



BLUE MARINE
FOUNDATION

A COASTAL AND MARINE NATIONAL PARK IN YOUR AREA?

A BRIEFING FOR SCOTTISH
COMMUNITIES FROM
BLUE MARINE FOUNDATION

Photo: Paul Richards

COASTAL AND MARINE NATIONAL PARKS

This is a short guide to the current process around new National Parks for Scotland. It sets out what a coastal and marine National Park could mean for your area in practice, and how communities can make the best case for one locally to promote nature and socio-economic recovery.

In February 2023 NatureScot issued [advice to Ministers](#) which included the following very promising comment.

At least one coastal and marine National Park should also be prioritised to provide an exemplar for this nationally important ecosystem and iconic Scottish landscape.

Blue Marine supports this objective, and will seek to work with communities trying to make that a reality in their area through a coastal and marine National Park. Might this be you?

We offer expertise in ocean restoration and sustainable use of our marine environment, working with coastal communities to support thriving coasts and seas.

BENEFITS

As with existing terrestrial National Parks, a coastal and marine National Park would protect landscapes and seascapes, bring socio-economic benefits to the area, improve quality of life, and boost tourism and recreation opportunities. Scottish Ministers are keen to see National Parks support a just transition to net zero and a nature positive Scotland.

The economic benefits of Scotland's National Parks have not yet been fully assessed. However, The Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park generates an estimated value of £866m per year plus more value through public enjoyment and

ecosystem services. It was estimated in 2012 that the English National Parks generated between £4.1bn and £6.3bn of Gross Value Added, equivalent to a city the size of Plymouth or Sunderland, or to the UK aerospace sector.

It was estimated in 2012 that the English National Parks generated between
£4.1bn – £6.3bn
Gross Value Added

THE PROCESS AND COMMITMENT

The Scottish Government are currently refining the process which will lead to Ministers designating “at least one new National Park by the end of this session, provided relevant legal conditions can be met”, in line with the [2021 agreement](#) between the Scottish Government and the Scottish Greens.

Ministers will invite nominations for new National Parks in Autumn 2023, which will be assessed against the final evaluation criteria (subject to consultation, which is ongoing at the time of writing).

Proposals for one or more new National Parks will then be subject to further detailed assessment and consultation before going to the Scottish Parliament for approval.

The Minister said in the consultation document that “several areas have put themselves forward as candidates for National Park status and I hope that we will receive nominations from across Scotland”. The more areas come forward, the more likely it will be that the Scottish Government will support more than one nomination.

The [National Parks \(Scotland\) Act 2000](#) means Scottish Ministers can designate National Parks which include marine areas. It sets out the four aims that would apply at sea as on land.

- A. to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area,**
- B. to promote sustainable use of the natural resources of the area,**
- C. to promote understanding and enjoyment (including enjoyment in the form of recreation) of the special qualities of the area by the public, and**
- D. to promote sustainable economic and social development of the area’s communities.**

The evaluation process discussed below is essentially those four aims expanded upon, and with subsequent Scottish Government policy decisions woven in. Further changes to aspects of the existing National Parks legislation are also being considered and will be subject to separate consultation.

The more coastal communities who come forward, the more likely it will be that the Scottish Government will support more than one nomination.

WHAT A COASTAL AND MARINE NATIONAL PARK WOULD MEAN IN PRACTICE

The crucial change it would bring is the establishment of a National Park Authority, with strong representation from councils and the local community.

That National Park Authority would have planning functions on land and at sea, with a focus on sustainability, balancing the interests of communities and their natural resources, and considering natural beauty and enjoyment through access. The scope of the planning function (including any new powers) would be determined for each new Park.

Designation of a coastal and marine National Park would not in itself mean changes to how the marine area would be managed. It would encourage better co-ordination of planning and management across the land and sea. That same [NatureScot advice](#) (February 2023) set out how a National Park of this sort could operate as an umbrella over other marine designations.

'Detailed work would then begin on establishing the Park Authority and developing its first National Park Partnership Plan which will set out the detail of how the area will be managed in future to take forward the Park aims.'

