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The Consultation Process

2-1 Before we could prepare this report, SNH was required to consult widely with individuals and organisations within and outwith the area of the proposed National Park. This section of the report describes how we undertook this task; it summarises the comments we received about how we carried out this exercise; and it presents a preliminary evaluation of its effectiveness.

Background

2-2 In planning the consultation programme, we worked closely with a number of organisations and individuals who had been brought together through the Cairngorms Partnership. We aimed to learn from previous consultation exercises in the Cairngorms, notably the earlier general consultation on National Parks in Scotland, which we undertook on behalf of Scottish Executive in the area in 1998. In addition we followed advice on good practice on consultation produced by the Cabinet Office and the Scottish Executive.

Main elements

2-3 Shortly after Ministers issued the proposal for the National Park in September 2000, we sent copies to all local authorities whose area fell within the proposed Park. Copies were also sent to all community councils in this area and to partners in the Cairngorms Partnership.

2-4 The formal consultation period commenced on 11 December 2000. At that time, copies of SNH's consultation document were sent to around 2000 organisations and individuals throughout Scotland, and a programme of media promotion commenced. Responses were requested by 13 April 2001 but, due to the outbreak of foot and mouth disease, the deadline for responses was extended until 30 April. Responses received after the deadline were also considered. The consultation period lasted for some 20 weeks, including the Christmas and New Year holidays, and was therefore considerably longer than the 12 week minimum specified in the Act. The range of information specifically developed for the consultation exercise is outlined in the panel.

Consultation information

Main consultation document

The main consultation document was based on Ministers' proposal for the area. It provided background information on Scottish National Parks and described the main issues on which views were sought. Copies of the consultation document were distributed directly to community councils and associations, local authorities, individuals, special interest groups and to others who had been involved in previous local consultations. Multiple copies were made available to many groups and organisations throughout the consultation period.

Summary consultation leaflet

The leaflet provided a brief summary of the main consultation document and a tear-off response-form to encourage participation. Around 30,000 copies of the leaflet were distributed to all households within and immediately around the general area proposed for the National Park. In addition, 9,000 copies were distributed through cafes, theatres and other public venues throughout Scotland. Copies of the leaflet were displayed at all consultation events, in local offices of public bodies and other public venues. Copies were made available on request to specific interest groups, including the Cairngorms Chamber of Commerce and the Cairngorms Campaign, to encourage active involvement of their membership. The text from the leaflets was also made available in Gaelic.

Twenty questions leaflet

The leaflet was designed to address questions that had been posed by young people in the Cairngorms area during the 1998 discussions about the National Park. The leaflet was written in accessible language, and tackled simple questions about National Parks in a straightforward and concise manner. It was distributed by post to everyone who requested the main consultation document, and made available at all meetings and events.

Information packs on National Parks in Scotland

A series of information sheets was prepared to provide general information on National Parks. The topics covered included: *Common Questions about National Parks; Issues and Opportunities; How to be Involved; Key Steps in Establishing a National*

Park; Guide to the National Park (Scotland) Act 2000; Implications for Land Managers; and a Brief History of National Park Proposals in Scotland. The information packs were available free on request from SNH and the text was also available on the SNH web-site.

Static displays and posters

Information display panels were developed for use at public meetings and open events. They were also on display, with a selection of publications, in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Perth and Dundee. The displays were loaned to some community groups on request, to enhance their consultation efforts at a local level. These information displays included a map of the proposed area, plus a summary of the proposal and other relevant information from the main consultation document and information sheets. Information posters were also prepared for use by ranger services in visitor centres, for community facilitators, and for schools throughout the Cairngorms area. Colour posters were printed and distributed to shops, libraries and public venues throughout Scotland, to raise awareness of the proposed National Park and the opportunity to contribute to the debate. Special posters with blank spaces for local advertising of events were made available to community councils and associations and to other groups.

SNH web-site (www.snh.org.uk)

A section of the SNH web-site provided information on the National Park proposals in the Cairngorms, including the text and maps from the consultation document, the information sheets and details of the open meetings. The site was updated during the consultation period.

Think-net discussion web-site (www.think-net.org)

SNH worked in partnership with The Highland Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and BT Scotland to promote an on-line discussion about National Parks. The discussion began in September 2000 and approximately 10,000 hits were recorded every month with an average of around 65 visitors a day going beyond the home page. Some 220 contributions were made over the course of the debate. During March, SNH helped to organise a conference in Elgin to bring the contributors together face-to-face. The event was attended by over 70 people. A report on the views emerging from the on-line discussion and workshops at the event was submitted to SNH.

