to establish public support for a rolling programme of future national parks based on a consistent strategy.

The project would have three major components:

- A series of educational and information talks to community councils, environmental groups, interested parties (eg fishermen, farmers, estate holders etc) which would demonstrate the need to protect the areas involved and how doing this in an holistic, sustainable way, can bring benefits for the whole community in terms of employment, a growing economy through green tourism etc. Talks would give information on the need for more national parks in Scotland, the opportunities this could create and international experience where taking a strategic long term view has brought the kind of benefits that should be available in Scotland.
- Meetings with government at local level in the affected areas, government departments, Scottish Ministers, Scottish Natural Heritage.
- Meetings with Scottish Environment Link, National Trust for Scotland, RSPB etc to generate support from the most influential and knowledgeable players.

Desired Outcome.

The aim, at the end of three years, will be to have achieved a significant degree of public support for:

- **a national park strategy for Scotland.**

From this, there could follow:

- a national park for Ben Nevis, Glencoe, Black Mount;
- a national park in Galloway;
- a coastal and marine national park on the West Coast.

Creating this significant degree of support will give the government of the day confidence to proceed in Scotland's wider interest and hopefully allow rational decision taking on this important issue. It should help to ensure that future national parks come about for sound environmental reasons free from political opportunism.

Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park.

The fight to save the Regional Park from industrialisation through windfarm development received a significant boost recently when the Corlic Hill windfarm was finally refused by Scottish Ministers nearly two years after they received the Reporter's recommendations. This degree of procrastination should never be allowed to happen again and efforts through Freedom of Information, to make sure that it doesn't, are likely to continue.

Loch Lomond and the Trossachs NP.

On 17 August, Bill Dalrymple stepped down as Chief Executive of Scotland's first national park after five busy, sometimes hectic, years. In that time much has been achieved including the approval of the National Park Plan and the commencement of the new Park Headquarters in Balloch. SCNP will always be grateful to Bill for making the time in a busy schedule to meet with us on a regular basis and for the open and frank way he discussed the problems and opportunities facing the authority. Those who have had the pleasure of meeting and working with Bill will know that he cares passionately about the Park and its people and approached the task with great commitment and integrity. We wish him well in whatever he decides to do in the future.

Cairngorms National Park.

The legal challenge to the Beaully/Denny overhead power line through the park has failed and clearance to proceed with the public inquiry has been given.

Coastal and Marine National Parks.

Plans for our first coastal and marine national park have been put on hold by the Environment Cabinet Secretary, Richard Lochhead. He first wishes to resolve a wide range of marine management problems through a new Bill.

Executive Committee.

Since the Spring Newsletter, the Executive has met on 19 June and 24 July. There is no meeting in August and a further meeting is scheduled for 4 September.

SCNP The Barony, 2 Glebe Road, Kilbirnie, KA25 6HX.
Tel: 01505 682447

E-mail info@scnp.org.uk

website <http://www.scnp.org.uk>