

## CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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### FOR DECISION

**Title: REVIEW OF LAND MANAGEMENT FORUM,  
FARMERS FORUM AND CAIRNGORMS DEER  
ADVISORY GROUP**

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Experience**

#### **Purpose**

At the Board meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2015, the Board asked staff to review the operation of the Land Management Forum, Farmers' Forum and Cairngorms Deer Advisory Group.

#### **Strategic Context**

We have reviewed the operation of these three forums in order to ensure:

- Effective engagement with the land management sector;
- Relevance to current issues and policy priorities;
- Proportionate use of support and administration resource;

#### **Recommendations**

- a) To change the current operation of the land management forum, its functions to be replaced through a) ongoing land manager engagement and b) land management training programme;**
  - b) To change the current Farmers' Forum into a Cairngorms Farming Network utilising existing farming groups operating in different parts of the Park;**
  - c) To continue to support the Cairngorms Deer Advisory Group, broaden its remit to upland management and update the topics on which CNPA seeks advice from the group.**
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## REVIEW OF LAND MANAGEMENT FORUM, FARMERS FORUM AND CAIRNGORMS DEER ADVISORY GROUP – FOR DECISION

### Cairngorms Land Management Forum

#### **Purpose**

1. The Land Management Forum was initiated by CNPA and latterly has been organised jointly with *Scottish Land and Estates*. The purpose of the forum has been to bring together a wide range of people to share knowledge, information and experience on land management and inform relevant policy. The intention has been to help land based businesses work alongside agencies and NGOs, develop new ideas and opportunities for the benefit of the National Park.

#### **Current operation**

2. The Land Management Forum has in the past met two or three times a year. Each meeting would have a focus on a topical theme but allow for time for CNPA and others to update on other issues. There has never been a set membership of the forum; invitations to meetings have always been open and targeted according to the relevant topic.

#### **Proposal**

3. Over recent years our direct engagement with land owners and land managers has increased, as has the number of initiatives engaging groups of land management interests. For example, current engagement includes landowners meetings, training seminars and joint representation in catchment partnerships, fisheries boards, deer management groups, forestry forums and Cairngorms Nature. There are therefore many other opportunities for seeking advice and input from the land management sector.
4. There will remain a value in bringing together relevant expertise around particular topics, but rather than maintaining a stand-alone Land Management Forum, we propose to deliver the same function through events run as part of a refreshed land management training programme. As well as topic themed events this should include at least once a year an opportunity to present and discuss an overview of priorities, delivery and current issues, for example in an annual seminar format.

### Cairngorms Farmers' Forum

#### **Purpose**

5. The Cairngorms Farmers' Forum was set up in 2009 for farmers and crofters in the National Park to discuss issues relevant to farming in the Park and engage with CNPA.

The aims of the Farmers' Forum are to help farming and crofting businesses in the National Park, to share and compare business experiences, to develop new ideas and opportunities, to get practical advice and to learn from site and exchange visits. We aim to ensure that all farmers and crofters in the Park have an accessible point of contact with CNPA and are able to find out about relevant policy and initiatives.

### **Current operation**

6. Like the Land Management Forum, the Farmers' Forum has never had a fixed membership, but is open to all with an interest specifically in topics relating to farming and crofting. Forum meetings have been held across the National Park but have tended to be better attended in Strathspey. The format is usually a talk by a guest speaker on a topical issue before engaging in an open question and answer session with the forum. Topics discussed in recent meetings have included: CAP reform, diversification, market trends and the vision for Scottish Agriculture. Despite topics being current and of importance to farming and meetings promoted through partner organisations, email, newsletters, local papers and social media, attendance has been sporadic and occasionally very low.

### **Proposal**

7. We propose to change the focus of the Farmers' Forum to a *Cairngorms Farming Network* by building on existing networks and communicating through existing farmers groups such as local NFUS, Young Farmers, SFQC, QMS groups and initiatives such as Wetlands and Waders across the National Park. This will allow us to continue to maintain and open dialogue with farmers and contribute National Park specific discussions to meetings of existing groups. This should include opportunities where farmers can help deliver priorities, such as Cairngorms Nature, and sharing information about the likely impact of wider changes on farming systems. We will use the Land Management Training Programme to deliver relevant events rather than organising these separately through a forum.
8. We are also continuing to pursue with Quality Meat Scotland the proposal for another 'Monitor Farm' in the National Park. We hope this will be confirmed soon. This has been an effective mechanism for sharing knowledge and expertise in the past and would be a very positive initiative.