2-5 In planning the consultation exercise, we recognised that there had been a number of consultation exercises in recent years over the future of the area. We aimed to work in partnership with the community councils and associations in the area to find the best possible ways of tapping into local opinion. We also wished to build the capacity of the communities to take an active and positive role in shaping the future of their area. The councils and other representative bodies in and immediately adjacent to the area were given the opportunity to manage the local consultation exercise themselves, using locally appointed facilitators, with training and expenses provided by SNH. In total, 20 of the 28 community councils and associations chose to manage the consultation in this way, using a total of 25 local facilitators. SNH helped organise two special training events for community facilitators to cover aspects of the National Park and appropriate consultation methods and also provided a range of materials for facilitators such as maps and information packs. The communities organised a wide variety of events which were appropriate to their local needs, including:

- community-led consultation exercises (20)
- open meetings (19)
- awareness raising events (4)
- area-based focus groups (29)
- interest-based focus groups (10)
- meetings with existing groups (23)
- telephone survey (1)
- drop-in events (6)
- individual interview programmes (4)
- displays/exhibitions (2)
- questionnaire surveys (7)

2-6 In addition, in each of the remaining community council areas where the community did not wish to manage their own programmes of consultation, SNH organised independently-facilitated, open meetings. These meetings were complemented by a series of five one-day, drop-in events and five evening meetings, which were held around the periphery of the area.

2-7 We also put in considerable effort to ensure the maximum possible involvement from individuals and organisations throughout Scotland. The programme included the following actions and events.

- Widespread distribution of the main consultation document and summary leaflet throughout Scotland.
- A series of public open meetings were held in Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness and Perth where discussion was stimulated and recorded by professional, independent facilitators. These meetings attracted around 150 participants in total. Information displays and publications were available in Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Perth for one week, around the time of the open meetings.
- A series of meetings were held with local authorities, interest groups and public agencies on request. SNH was able to meet all such requests during the consultation period, involving a total of 1830 people in around 80 meetings.
- Adverts were placed in the local and national press announcing the launch of the consultation period and details of local meetings and events.
- A telephone help-desk was established in the SNH office in Aberdeen, manned during office hours, to answer questions and respond to requests for further consultation materials.
- The summary document was translated into Gaelic and we explored the use of the Gaelic-speaking media to raise interest in the consultation. The Gaelic summary was made available on request and through the SNH and Think-net web-sites.
- Information about the consultation exercise was made available for the visually impaired.
- A media strategy was prepared and used to stimulate press interest throughout the period. We monitored the extent of press coverage about the National Park and consultation exercise and the results are shown in Table 2-1.

Table 2-1: Recorded media coverage of the proposed Cairngorms National Park during the consultation period

Media Type	No. of Articles/Items	Examples
National Press	9	The Herald, The Scotsman, Scottish Daily Express, Press and Journal, Scotland on Sunday.
Local Press	74	Strathspey & Badenoch Herald, Deeside Piper & Herald, Inverness Courier, Perthshire Advertiser, Forfar Dispatch, Dundee Courier and Advertiser.
Radio	9	BBC Radio Scotland, Heartland Radio, Radio Tay, Speyside Radio.
Television	2	Grampian TV, BBC Scotland.
Magazine	7	Business AM, Metro Scotland, Scots Magazine, Heritage Scotland, Woods For All, Positive Impact.
Other	4	The Marr Area Partnership, Glenlivet Estate Newsletter, Comment (Highland Perthshire Community Newsletter), The Claik (Cairngorms Partnership).
Total:	105	

2-8 Special efforts were made to find out the views of young people in Scotland.

