

# Title: A national park proposal for Galloway – NatureScot’s role as Reporter

**Date: 21 August 2024**

| **Purpose:** | Decision |
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| **How does this link with our corporate priorities of improving biodiversity or delivering nature-based solutions to climate change:** | The reporting work on the new National Park proposal for Galloway is part of our 30x30 delivery plan, though National Parks have an important contribution to make across NatureScot priorities to protect, restore and value nature. |
| **Summary:** | This paper describes the key elements of the Reporter role, provides an update on the early stage of our reporting work and outlines the role we want Board to play in it. |
| **Actions:** | * To agree future Board engagement in the reporting work * To raise and discuss any issues at this early stage of the reporting process |
| **Recommendations:** | To welcome the commissioning of NatureScot as the Reporter, to note the early progress made and the active role proposed for the Board in this work. |
| **Report Author(s):** | Pete Rawcliffe |
| **Sponsor:** | Eileen Stuart |

## Purpose

1. This paper provides a brief update on the work we are undertaking as the Reporter for the statutory proposal for a National Park in Galloway.

## Introduction

1. On the 22nd July, Scottish Ministers made a statutory proposal for a new National Park to be established in Galloway (with the broad area of search extending to parts of Dumfries and East and South Ayrshire). They also asked NatureScot to be the Reporter for the next phase of work in developing and consulting on the detailed arrangements for the proposed National Park. The NatureScot chair has responded to the Cabinet Secretary welcoming the commission and emphasising the open, transparent and inclusive manner with which we will deliver it.
2. Initial briefing to staff and Board was issued on 22nd July setting out the background to this announcement and the work underway to respond to it. This includes the establishment of a project board chaired by Eileen Stuart to oversee the work of the project team created for this task with a range of staff drawn from People and Places, South Operations, Communications and other national teams.
3. The proposal is not a designation announcement. Decisions on establishing Scotland’s third National Park will be made by Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament, informed by NatureScot’s advice gathered in our Reporter role. If Ministers decide to go ahead with designation, further consultation will take place on a draft designation order which will include a detailed boundary.

## The National Park Reporter Role

1. The Reporter is tasked with both developing the detail of the proposal and seeking the views of local people and other stakeholders on it. Details to be developed include:

* identifying, at a broad scale, what area the new Park should cover;
* options for the new Park’s powers (e.g. planning, access etc); and
* governance (e.g. size and make-up of its Board) and operation.

While the bid contains a map of a proposed area, Scottish Ministers have indicated that a Park area could be smaller or larger in size.

1. Scottish Ministers have directed NatureScot to specifically consider how a new Park can contribute directly to its priorities for tackling the climate emergency, growing the economy and improving public services. They also recognise the central importance of this area for farming, forestry and renewables and the existing contribution made by the Galloway and South Ayrshire Biosphere Reserve which covers a larger area (including marine) than that proposed in the bid.
2. The Reporter’s advice should be informed by the engagement and consultation work we will undertake. To do this, we will:

* raise awareness of the proposal, our role as Reporter, and the scope of the issues to investigate
* provide information on what a National Park could mean
* meet and listen to the views of the local community, community councils and stakeholder groups using a range of inclusive engagement approaches
* develop and run an online engagement and consultation portal
* hold a formal public consultation for at least 12 weeks from November 2024 to January 2025
* analyse and report on all the views expressed and by whom so that Ministers are fully sighted on any issues and concerns that have been raised.

1. To date, we have focused efforts on speaking to key stakeholders. These meetings have been positive, even when these groups have significant concerns about the principle of a Galloway National Park. They have enabled us to explain the process, and our role, and to develop thinking about how we best engage with all interests in the development of the options. We have also written formally to all three local authorities and community councils within the indicative area to raise awareness of the proposal and seek discussion on it. A more outward phase of our work will begin at the end of August with the launch of the online portal, the leafleting of households in or close to the indicative area, and a series of drop-in surgeries to raise awareness of the proposal and encourage the engagement we are seeking.

## Becoming a trusted reporter

1. A key part of our role is to gauge the level of support for the proposal and to report this accurately to Ministers. Crucial to success in this will be building trust with all groups and stakeholders. A first step towards this is to be in ‘listening mode’, making clear nothing is ruled in or out at this stage and welcoming all thoughts, opinions and reasoning, even if they are against the principle of a National Park. Effective communications and the provision of regular feedback on the process and how the views expressed have shaped the development of our advice is also critical.
2. If there is to be a new National Park in Galloway, it is also clear that it will need to reflect local circumstances and help meet the needs of people who live and work in the area. In developing the detailed arrangements for the proposed National Park we will need to draw on our natural heritage expertise, including our knowledge and understanding of the benefits of existing National Parks for people and nature. At the same time, we will need to engage creatively with other public bodies and stakeholders in developing our advice, both drawing on the experience of, but also looking beyond, the current Parks to an approach which is best suited for Galloway.

## Board engagement and role

1. It is proposed that the Board will play the following role/s in the development and sign-off of the advice to Ministers:

* The main Board will discuss and approve NatureScot’s advice in a special meeting to be held in Galloway in Q4.
* The PAC will be asked to sign-off the consultation questions paper and review the analysis of the responses and scoping of our advice.
* To ensure the Board remain engaged throughout the process, Jill Robbie has agreed to join the project board as project adviser.
* Through their contacts and network, all Board members have a role to play in explaining this work and championing our approach as Reporter.

## Conclusion

1. This is a high-profile and significant piece of advisory work for NatureScot. While challenging, we should be confident in delivering it in an open, transparent and inclusive manner. We have experience to build on from the reporting work we undertook for Scotland’s first two National Parks and can also usefully draw on the practical experience from the first two decades of their operations. Board engagement in this work will also be important given its political profile.