## **Cairngorms Deer Advisory Group**

### **Purpose**

9. The Cairngorms Deer Advisory Group (CDAG) was set up with the support of the Association of Deer Management Groups to promote better communication and understanding between all organisations with an interest in deer and their

management in the National Park. It is named an Advisory Group because it was also intended to be a key source of advice to the Cairngorms National Park Authority on deer and their management.

### **Current operation**

10. Unlike the two Forums above, CDAG has a fixed membership drawn from Deer Management Groups, Scottish Gamekeepers Association, British Deer Society, Association of Cairngorms Community Councils, Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum, Scottish Environment LINK, Scottish Country Sports Tourism Group, Scottish Government Rural Payments and Inspectorate, Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission Scotland and CNPA.
11. CDAG originally met three times a year, but in the last three years it has met once per year.

### **Proposal**

12. Deer management remains a significant priority in the National Park and continues to have a high profile nationally, with the Scottish Government review of deer management planning scheduled for late 2016. We therefore recommend that we continue to support CDAG as it provides valuable advice to CNPA and provides an effective forum for different interests to engage and co-ordinate with each other. We recommend that the remit for the group is broadened in line with the wider expectations now clearly placed on deer management groups to support delivery of public interest outcomes such as habitat enhancement, woodland expansion and peatland restoration. To address this remit effectively we would expect CDAG to meet 2-3 times per year.
13. We therefore propose that the remit is broadened to provide advice on upland management and that CNPA specifically ask CDAG over the next three years to consider and advise on:
  - a) implications for deer management of other major initiatives (e.g. peatland restoration, woodland expansion, A9 dualling);
  - b) strategic approach to peatland restoration in the Park;
  - c) integration of woodland expansion, moorland habitat and sport objectives; and
  - d) the overall delivery of public interest outcomes through deer management.

We propose to ask CDAG to review its current membership accordingly to ensure it reflects this wider remit.

## Other communication with land managers

14. Beyond the Forums considered here there are other mechanisms in place through which CNPA will continue to work alongside land managers. Our support for Training and Skills Development will continue with financial assistance provided for bespoke training that helps land managers achieve best practice. We are refreshing the land management training programme for the next financial year and will continue to arrange training seminars and events that are specifically relevant to delivering the National Park priorities.
15. Direct communication with the wide mix of landowners, farmers, crofters, keepers, foresters, stalkers, factors, agents, sporting tenants/partners etc. will continue on a regular basis both informally and through established groups.
16. Initiatives such as the Tomintoul and Glenlivet Landscape Partnership, the East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership and the Cairngorms Peatlands project are particularly relevant. It is important that we maintain elements of practical assistance through e.g. the Peatlands Initiative and the Strathspey Wetlands and Waders Initiative.
17. Our involvement with national groups such as the Moorland Forum, Forestry Forums, Partnership Against Wildlife Crime, continue to be extremely useful for influencing and maintaining an awareness of national initiatives that are relevant to the National Park.

## Strategic Risk Management

18. Effective engagement with land managers is identified in CNPA's strategic risk register under risk C1: *Partnerships: Conservation partnerships, crucial to delivery of priorities across land owned by others, are not formed or sufficiently developed to deliver conservation priorities.*
19. Consideration of the future arrangements for these forums and wider engagement with land managers is set in the context of the mitigation action: *Prioritise investment of time in establishing and maintaining working relationships; develop clear focus on required partnerships, their purpose, objectives and resources.*
20. The proposed changes to these forums maintain effective communication mechanisms, make best use of existing networks and help CNPA focus staff time effectively with this significant group of partners.

## **Resource Implications**

21. The above proposals do not require additional staff or financial resources than currently budgeted for. It is intended that they would help to ensure more efficient use of staff resources.

## **Recommendations**

- a) To change the current operation of the land management forum, its functions to be replaced through a) ongoing land manager engagement and b) land management training programme;**
- b) To change the current Farmers' Forum into a Cairngorms Farming Network utilising existing farming groups operating in different parts of the Park;**
- c) To continue to support the Cairngorms Deer Advisory Group, broaden its remit to upland management and update the topics on which CNPA seeks advice from the group.**

**Will Boyd Wallis  
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February 2016**