- Secondary schools throughout the Cairngorms area were given the opportunity to take part in a number of awareness-raising and capacity-building workshops about National Parks. These workshops were organised in association with Cairngorms Partnership and run in seven schools, involving around 250 pupils. The visits raised awareness about the proposals for a National Park and sought views on Ministers' proposals.
- Several of the community-led consultation exercises made special provision to involve children or younger people by, for example, visiting schools, organising local poster competitions, or by attending Parent and Teacher Association meetings where contact with young families was possible.
- A conference for Scottish University and College students from throughout Scotland was planned in association with a group of specially trained postgraduate students from Aberdeen University's Department of Geography. Unfortunately this event was cancelled at short notice due to the outbreak of foot and mouth disease. However, a replacement event for Aberdeen University students was held in March 2001, involving more than 40 students.
- In April, two special consultation events were planned as part of an International Student Environment Conference 2001 involving some 65 students from throughout Europe. A presentation was given on the Cairngorms area, followed by a discussion workshop a few days later, where participants gave their opinions on some of the key issues.
- A group of young people from the Cairngorms Youth Group, who had been working on the National Park issue since 1998, prepared a Youth Manifesto with assistance from the Cairngorms Partnership. The Manifesto set out the main issues for young people in terms of what they are seeking from the designation, and how they would like to be involved in the running of the Park. The Manifesto was widely circulated in the area as a basis for discussion and was presented to Ministers.

- Visits were made on request to Dundee University and Elmwood College, Cupar, involving over 30 students. The students took part in discussion seminars which generated either a report or individual responses.

2-9 A number of organisations worked in partnership with SNH to stimulate interest in the consultation exercise and encourage active involvement. For example, in Aberdeen we worked together with the Royal Scottish Geographical Society and with the Cairngorm Club to organise two special meetings for their members and other interested parties. SNH staff attended the meetings to provide information and to answer questions, while participants were encouraged to respond in writing. The Cairngorms Partnership's Community Council Group produced and circulated a manifesto to clarify what the community representatives in the area expect from the National Park.

2-10 SNH was approached by the Highland Perthshire Community Partnership, an umbrella body for community councils in the area, who were aware of local concerns about the potential impact of being sandwiched between two potentially large National Parks. We agreed to fund a special programme of community-led consultation, which resulted in a report being submitted. SNH also made a commitment for a further study of the implications of National Parks for adjacent areas.

Participation in the consultation exercise

2-11 SNH received 397 full written responses and a further 452 responses using the summary leaflet form. A full breakdown of these written responses, analysed by stakeholder group and by geographic origin, is provided in Annex C. The number of written responses compared very favourably with other recent similar consultation exercises (Table 2-2)

Table 2-2: An indication of the level of participation compared to recent consultation exercises

Consultation exercise	Lead Organisation	Date	Number of written responses received
Draft Cairngorms Management Strategy	Cairngorms Partnership	1996	216
National Parks for Scotland	Scottish Natural Heritage	1998/1999	451
Proposed National Park for Loch Lomond and The Trossachs	Scottish Natural Heritage	2000/2001	550
Proposed Cairngorms National Park	Scottish Natural Heritage	2000/2001	Letters: 397 Summary leaflet forms: 452 Total written responses: 849

Table 2-3: Estimate of the number of people participating in consultation meetings and other events

Type of meeting and event	Estimates of number of people participating
Community-led consultation exercise	1600
Peripheral meetings and other local community meetings organised by SNH	180
City meetings	150
Other meetings and events, including the youth programme	1000
Estimated total	2930

2-12 Responses were received from a wide range of representative groups, some of whom had made considerable efforts to consult with their members before replying. In addition, several of the Cairngorms Partnership's Peer Groups responded, including the Recreation Forum, the Agricultural Forum, the Housing Forum and the Scottish Landowners' Federation Cairngorms Liaison Group.

2-13 We received reports from all 20 community councils and associations within the area who chose to manage the consultation exercise themselves. Written reports were submitted on behalf of all remaining community councils by professional facilitators following local meetings. Fifteen community councils and associations also chose to submit written responses.

2-14 A great many people participated directly in the consultation process by attending meetings and events. An estimate of the numbers involved

is shown in Table 2-3. A significantly greater number were involved than in the previous consultation, with over 2900 people attending a total of 143 meetings and other events, compared to 700 people at 28 events in 1998.

Assessment of the effectiveness of the consultation process

2-15 We considered it important to assess the effectiveness of the consultation process and we approached this in a number of different ways. The statutory requirement issued to us by Ministers under Section 3 of the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 set out a number of aims for the consultation process. In addition, SNH also identified a number of specific objectives based on our previous experience of consultation work in the area. A review of the effectiveness of the consultation process in terms of these aims and objectives is presented in Table 2-4 and 2-5.

