



CEO Report

Agenda Item 7

National Park Authority Board Meeting

9 June 2025

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1. Purpose

1.1. To provide updates on significant developments affecting the strategic context in which the National Park Authority operates as well as progress on the strategic areas of work not already reported elsewhere on the Board agenda.

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. Board Members are asked to note the contents of this report for information.

3. Scottish Government Update

3.1. **Natural Environment Bill:** As reported at the March Board meeting, the Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill, has been introduced to the Scottish Parliament by the Scottish Ministers. As part of the Stage 1 scrutiny, the Bill is being examined by the Rural Affairs and Islands (RAI) Committee. This stage focuses on the general principles of the Bill and includes evidence-gathering, calls for public views, and a report from the committee to Parliament. The Committee has taken evidence from

various stakeholders, including Scottish Government officials, National Park Authorities, eNGOs, representative organisations and local authorities. The Bill proposes broadening the purposes of National Parks to include stronger emphasis on supporting biodiversity, nature recovery, and addressing the climate crisis.

- 3.2. To recap, The Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill, introduces several key changes to protect and enhance Scotland's natural environment. The bill includes provisions for setting statutory targets for biodiversity improvement, modifying environmental impact assessment and habitats regulations, updates National Park aims and powers, and measures to improve deer management. Notably the Bill mandates that the Scottish Government establish legally binding targets for improving biodiversity covering the condition and extent of habitats, the status of threatened species, and environmental conditions for nature regeneration. The specific targets will be set through secondary legislation with a framework for monitoring and review. On National Parks the Bill makes minor updating changes to the statutory aims, with additional explanatory provisions, strengthens the responsibilities of other public bodies to have regard to the aims and to enable the delivery of National Park Partnership Plans. The bill also proposes that National Park authorities be given powers to issue fixed penalty notices for defined breaches of byelaws.
- 3.3. The Rural Affairs and Islands Committee held an evidence session attended by the CEOs of both National Park Authorities and a representative from Argyll and Bute Council. The session was wide ranging and provided the opportunity to talk at length about the work of National Parks and how the provisions of the Bill will assist in the delivery of our National Park Partnership Plans.
- 3.4. The next stage is for the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee to produce a report on the Bill's general principles. There will then be a Stage 1 debate and vote in Parliament where MSPs will debate and vote on the general principles of the Bill. If the principles are not agreed, the Bill cannot proceed. Stages 2 and 3 will be where amendments to the Bill can be proposed and voted on and this could include amendments to the National Parks proposals. These stages will be monitored and any implications of such changes will be brought to the attention of Board members.
- 3.5. Following publication of the Bill the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs Land Reform and Islands, Mairi Gougeon wrote to both National Park Conveners offering a meeting and this was held on 15th May. The meeting provided an opportunity to discuss how the provisions of the Bill

can support the delivery of National Park Partnership Plan outcomes. Specifically it was highlighted;

- How can NPs can be flagships for delivering the provisions of the Bill in practice
- The need to integrate delivery with progressive agri-env reform and land reform measures
- The need for effective incentives for land managers as well as regulation to deliver deer management outcomes (and this is work that we are developing with NatureScot in the Park)
- We can continue to offer our experience and insights to the Scottish Government on these matters.

4. Proposed New National Park

4.1. Members will recall that following a call for bids and a bid assessment process, the Scottish Government decided that its preferred bid was for a new National Park in Galloway. Following this, NatureScot was commissioned to investigate and report on the proposal. NatureScot conducted a formal consultation with a wide range of stakeholders in the area from November 7, 2024, to February 14, 2025, including holding a significant number of public events and meetings. The consultation focused on the proposed area, potential functions, powers, and governance of the National Park, aiming to determine what type of park would best suit Galloway. The consultation led to significant campaigns both for and against a National Park and officers provided support to NatureScot colleagues to clarify many questions about the work of the existing National Parks as well as to correct misinformation. It is understood that NatureScot has now submitted its advice to Scottish Ministers based on this consultation. A Ministerial announcement is to be made in the Scottish Parliament on 29th May in respect of whether Ministers wish to proceed with designating a new National Park for Galloway and, if it is to proceed to the next stage, what form the proposals might take. A verbal update on Scottish Ministers' decision will be provided for Members at the Board meeting.

