

## CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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**Title: GAELIC LANGUAGE - INTERIM POLICY**

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### **Purpose**

This paper seeks the Board's approval to prepare a Gaelic Language Plan in due course and for an interim policy statement in relation to the CNPA's view on Gaelic language. It also seeks the Board's approval to form a Gaelic Advisory Panel to provide technical guidance, as and when required.

### **Recommendations**

Members are invited to -

- agree that it would be appropriate for the Authority to produce a Gaelic Language Plan in due course and that the following should be used as an interim policy statement, pending the development of such a Plan -  

‘The CNPA recognises the Gaelic language as a living part of Scottish life and an important aspect of the Park’s cultural heritage. We will therefore seek to use the Gaelic language, as appropriate, to reflect the area’s cultural heritage and to further the aims of the National Park. In due course, through the development of a Gaelic Language Plan in association with Bòrd na Gàidhlig, the Authority will more fully articulate ways in which Gaelic will be used in connection with its work. For the time being, the use of Gaelic will be considered on a case by case basis for each element of the programme of activity set out in the Authority’s Corporate Plan’;
- provide a steer to the Park Gateways Working Group to adopt a dual language approach on entry point signage;
- approve the establishment of a Gaelic Advisory Panel to provide specialist guidance on Gaelic issues.

### **Executive Summary**

In due course, the Authority will develop its approach to the use of Gaelic language (and broader aspects of Gaelic culture), as is consistent with the first aim for the Park - ‘to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area’, and the third aim - ‘to promote understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the area by the public’. This thinking will be informed by the Authority’s Cultural Heritage Strategy, which is currently being developed, and we will seek the guidance and assistance of the Gaelic development agency Bòrd na Gàidhlig as necessary. In accordance with the forthcoming Gaelic Language Bill, it would seem sensible that the Authority’s policy approach should subsequently be articulated in a Gaelic Language Plan. However, there are some pressing reasons to establish an early view on the use of Gaelic language, for example to give a steer to the work of the Gateways Working Group. This paper therefore proposes an interim position for the Authority to adopt in relation to use of the Gaelic language.

## GAELIC LANGUAGE - INTERIM POLICY

### Background

1. The Census from 2001 indicated that, across Scotland, there were 58,652 people able to speak Gaelic, 65,674 able to speak, read or write Gaelic and 92,396 able to speak, read, write or understand Gaelic. The 2001 Census also demonstrated that Gaelic decline has slowed down and has almost halved from the decline of the previous decade of 1981 to 1991.
2. Within the Cairngorms National Park there are clear variations in the proportion of the local population who can speak Gaelic, with Badenoch and Strathspey being the area where it is most prevalent. This is borne out by the fact that 3.6% of people within Badenoch & Strathspey can speak Gaelic, while the figures for those parts of the Park that lie within Moray and Aberdeenshire are 1.6% and 1.1% respectively. It is also notable that the Gaelic of the National Park is distinct from that of other parts of Scotland and, indeed, that there are localised distinctions within the area.
3. Of course the issue of Gaelic does not just relate to the number of people who can speak, read, write and understand Gaelic. It is equally relevant to the broader culture and landscape of the Park, as is perhaps most strongly evidenced by the prevalence of Gaelic place names throughout the area.

### Strategic Context

4. Use of the Gaelic language is an issue that has relevance to all four of the Park's aims. In particular, given that it has an important role to play within the broader Gaelic culture, it can be argued that the Park should create an environment that actively supports the language, in line with its first aim - 'To conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area'. This is an issue which will need to be addressed via the Cultural Heritage Strategy, which is currently being developed as part of the Park Plan. It is worth remembering, though, that the Park Authority has already recognised the importance of Gaelic, as is evidenced by the use of the Park's Gaelic name alongside the Park Authority's logo.
5. At a national level, the policy thrust is very much towards the creation of a more supportive environment for the Gaelic language and culture. The Gaelic Language Bill, which it is intended will be put before the Scottish Parliament in the summer, will confer specific statutory powers upon Bòrd na Gàidhlig, an NDPB established in March 2003 to promote the use and understanding of Gaelic and to prepare a national Gaelic Language Plan. The Bill will also place a duty on public bodies to consider a need for Gaelic language plans in relation to the services they offer. Given the Authority's role with regards cultural heritage, it is suggested that it would be sensible to prepare such a Gaelic Language Plan in due course, once the Gaelic Language Bill has been passed. Such a Plan, which would apply to *the Authority* only, would need to be framed within the context of the Cultural Heritage Strategy and the Park Plan which would set out the broader *Park* policy approach to Gaelic.

## Interim Policy Statement

6. In the interim period, before the Authority develops its policy with regards the Gaelic language, there is a need to set out a general sense of direction on the issue. For example, the Park Gateways Working Group are considering the issue of dual English/Gaelic signage but are keen that any decision that is taken should not be construed as being the Authority's general policy approach to the Gaelic language. It is therefore proposed that an interim policy statement be made, which is positive in relation to the Gaelic language but which allows people working on programmes/projects to consider its use in each specific context. The following statement is suggested -

‘The CNPA recognises the Gaelic language as a living part of Scottish life and an important aspect of the Park’s cultural heritage. We will therefore seek to use the Gaelic language, as appropriate, to reflect the area’s cultural heritage and to further the aims of the National Park. In due course, through the development of a Gaelic Language Plan in association with Bòrd na Gàidhlig, the Authority will more fully articulate ways in which Gaelic will be used in connection with its work. For the time being, the use of Gaelic will be considered on a case by case basis for each element of the programme of activity set out in the Authority’s Corporate Plan’.

## Practical Considerations

7. In practice, a ‘case by case basis’ means that Gaelic language issues in relation to specific projects should be considered both by the individual or group that is developing the project and by whoever has the financial authority to approve the project. For example, in the case of the Park Gateways Working Group, the final project will require Board approval and so it would therefore be sensible for the Board to provide a steer on whether dual language signage would be appropriate (with the caveat that this would in no way indicate the Board’s view on the use of Gaelic in Park signage more generally).
8. There will be projects or policy issues where specific Gaelic language expertise will be essential. For instance, a project proposal relating to the English interpretation of Gaelic place names within the Park is currently under discussion. It is therefore recommended that the Board agree to the establishment of a Gaelic Advisory Panel, comprising of key external experts, who would provide guidance and advice, as necessary.
9. It must also be recognised that there are other local linguistic traditions, particularly Doric in the eastern parts of the Park. The Park Authority should, of course, be aware of the area’s cultural history, and also be sensitive to local views and traditions in applying any Gaelic policy. The development of the Cultural Heritage Strategy will provide the opportunity to explore these broader cultural influences in more detail.

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7 May 2004

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