2-16 We asked the professional facilitators who co-ordinated the community-led consultation exercises and organised meetings throughout Scotland to prepare an evaluation report. The results are presented in Report 3. In addition we also asked a post-graduate student at St Andrews University who is an employee of Parks Canada to undertake an independent evaluation of the consultation exercise. SNH paid only the expenses of her work and, in due course, the results will be incorporated into her doctoral thesis. Her report is published as Report 4. In general, both these reports confirmed that, although some elements of the consultation period could have been organised more effectively, the overall process was successful.

Table 2-4: Assessment of the consultation process against the aims set by Scottish Ministers

Aims	Assessment
<p>To consult with all statutory consultees, including local authorities, community councils and those people who appear to be representative of the interests of those who live, work or carry on business in or near the area, as well as any other people SNH consider appropriate.</p>	<p>Achieved. Responses were received from all relevant statutory bodies and from all local authorities in the area and those immediately adjacent. All community councils in and around the Cairngorms area were actively involved in the discussions, and the majority put considerable efforts into determining the views of the people who lived and worked in the area. Several representative groups also went to considerable effort to reflect the views of their members, and encouraged them to respond directly. The proposed National Park received widespread publicity in local and national press. The level of written response and participation compared favourably with similar previous consultations in the area.</p>
<p>To ensure that the consultation is participatory, and that steps are taken to ensure that people have an opportunity to discuss issues, and suggest and consider alternatives. Meetings with interest groups should be part of the process.</p>	<p>Achieved. SNH worked closely with community councils and associations and encouraged them to manage the process locally in order to find the best ways of tapping into local opinion. During the consultation period, progress reports were distributed to the Cairngorms Partnership's Peer Groups and the Advisory Panel and opportunities were given to make suggestions about how the process could be improved. The use of professional or specially-trained facilitators at many of the meetings provided a degree of independence that was welcomed. All groups who requested meetings with SNH were accommodated.</p>
<p>To ensure that agencies and public bodies representative of relevant interests, including those representative of social and economic interests, of the proposed Park, are consulted, and their views reported.</p>	<p>Achieved. Meetings were held between SNH and a number of organisations where social and economic matters were to the fore, including, for example, local authorities, Forest Enterprise, tourism associations, District Salmon Fisheries Boards and Chambers of Commerce. A wide range of written responses was received from agencies and public bodies, many of whom were representative of social and economic interests. Special meetings were held with representatives of the enterprise network to encourage discussion across the boundaries which divide the Cairngorms area.</p>
<p>To build on the preparatory work undertaken at the request of Scottish Ministers during 2000, which paved the way for a formal consultation.</p>	<p>Achieved. The consultation document contained a range of three options for the possible area of the Park which had been developed in discussion with members of the Cairngorms Local Authorities Group and the Cairngorms Partnership's Peer Groups. The consultation materials described the methodology which had been used to identify the range of options. It was made clear that the options were illustrative only, and respondents were free to suggest other options for the area of the Park. A range of options was also set out for the functions of the Park Authority and the balance of representation on the governing Board.</p>
<p>To develop and report on objective criteria (based on the conditions in section 2(1) of the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 and an associated methodology, against which SNH make their assessments of the proposal.</p>	<p>Achieved. The consultation document set out the methodology which had been used to develop the options, including the criteria which would be used to help us in reporting. Respondents were invited to submit information which could be used to complete the assessment. The assessment is included in Annex D of this report.</p>

