

CEO Report

Agenda Item 8

National Park Authority Board Meeting

14 September 2026

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1. Purpose

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)

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

3. Scottish Government Update

3.1. The Scottish Government announced the **Programme for Government 2026-31** (PfG) on 1 September 2026. Notably instead of the usual 1 year programme this is intended to cover the entire period of the current parliamentary session, setting out strategic commitments and a

legislative agenda. It continues to place climate action, nature recovery and environmental resilience as one of four central priorities of the Government over the next 5 years. The approach to combine tackling the twin nature and climate crises with economic growth, resilience and community benefit chimes strongly with the direction set out in our current National Park Partnership Plan 2024-29. This means that much of our current work already contributes strongly to the direction being set out in the new PfG. Key commitments on carbon reduction, climate adaptation, biodiversity restoration, land use reform and environmental governance change. The PfG also sets out the Scottish Government's strengthened commitment to pursuing Public Sector Reform and key proposals affecting the National Park are set out in the next section of this report.

- 3.2. PfG commitments and priorities of note include;
- 3.3. Increasing woodland creation to 18,000 hectares annually by 2029-30, with at least 40% native woodland.
- 3.4. Reaching 21% woodland cover by 2032.
- 3.5. Restoring 400,000 hectares of degraded peatland by 2040.
- 3.6. Review and delivery of a strengthened Wildfire Strategic Action Plan.
- 3.7. Implementing the Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2026.
- 3.8. Delivering Scotland's Biodiversity Strategy.
- 3.9. Continuing and expanding the Nature Restoration Fund.
- 3.10. Supporting large-scale peatland restoration.
- 3.11. Continuing the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund
- 3.12. Committing to delivering 110,000 affordable homes by 2032, with at least 10% in rural and island communities.
- 3.13. The £2 bus fare cap is to be extended to the SPT area from 7 September 2026 which covers the west of the National Park.

3.14. Following the Scottish Parliament elections, there has been a wide range of engagement during the summer providing opportunities for new and returning MSPs wishing to visit and learn more about the importance and contribution of the National Park Authority's work. This included a visit from Mark Ruskell MSP, newly appointed Chair of the Scottish Parliament Rural Affairs Committee, to Loch Katrine, travelling there via the Trossachs Explorer bus service now operated by Stirling Council. Following on from the visit from Andy Kerr Scottish Government Director General for Net Zero in May, we have also hosted a visit from the recently appointed Director for Environment and Forestry, Kersti Berge to familiarise her with our work and current priorities. Preparations are also being made to receive Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs, Gillian Martin MSP and Minister for Agriculture Marine and the Islands, Jim Fairlie MSP in the coming weeks.

3.15. Members will recall that the Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2026 was passed by the Scottish Parliament earlier this year and received Royal Assent on 12th March. Much of the Act represents an enabling framework with much detail still to be delivered through secondary legislation which will be progressed in the new parliamentary term. The changes to the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 in terms of amended aims, strengthened duties on public bodies to have regard to the statutory aims and facilitate the delivery of National Park Plans and changes to the designation process for any new National Parks are brought into effect by the 2026 Act with a commencement date expected in October.

3.16. There are four main workstreams that will implement other areas of the Act;

3.17. Statutory Biodiversity Targets

- 3.18. Strengthened Biodiversity Duties on Public Bodies
- 3.19. Deer Management Reform – expanding NatureScot’s powers to intervene on damaging deer management
- 3.20. National Park Reform
- 3.21. In relation to the National Parks workstream, the Act requires Scottish Ministers to publish a National Parks Policy Statement every 10 years setting out the vision, priorities and intended outcomes for Scotland’s. The workstream is expected to set out the timetable and process for preparing this statement. The Act also enables Scottish Ministers to introduce regulations allowing National Park Authorities to issue fixed penalty notices for breaches of byelaws. A specific statutory instrument will have to be drafted and consulted on which sets out how such a power will work in practice. A detailed timeline is not yet available, but it is expected that this will be completed and approved during 2027. Once the SSI provisions are clarified the National Park Authority will need to decide how it wishes to use this power in relation to the Loch Lomond and Camping Byelaws.
- 3.22. In terms of the overall package of secondary legislation, the Scottish Government is still preparing an overall timetable but has published and implementation update which provides an overall roadmap.

