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# CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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## FOR DISCUSSION

**Title:**                    **The CNPA's Role in Research**

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### **Purpose**

The purpose of this paper is to consider the role that the CNPA should play in research in the Park, to inform development of a research programme.

### **Recommendations**

That the Board consider and discuss:

1. Is this the right basis for the CNPA to be involved in research?
2. Do the roles identified fulfil the opportunity that the CNPA has to promote relevant research and its use in the Park, and meet the CNPA's own organisational needs?

### **Executive Summary**

Development of the Draft Park Plan and State of the Park Report has highlighted a number of research needs for the Park and now requires the CNPA to address its research role.

In working towards the objectives and priorities of the Draft Park Plan, the CNPA should ensure that research carried out in the Park is as relevant and useful as possible to managing the Park; and that the findings are easily accessible and understandable by all with an interest.

Four roles for the CNPA are identified:

- a) promoting the Park as a research pilot or study area
- b) co-ordinating a research agenda relevant to the Park
- c) commissioning specific research
- d) collating and disseminating research findings

Following the Board's discussion we intend to develop an ongoing research programme and investigate the feasibility of options for research collation and dissemination.

## THE CNPA'S ROLE IN RESEARCH – FOR DISCUSSION

### Background

1. This paper considers the roles that the CNPA can play in research in the Park. The forthcoming publication of the State of the Park Report in March highlights a number of areas where further research is required and the Draft Park Plan identifies the importance of research to informing management and monitoring.
2. Therefore there is a need to articulate the role that the CNPA should play in research and set out a framework to address the research needs and opportunities in the Park.

### Purposes of Research in the Park

3. Research is not an end in itself, but is needed to inform policy, management and decision-making. We have identified three key purposes for which research is needed in the Park:
  - a) Strategic Policy Development- policies for the management of the Park, both in the CNPA and in partner organisations should be based on the best available evidence and information. At this early stage of the Park's development, data and information at a Park-scale is often not available and new information is needed to help deliver the Draft Park Plan.
  - b) Informing decisions relating to statutory procedures- to fulfil the Park Authority's statutory functions, particularly relating to outdoor access and planning, there is a need to source the best available information to inform decisions.
  - c) Monitoring the State of the Park- to develop an effective suite of indicators and a monitoring programme for the Park, additional baseline and trend data is required.

### Existing CNPA Research Involvement

4. To date the CNPA has engaged with research on an ad-hoc basis to inform policy development and respond to opportunities as they arise. Much of our policy development has included research projects to provide a baseline and inform policy, for example the Outdoor Access Audit and Visitor Survey.
5. At a more strategic level, the CNPA has been involved in the following:
  - a) State of the Park Report- commissioned by the CNPA, this identifies current knowledge of resources in the Park and a number of gaps in data which can inform a future research agenda;
  - b) Spatial North- a Northern Periphery Programme project co-ordinated by the UHI Centre for Mountain Studies. This aims to identify information sources and requirements for spatial planning in the Highlands and Islands and join-up the requirements of different public sector bodies. It is designed in part to inform the Highlands and Islands forthcoming application for EU Structural Funds in 2007;
  - c) Macaulay Institute- we have held discussions with MLURI to help shape their research programme on Environment- Land-use and Rural Stewardship. This

has identified opportunities to use the Park as a study area for a number of topics.

- d) SNH- we have identified common research priorities with SNH and used the State of the Park Report and other sources to inform their research agenda in the Park for the coming year.

## **Discussion**

### **The Role of the CNPA in Research**

6. Many organisations carry out research in the Park which varies widely in its subject, its academic or applied nature, and its purposes. We should ask how best the CNPA can add value to research in the Park, to benefit the Park's long-term management.
7. The Draft Park Plan identifies several objectives relating to research, but two key objectives in the 'Learning and Understanding' section are:
  - a) *'Capture knowledge and factual information about the Park in a range of appropriate ways so that it is easily available to anyone who wants to use it and can be passed on to future generations.'*
  - b) *'Ensure that the Park is a place where both scientific and traditional forms of knowledge about the land and its management are valued and put to good use in the long-term management of the area.'*
8. These identify two aspects to guiding the CNPA's involvement in research:
  - a) Ensure research carried out in the Park is as relevant and useful to managing the Park as possible;
  - b) Ensure that the findings of research are easily accessible and understandable by all those with an interest in the Park.

### **Discussion Point: Is this the right basis for the CNPA to be involved in research?**

9. To pursue the two objectives above there are four potential roles identified for the CNPA in research:

#### ***Promoting the Park as a research pilot or study area***

10. The CNPA has a role to promote the Park as a case study area or pilot area in appropriate research and development projects. This offers opportunities to gain additional knowledge about the Park, influence the development of new ideas relevant to the aims of the Park, and to raise the profile of the Park.

#### ***Co-ordinating a research agenda relevant to the Park***

11. To help ensure a co-ordinated approach to delivering the four aims of the Park collectively, an overview of research needs and a co-ordinated programme to address these is required. The CNPA is uniquely placed to take an overview of research needs across all four of the Park's aims and to co-ordinate as best it can the timing and scope of research to maximise the value to as many interests in the Park as possible.

