

5 November 2024

Mairi Gougeon MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands
St Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

Sent to: CabSecforRALRI@gov.scot

Dear Mairi,

I am writing to you to express my concerns about the process of designating a new National Park in Scotland. As you may be aware, NFU Scotland is opposed to the creation of any new National Park. We recently undertook a public survey on the proposed National Park for Galloway. Of the almost 2,000 respondents, 73% were against the proposed bid. Of our members that responded, 78% were against the proposal. We feel that this is a significant proportion of the population – both farmer and the general public – who have serious concerns about what a new National Park will mean for them, their communities and their businesses.

One of our main concerns is around the process. In July 2024, the Scottish Government confirmed that NatureScot was to be appointed the Reporter to conduct the public consultation and investigation into whether Galloway should become Scotland's third National Park. In an initial meeting with NatureScot, they said that were not an impartial reporter, as their organisation has an interest in Scotland gaining a new National Park. This has unfortunately confirmed many fears from our membership that this proposal is a 'done deal'.

NatureScot committed to conducting their investigation in an open, transparent and inclusive way. But unfortunately, this clear bias is preventing this from happening. Our members in the Galloway and Ayrshire regions feel that their views are not represented, their voices are not heard, and their opinions do not matter. They feel the matter on whether Galloway should become a new National Park has already been decided by a small minority. This was evidenced by the fact NatureScot recently shared a report commissioned by Scottish Environment LINK on the social and economic benefits of National Parks. This report itself was written by John Mayhew, Chairman of the Scottish Campaign for National Parks. Our

members have repeatedly stated that the lack of impartiality and objectivity is making them feel alienated and ignored by this process.

We feel like this is a serious problem and that there has been a significant failing on the part of the Government by not appointing a truly independent reporter for this investigation. As an additional concern, we know there are legislative changes proposed for the National Parks Act (Scotland) Act 2000. We are concerned that these changes are not sequential but happening in parallel. We feel that any changes to the legislation should be established before the public have been asked to comment on proposals for a new National Park. By not doing so, the process is disjointed and unclear.

We do currently and hope to continue to have a good working relationship with NatureScot. We remain committed to engaging in the process and will provide a full and thorough response to the consultation when it is published. But we would be doing our members a disservice by not putting on record the fact that many of them feel this process is nothing more than a rubber stamp.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martin C. Kennedy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Martin Kennedy

President, NFU Scotland