4. Scottish Government Public Service Reform Update

- 4.1. It has been well trailed that Public Sector Reform would be a key priority for the new Scottish Government, and this was particularly signalled by the appointment of Ivan McKee MSP as Cabinet Secretary for Public Sector Reform. As part of this programme it has been stated that structural change would be required and there was a desire to reduce the number of public bodies operating in Scotland. A number of

significant announcements have been made across the public sector, notably reducing 14 Health Boards to two.

4.2. Most significant for our work is the commitment being made to create a new unified national environment body, taking on the functions of SEPA, NatureScot, Zero Waste Scotland, and potentially parts of Scottish Forestry.

4.3. The Cabinet Secretary has stated that bringing these bodies together into a single, modern organisation over the next two or three years is about building a more joined-up and preventative approach. The new organisation is intended to have the scale and expertise to tackle climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution more efficiently and effectively, and to accelerate the gains from a more circular economy. This is stated as an ambitious long-term reform that will build on the strengths of the existing bodies, including the passion, professionalism and considerable expertise of the staff at each of these organisations.

4.4. There will require to be legislation to enable the transfer of statutory functions to the new organisation and a Bill is expected to be introduced to the Scottish Parliament during 2027 with the intention of the new (yet to be named) organisation coming into operation by 2029.

4.5. Much of the detail is still to be worked through but has been made clear at this stage that there are no plans to include the National Park Authorities, Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, Forestry & Land Scotland or Environmental Standards Scotland in the new body.

4.6. Although the National Park Authorities are not directly affected by the proposed structural changes, we will still need to demonstrate meaningful progress against the Public Service Reform agenda. Our current approach puts us in a strong position, with its emphasis on

convening partnerships, place-based delivery, prevention, and outcomes-focused performance. We are already applying this approach to major societal challenges, including nature restoration, climate adaptation, sustainable tourism, and community resilience.

4.7. The Executive team are already working on presenting more strategically what contribution we are making, and can make, to PSR and we will be presenting this to the Board along with our Mid-Term Financial Plan in due course. At the same time we will work to ensure that partnership working with public bodies affected by structural change continues and adapts as the transition to a new body progresses.

5. Camping Management Byelaw Update

The camping management byelaw review public consultation was launched as planned on 29th July. There has been a good level of engagement across print and digital platforms and at time of writing we have received 324 responses to the consultation with around 4 weeks left to go till the close of the consultation period. Our independent facilitators have delivered 2 public engagement sessions at Loch Achray Campsite and Balmaha Visitor Centre which has helped raise awareness and ensure visitors to the National Park are engaged as well as local and national stakeholders. A third online session was held to engage communities, stakeholders and partners with a Q & A session and update on progress so far.

The read out of the consultation so far shows some interesting insights, good engagement levels and general support for the proposals. The work done by our communications team in providing tagged links through our promotional emails and materials have provided insights into which engagement methods are most successful and which groups are most receptive in providing consultation responses.

Once the consultation closes on the 21 September external consultants will provide a final report on consultation findings. This report, alongside final recommendations, will come to the board for decision in December before amended byelaws are submitted early in 2027 seeking Scottish Ministers' approval.

The project team are also planning for phase 2 of the project if Ministers are content to approve. This will focus on implementation, training needs analysis, procedural reviews and communications and awareness raising campaign planning. The proposed changes around irresponsible fire lighting are expected to be the main change requiring public awareness raising.

Executive Sponsor / Author: Gordon Watson