Table 2-5: Assessment of the consultation process against objectives set by SNH

Objectives	Assessment
To ensure the effective participation of both local and national interests.	Achieved. Both local and national interests were given ample opportunity to respond to the consultation exercise. In the local area, management of the community consultation was carried out in partnership with the community councils and associations, and this ensured a very high level of response.
To encourage a significantly greater level of involvement from local people than the previous consultation in the area in 1998/99 when 91 responses were received from individuals and organisations within the area; 451 written responses were received in total; and around 600 people attended public meetings held in the area.	Achieved. 349 written responses were received from individuals and organisations within the proposed area out of a total of 849 written responses. In addition, the community-led consultation programme and the series of open meetings and associated events are estimated to have involved more than 1500 people throughout the Cairngorms area. Over 250 local school pupils took part in the consultation process.
To build on the existing structures for involvement in the area, notably the Advisory Panel, the four Peer Groups of the Cairngorms Partnership – Community Councils Group, Recreation Forum, Ward Councillors Group, Scottish Landowners’ Federation Liaison Group and the Cairngorms Local Authorities’ Group of officers and members.	Achieved. SNH staff attended, or offered to attend, meetings with the Advisory Panel and each of the four Peer Groups during the consultation period. Written progress reports on the consultation programme were provided, and the groups were invited to make suggestions for improvement to the consultation process. The close working arrangement with the Community Councils Group resulted in an enhanced network of skilled and experienced community facilitators.
To provide for the involvement of certain target groups (e.g. farmers, businesses, and young people).	Partly achieved. Activities were specifically targeted at young people including meetings with primary and secondary schools, colleges and universities, although some events were disrupted by foot and mouth disease. Community councils and associations were encouraged through the training events to identify and involve those specific target groups which they considered appropriate in their area. SNH and the local community facilitators experienced some difficulty involving farmers during the period due to the outbreak of foot and mouth disease. Many businesses were involved through the efforts of their local Chamber of Commerce.
To promote a better understanding of the legislative and policy framework for Scottish National Parks, and the issues and opportunities involved in their designation.	Achieved. Information was made available in several forms including information packs, web-sites, leaflets, research reviews, displays and posters. SNH accepted all invitations to meetings and made many presentations relevant to the interests of the groups concerned. Telephone queries were addressed through the helpdesk. The on-line discussion through the Think-net site provided an informal learning environment.

2-17 The independent evaluation estimated that there had been an increase of 250% in participation compared with the 1998 consultation exercise. The Convenor of the Cairngorms Community Councils Group wrote to SNH Chairman at the end of the consultation period to say that, from her perspective, the initiative had been very successful. We hope that the community-led consultation will have long-lasting positive outcomes and strengthen the capacity of communities to participate in the future. Useful lessons were learnt on all sides. In future, we would allow more time for training of facilitators. Communications between SNH staff, facilitators and community councillors could be improved - for example, several of the facilitators working at community level and community councillors said that they had found the formal consultation document difficult to understand and wanted more simple information to be made available. A great number of people requested more information about, for example, the policies and work-plans that the National Park Authority would adopt, but such questions were difficult to address.

2-18 Information on the effectiveness of the consultation process was also provided directly by respondents. Approximately half of those who expressed a view on this topic commented positively on the efforts which SNH had made to distribute the materials widely, to involve people in the debate, and on the clear presentation of complex issues in the materials we had produced. A few responses made specific comment about the generous amount of time that had been made available for the consultation. The extension of the consultation period due to the outbreak of foot and mouth disease was welcomed.

2-19 Some organisations, groups and individuals questioned the principle of SNH's appointment as the reporter on the basis that it was felt that we were biased towards the natural heritage, or that SNH could not be independent as we were perceived to favour National Parks. On the other hand, some respondents were concerned that because SNH was constrained by the role of reporter, no agency or arm of government had been able to be an advocate for the benefits of National Parks, or for their role in the conservation and enhancement of the natural heritage.

2-20 The majority of respondents did not comment on the consultation exercise itself but a few organisations, including the Mountaineering Council of Scotland, and a small number individuals were critical of the consultation process and materials. Some felt that the analysis of issues was light, that the justification of the conclusions was flawed and that specific subjects were not mentioned or given sufficient prominence. There was also criticism that the information presented on costs was sketchy, and the view was expressed that SNH should have sought views of consultees on this matter.

Impact of the outbreak of foot and mouth disease

2-21 The outbreak of foot and mouth disease disrupted some elements of the consultation process. During late February and early March, SNH cancelled all meetings in the area and asked others who were organising meetings to consider postponing them until assessments of the risks could be undertaken. Several events which had been planned at SNH's office at Battleby, near Perth were cancelled because of risks to adjacent farmland, and it was not always possible to reconvene them. As the extent of the outbreak became clearer, each community council and association was asked to consider how best to involve farmers and land-managers in their discussions, given the special circumstances. The opportunity for more media coverage about the consultation was also lost as a result of the disease outbreak.

2-22 After consulting with members of the Cairngorms Partnership's Advisory Panel, the deadline for responses was extended by a little over two weeks to 30 April. In July, consideration of the draft advice by the SNH Board was postponed to allow the National Farmers' Union of Scotland to proceed with three meetings for their members in the area.

2-23 In summary, the outbreak of the disease disrupted some aspects of the consultation process, but we consider that the overall impact was negligible.