



# Policy Summary

## NATIONAL SCENIC AREAS

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Scotland's scenery is nationally and internationally renowned. Viewed with pride by Scots themselves, it also has economic significance as a key attraction for tourists. It is important to the quality of life in providing settings within which people live, work and play; it is the route by which most people come to understand and value the natural heritage; and it is at the heart of the popular image of Scotland.

**SNH's view is that Scotland's most scenically valued areas should be safeguarded through designation as National Scenic Areas (NSAs). The NSA designation is an accolade - 'the very best' of Scotland's natural beauty and amenity - rather than a representative suite of all of Scotland's diverse landscapes. NSAs are of at least national importance.**

## BACKGROUND

The NSA designation was established by Government in 1980 following a survey by the Countryside Commission for Scotland. This survey identified 40 areas of Scotland as being "*...of unsurpassed attractiveness which must be conserved as part of our national heritage.*"

In 1997 SNH was asked by the Government to review the NSA designation with a view to making it more effective, to consider whether the present series of 40 areas should be expanded and to advise on the relationship between NSA's and other relevant designations. Following wide consultation including a consultation paper on the options, in February 1999, SNH published its advice to Government in October 1999.

## SNH'S POSITION

SNH aims to protect areas and sites of special natural heritage value and to secure their appropriate management. SNH recognises that as a nation we have not always looked after Scotland's best scenery as well as it deserves. SNH's priority for action is therefore to ensure that measures are put in place to enable the effective safeguard and enhancement of existing NSAs before identifying further new areas to expand the suite. Any changes within NSAs should be consistent with safeguarding their scenic interest while allowing for the social and economic needs of communities. On the few occasions when unresolvable conflicts arise, the interests of long-term conservation should take precedence.

The main elements of SNH's advice to Government included: -

- encouraging greater responsibility for the designation amongst others, particularly local authorities and local communities;
- involving local authorities - as leaders, co-ordinators of effort and advocates for individual NSAs at the local level;
- placing a new duty on local authorities to produce, implement and regularly review a Management Strategy for each NSA;
- involving local communities and other interests in the preparation of Management Strategies, and their implementation;
- seeking new legislation to define the purpose of NSAs and to place a duty on public bodies and others to safeguard and enhance NSAs when exercising their functions;
- seeking changes to some of the regulatory provisions under the Town and Country Planning system as they apply to NSAs;
- seeking the revision of mainstream land-management support schemes to ensure they contribute to NSA objectives, and additional incentives to influence land management;
- requesting clearer guidance be issued by Government and SNH;
- seeking greater effort to increase awareness and understanding for NSAs amongst local communities and general public; and
- seeking additional resources to support the development and implementation of strategies.

Many of these improvements can be achieved without legislation. However, SNH considers it anomalous that there is currently no formal statutory basis for protecting Scotland's finest landscapes and is anxious that suitable legislation to rectify this should be enacted as soon as possible.

Any expansion of the existing suite of NSAs will require an open consultative process. SNH sees itself as the obvious organisation to lead the search and selection for any new areas and to act as a national champion, guardian and expert adviser, and to monitor the NSA process. Review of new candidate areas for NSA status will involve other interests - including the affected communities - in :-

- confirming criteria for the identification and selection of new areas;
- identifying an initial sift of candidate areas; and
- preparing recommendations for SNH to consider and review, for eventual validation by the Scottish Parliament or Executive.

However, SNH will for the meantime, concentrate on improving the management of existing NSAs. SNH has advised that, within future National Parks, any existing NSA should be de-designated, to reduce the potential confusion and complexity of overlapping designations. However, such former NSAs are still considered as representing part of the best of Scotland's scenery and such areas will be protected through appropriate policies in the Park Plan.

## **REFERENCES:**

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