



## Winter 2008/2009

### A Happy New Year to you all.

I was very disappointed at the apparent lack of commitment to the whole idea of national parks shown by the recent stage 1 Quinquennial Review. In the introduction, Michael Russell the Minister is quoted as saying,

*“At the outset, I want to say with enthusiasm how exceptionally important our national parks are to Scotland. Indeed, their iconic landscapes put Scotland on the international stage.*

*The parks demonstrate sustainable solutions for rural development and environmental protection, and contribute to the Government's greener Scotland and other objectives.*

*In the five years since the parks were established, they have made good progress.”*

That sounds like good news, but in all that follows, the ‘if’ word colours everything. *‘If, in the future, consideration were given to the designation of further national parks....’ ‘....and if, in the future, there were to be further National Parks,....’*

The Review was to be in two stages with stage 2 considering such important issues as boundary changes and potential new National Parks. Michael Russell had also asked his civil servants to make sure that the role of Regional Parks was examined as part of stage 2. Stage 2 has been cancelled!

On the one hand, government is saying with enthusiasm how exceptionally important our national parks are to Scotland whilst at the same time offering no commitment by saying there will be more. As an eminent QC said at a public inquiry I was involved in some years ago when he deliberately and memorably mixed his metaphors, accusing the powers that be of ‘speaking with forked hands’. Let us hope I am mistaken, but do I hear the dulcet tones of Sir Humphrey in the drafting?

Scotland has the potential and the opportunity to make a significant contribution to conservation by establishing a whole range of national parks, marine, coastal and land based, of international significance. Remember that national opinion polls showed that more than 90% of the public at large supported having national parks in Scotland. In the national interest, let's get on with it!

**Robert Maund**  
Chairman

### National Parks Review.

The Autumn Newsletter came out just before the publication of the Stage 1 report and we confidently spoke about how Stage 2 was to proceed. Nothing can be taken for granted however, and when Stage 1 was published it became clear that there was not to be a Stage 2. Government is confident that it has enough information from Stage 1 to make Stage 2 unnecessary.

Stage 1 cannot be regarded as a strategic review which will guide us on the need for further national parks and too much of the report is bound up with the minutiae of administration, the size of the Board, who employs the staff, how the existing parks can share information and services etc. To change some of these things will require alterations to the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 and will absorb massive amounts of time, energy and money. Whilst that is going on, there will be uncertainty within the two existing parks and progress on the more fundamental issues of a strategic approach to future national parks and a programme of implementation, is likely to stay on hold.

Government is rightly keen to take the views of local communities into account before proceeding with further national parks. However, these views need to be balanced with the national interest. Approached sensitively, it would become clear that achievement of the national interest can bring enormous benefits to local communities. The Stage 1 report suggests the setting up of a National Strategy Group chaired by the Minister. As proposed, however, it could centralize power and exclude local communities and the non-governmental organizations. This does not seem a wise way to proceed and we are looking at ways in which to propose modifications so that any strategy group has proper terms of reference and has people on it who would provide sound professional advice rather than political fixes of the kind that so damaged the initial designation of the Cairngorms.

### Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park.

The main issues for Loch Lomond and the Trossachs remain the local plan on which responses are required by the end of February and the quality of some recent development control decisions which seem at odds with the laudable pronouncements in the plan. There is still a steep learning curve before we get the quality of decision making necessary to give national parks a genuinely environmentally sustainable future.

### **Cairngorms National Parks.**

On 12 December, SCNP called a meeting in the LINK offices in Perth to discuss the proposal to build a new settlement and commercial development near Aviemore. The meeting's aim was to draw the attention of other environmental bodies to a scheme which in our view could be extremely damaging and totally inappropriate in a national park.

The development of 1,500 houses within a National Scenic Area to the East of the River Spey at Aviemore is a major development issue for the national park authority. The thrust of the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000, which majored on sustainability, was to give the prime importance to conservation of heritage where there is conflict with development. Such a proposition should only be considered when there are aspects of national importance which must be taken into account and no other suitable areas external to the national park are available. This is the prime test which should be applied to development in national parks, but what other tests should be applied to this scheme?

They are the questions of need, of sustainable development and environmental sustainability.

The National Park Authority has set forth a list of principles or more accurately, aspirations which it sees as preconditions for any planning application to be successful. These are predicated on a self-contained community living within an environmentally friendly context of alternative energy and low carbon footprint, in harmony with neighbouring Aviemore. Such aspirations are possibly achievable for small scale developments, but with 1,500 houses, perhaps containing 3,000 to 5,000 people, An Camas Mor would be bigger than the existing settlement of Aviemore (population less than 2,500) and could not avoid major pressure on the surrounding natural heritage. This question of scale is exacerbated by the fact that the site area is actually smaller than Aviemore itself.

It is thought that a planning application could be lodged in February and the danger is that it will be dealt with in advance of the public local inquiry into the park local plan. This in our view would be quite the wrong way of dealing with an issue of such significance. Discussions are on-going.

### **Possible Harris National Park.**

In September 2008, SCNP and others responded to a request for views on a possible national park based round Harris (see report on our web site.).The final report taking all views into account, produced by consultants, has been circulated within the local community and the

study group is intending to hold a postal ballot on the issue in February. The report is the view of the consultants and opinions within the Study Group are understood to diverge slightly on some issues. The Group will make its own distinct recommendation to the community ahead of the ballot.

### **Saving Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park.**

North Ayrshire Council has recently refused unanimously the Millour Hill windfarm application. The decision demonstrates their growing determination that the Regional Park should not have any further wind turbines within its boundaries.

### **SCNP Fundraising for "the Project".**

A further contribution of £1000 has been offered to our joint project with APRS by the N. Smith Charitable Settlement bringing the funding raised and promised very close to £20,000. By the time you read this, our stage 2 application to the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation will have been submitted and as always, we remain buoyantly optimistic. As part of our stage 2 application, support has been canvassed from other environmental groups with an interest in national parks, together with recreational groups and some with a more economic interest.

### **Annual General Meeting 2009.**

Please remember the 2009 AGM to be held on Friday 17 April 2009 at the Smith Art Gallery and Museum in Stirling. Our guest speaker is Michael Dower. Let us have a good turnout as it promises to be a very interesting and stimulating occasion.

### **Consultations.**

*National Parks Review  
Loch Lomond and the Trossachs Local Plan  
Cairngorms Boundary*

### **Executive Committee.**

Our Executive continues to be strengthened by the addition of new members. Following James Fraser joining, we have co-opted Ross Anderson, a retired landscape architect, a founding partner of the ASH consultancy. On retirement, Ross and his wife Janet ran a high quality bed and breakfast and self catering concern and his experience of the tourism business in Scotland is considerable. Ross also has experience as a former board member of the Yorkshire Dales NPA. His contribution to SCNP's work should be invaluable and we welcome him to the team.

Since the Autumn Newsletter, the Executive has met on 13 January and 10 February. A further meeting is scheduled for 10 March 2009.

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