12. This includes influencing the research programmes of others. As well as national research councils, most public bodies undertake a research programme, some of which will be of direct relevance to the aims of the Park. The CNPA should work with other organisations to identify where research may be tailored to give best value for the Park as a whole, make links with policy and implementation, and to identify common research interests which partners can take forward.

### *Commissioning specific research*

13. From time to time, the CNPA will need to commission research to inform its own policy development or monitoring. For example, the Sustainable Tourism Strategy identifies three research priorities required to fulfil its objectives, and equivalent strategies in other fields will also identify research needs. In all cases, the potential for synergies with partner organisations should be considered, to ensure that the research gives best value for the Park as a whole.

### *Collating and disseminating research findings*

14. The potential value of research in informing management of the Park can only be realised if the information is widely available and known. The CNPA has identified the need for debate about the future management of the Park to be well-informed, and this relies on all interests having access to good information. The CNPA is well-placed to act as a ‘corporate service’ to the Park as a whole in collating and disseminating research.

### **Potential Research Partners**

15. In pursuing all four of these roles the following groups of potential partners should be considered. Each has particular strengths in their ability to collate and interpret data, carry out monitoring and make use of the findings.
  - Universities
  - Research Institutes and Councils
  - NGOs
  - Public Bodies
  - Thinktanks
  - Estates and Land Managers
  - Businesses
  - Communities
16. **Discussion Point: Do the roles identified fulfil the opportunity that the CNPA has to promote relevant research and its use in the Park and meet the CNPA’s own organisational needs?**

### **Consultation**

17. Discussions with a wide range of partners to develop the Draft Park Plan have highlighted associated research needs for future policy and management. There is

common recognition of the opportunity for CNPA to give some co-ordination and to promote a research agenda designed to inform future management of the Park. If the CNPA pursue the four roles identified above, consultation and collaboration with partners will be key to all.

## Policy Context

### Draft Park Plan

18. The Draft Park Plan highlights the need for management to be based on the best available information. Research is needed to inform our work towards many of the long-term strategic objectives and the Priorities for Action specify additional information and research that is needed in the immediate future.

### CNPA Corporate Plan

19. For the CNPA, the use of research to inform management and policy decisions underpins many of our goals as an organisation, and is particularly relevant to the following two goals of our Corporate Plan:
  - a) *Goal 5: 'plans, policies and actions developed through transparent and robust processes that engage with stakeholders'*
  - b) *Goal 6: 'justly perceived as an open, accountable and trusted organisation'*

### National Policy

20. In the national context, SEERAD has recently revised its strategy for research to focus on delivering research that is more directly related to policy and meeting the needs of the Scottish Executive and Scotland as a whole. As a result, the Main Research Providers (eg Macaulay Institute) are developing new research strategies in partnership with end-users, such as the CNPA, to get research outputs that will be useful in delivering Scotland's policy ambitions. This gives the CNPA an opportunity to help shape the research agenda (locally and nationally) to ensure useful outputs linked to real needs.
21. There is also an increasing emphasis at a national level on co-ordinating research provision and results, in order to share information and improve public debate and policy making. The Scottish Higher Education Funding Council is currently funding the UHI Millennium Institute to investigate the feasibility of establishing a Scottish Academy of Rural Policy to join-up information and expertise in rural policy.

### Delivering Sustainability

22. The integration required for sustainable management relies on access to the best-available information. The development of a co-ordinated research programme in the Park is part of a long-term approach to ensuring that future needs and impacts are considered and that the relevant information is sourced.

### Delivering a Park for All

23. While there may be some particular research needs to help develop policy or management that delivers a Park for All, the main opportunity is to ensure that research and information about the Park is easily available and accessible to all.

### **Delivering Economy, Effectiveness and Efficiency**

24. A co-ordinated research programme is a vital part of delivering policy and management within the public sector that is economic, effective and efficient. There are many organisations which carry out research tailored to their own remits and agendas, and co-ordination at a Park level could bring added value and greater efficiency.

### **Implications**

#### **Financial Implications**

25. The current Operational Plan makes provision for £50,000 in 2007/08 to address strategic research needs and there is provision in group budgets for specific research projects already identified. There will be a requirement for staff time across the CNPA to manage research projects and time to provide the co-ordination, develop the research programme and manage dissemination. The financial implications of the collation and dissemination options will be investigated as part of the work to follow this paper.

#### **Presentational Implications**

26. There are no presentational issues arising beyond raising awareness of our intentions to develop our role in research, and how this will be linked with other organisations, the Park Plan, other policies and monitoring programmes.

#### **Implications for Stakeholders**

27. We are already in touch with some of the key stakeholders and have started work to co-ordinate research needs and programmes. This contact will develop as the CNPA sets out in more detail a research programme for the Park, through discussion with the stakeholders. It also provides an opportunity for stakeholders to influence the research agenda of the Park and work with others to get best value from the research undertaken.

### **Next Steps**

28. Informed by the discussion of the Board on the proposed roles for CNPA set out above, we intend to develop a rolling programme of research using the State of the Park Report and Draft Park Plan as a starting point, through discussions with partners.
29. We also intend to investigate options for research collation and dissemination including opportunities for web-based resources, publications and library facilities (virtual or hard-copy).

30. An update on the research programme and collation/dissemination options will be brought to the Board during 2007, informed by the completed Park Plan process.

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