NATURESCOT, IN CORRESPONDENCE

On land, nature conservation designations and other protected areas exist within and close to a National Park. NatureScot considers that similar arrangements could apply to coastal and marine National Parks, including any new enhanced protection measures. 'We see their role as complementary and supporting both the proposed purpose and existing aims of National Parks, which collectively aim to secure the recovery of both nature and the local communities. A new coastal and marine National Park could provide a model of best practice in drawing together the different, often overlapping, designations and planning processes that exist and demonstrating how they can collectively be used to deliver a coherent approach.'

Photo: Jim Greenfield



HOW TO GIVE YOURSELF THE BEST CHANCE

The Scottish Government are welcoming [pre-registration](#). If you're even considering putting in a nomination, email NationalParks@gov.scot as soon as possible. That way the Scottish Government can update you with any important information, key dates and communications throughout the process, and it will also enable them to contact you about the offer of support that will be made available during the nomination process.

Blue Marine will encourage greater awareness of how bids that include a marine element will be considered, firstly by engaging in the Scottish Government consultation on the draft criteria [here](#).

That draft sets out seven criteria - each of which is broken down into more detailed "components". **They currently read as follows:**

1. **Is the area of outstanding national importance because of its natural heritage or the combination of its natural and cultural heritage?**
2. **Does the area have a distinctive character and a coherent identity? Is the proposed area of a sufficient size to justify integrated management as a National Park? For example, are there strong connections between the landscape and seascape that warrant a large area to be identified as a new National Park?**
3. **How would designating the area as a National Park meet the special needs of the area? What difference would National Park designation make for nature restoration, cultural heritage, sustainable use of natural resources, public enjoyment and sustainable communities? One component here is "how it would make a significant contribution to climate change mitigation and adaptation?"**
4. **How would designating the area as a National Park support visitor management and the area's offer for education, recreation and enjoyment by all of Scotland's people? The components here are quite extensive and worth reviewing in detail.**
5. **Why is the investment required to create and operate a new National Park for this area justified?**



Photo: Rowan Aitchison

6. **Is there sufficient evidence of local support for this proposal? The components here talk about a) local interests - community bodies, landowners and managers, businesses, third sector organisations, and public bodies, etc, and b) the local authority or authorities in the area.**
7. **Would the designation of the area bring benefits to Scotland as a whole and contribute to strategic priorities including nature restoration, climate mitigation and adaptation action, green investment, skills and jobs and nature friendly farming? The crucial component here is around the commitments Ministers have made through the [Scottish Biodiversity Strategy](#).**

If you are considering lodging a nomination, it will be worth reading the draft criteria and the components that sit below them in full. There will be three key factors:

1. **Location** - a landscape (and seascape) with geographical identity, which can meet the requirements in the Act and the above criteria.
2. **Justification** - your reasons for nominating the location. Any evidence of community interest, need, value and opportunity will help the proposal.
3. **Local Support** - If you have the local MSP or MSPs on board, you will have a much stronger practical chance of success, and local media would help too. The more local businesses, community groups, councillors and so on you have, the better too.

WHAT THE TIMESCALE LOOKS LIKE

Once the final evaluation criteria have been published, there will be an opportunity for community groups (and potentially others) to nominate areas to be considered. Ministers will then make proposals for one or more of the areas to be designated, and then appoint a reporter (almost certainly NatureScot) to work up draft orders.

The expectation has been that designation would be completed by early 2026. Detailed work would then begin on establishing the Park Authority and developing its first National Park Partnership Plan which will set out the detail of how the area will be managed in future to take forward the Park aims. It would be extremely difficult for Parliament to attempt to press Ministers to support additional nominations once their proposals have been published, though, so the crucial period for influence is over the next year.

The expectation has been that designation would be completed by early 2026, but the crucial time for influence is over the next twelve months.

WHAT BLUE MARINE CAN DO

Blue Marine has experience and policy expertise from around the UK. We would like to help make the case for a marine and coastal National Park to MSPs, Ministers, civil servants, the media, and other interested parties.

For more information, our June 2021 briefing on one possible location - Argyll Coast and Islands - [is here](#).

Joe Richards

Scotland Project Manager,
Blue Marine Foundation

joe@bluemarinefoundation.com

Marineparks@bluemarinefoundation.com



BLUE MARINE
FOUNDATION

Photo: Mark Smith





BLUE MARINE
FOUNDATION