5. Local Development Plan

5.1. Members will be aware that an update on the timescales and milestones for preparing our new Local Development Plan were published at the start of April. This was set out in our updated Development Plan Scheme available on our [website](#).

- 5.2. The first milestone in the preparation of the new Plan is the compilation of an Evidence Report. This is the gathering of a baseline of relevant policy, strategy, data and information. Draft key sections of the Evidence Report have been completed and placed on the website. Engagement on these drafts is targeted to stakeholders, to help to identify gaps, but it is open to all to review and comment. In person stakeholder workshops are under way at the time of issuing Board reports which are intended to explain the process to prepare a Local Development Plan and take stakeholders through the information to assist engagement at this and future stages. Further information and all the draft reports can be accessed [here](#).
- 5.3. The period of engagement will conclude in the first week in July and officers will then work to finalise the Evidence Report for the Board's consideration and approval to submit to the Scottish Government for an assessment known as a 'Gatecheck' later in the year.

6. Visitor Season so far

- 6.1. We've seen an extremely busy start to the season with the excellent recent weather, with our popular sites coming under considerable visitor pressure. Despite maintaining high levels of visitor management resourcing this year, our teams have been stretched and working in challenging circumstances. In particular the latter half of May has seen a return of high levels of irresponsible parking, litter and antisocial behaviour issues due to the sheer volumes of people and cars. We have also seen a number of fire incidents due to the irresponsible use of disposable barbecues which have burnt down litter infrastructure and caused a wildfire at SWT Glen Finglas. We have been working closely with partners through our National Park Visitor Management Group as well as with colleagues in Police Scotland through Operation Ballaton to coordinate and focus efforts. We will be co-ordinating a focused partnership discussion in the coming weeks to ensure all partners can perform their key roles should we see another spell of extended good weather.
- 6.2. The good weather has also resulted in our permit areas and campsites at, or very near capacity on Friday and Saturdays. This includes the Salloch site which where we are piloting a new management system with partners at Forestry and Land Scotland.
- 6.3. Our communication campaign messaging has focused on discouraging irresponsible behaviour and highlighting how to visit responsibly. As always staying safe is a big message with water safety & wildfire messaging being shared and re-enforced by staff on the ground.

7. Update on Loch Lomond Byelaws

- 7.1. A comprehensive communications campaign to raise awareness of the new byelaws seems to be well received and we were delighted to launch the new Loch Lomond Registration Service in time for the season. Members will remember that a significant change is that individuals now need to register if they will be in charge of a motorised vessel as opposed to the previous system which only required the registration of motorised vessels. At the time of writing over 2500 new accounts have been activated on our new system and we have also seen over 2900 vessels registered this year as opposed to under 2700 at the same stage of 2024.
- 7.2. Good weather has probably driven the increase in the registrations which has undoubtedly stretched our resources at Duncan Mills Slipway however largely we are delighted with public reactions to the new system and improvements are being witnessed week on week by our excellent staff supporting registrations and launching. The Registration Gateway has worked well for processing launches and as most customers turning up now are registered and have got launch passes (or at the advice of the team, they log into their accounts and buy online while in the launching queue), the system can run relatively smoothly and is demonstrating efficiencies even at this early adoption stage.
- 7.3. The team have also been working hard to ensure that the new buoyage which demarcates the new 6kph slow-speed zones are in place. The key zones of Balloch, Duck Bay, Luss and Milarrochy are now marked and although busy we are seeing good levels of understanding and compliance around these areas.

8. Trossachs Explorer Shuttle Bus Pilot 2025

- 8.1. Following procurement, we were delighted to receive three proposals from two operators for a second-year pilot of the Trossachs Explorer. The scoring panel identified McColls, based in the Vale of Leven, as the winning bidder. Their proposal included a full price breakdown, understanding of last year's evaluation, and a clear interest in the wider transport vision for the Park.
- 8.2. The Trossachs Explorer will operate for a period of 13 weeks between Monday 7th July and Sunday 5th October 2025. Although continuing to connect Callander with Aberfoyle, the route will extend to Drymen and run up to 7 return journeys a day. This will connect with onward transport to Alexandria/Balloch train stations (via 309), Glasgow (via X10), Stirling (via 59) and Killin (via C60) as well as Loch Katrine cruises. There will be two buses operating the route with capacity for 18 seated passengers. A

30-seater bus will be on standby to improve reliability and boost capacity on peak days.

Executive Sponsor/Author: Gordon Watson, CEO