Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for The Future of National Parks in Scotland

SEA Environmental Report

September 2023

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for The Future of National Parks in Scotland

SEA Environmental Report

Final report prepared for the Scottish Government by

AECOM Limited

September 2023

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Non-Technical Summary

The new National Park proposals

The Scottish Government is currently progressing proposals to establish one or more new National Parks in Scotland and to amend Scotland's National Parks legislation.

The overarching objective of the proposals is to further the Scottish Government's commitments to protect and restore nature, tackle climate change, and promote sustainable land use.

Within this context, Scottish Ministers wish to see Scotland's National Parks as special places for wildlife and biodiversity that will actively support nature recovery and the transformational change needed in approaches to land-use, in order to achieve a just transition to net zero in Scotland.

In recognition of this, the Programme for Government contains a commitment to designate at least one new National Park in Scotland within the current Parliament.

As part of the proposals, a number of initial phases are being undertaken by the Scottish Government. These include the development of appraisal criteria for National Park selection, the consideration of potential changes to the governance arrangements for existing and new National Parks, and the consideration of potential amendments to the aims, purpose and functions of existing and new National Parks.

Strategic Environmental Assessment for the new National Park proposals

To support the development of the new National Park proposals, an independent Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is being undertaken.

SEA is a systematic process for evaluating the environmental consequences of proposed plans, programmes, and strategies to ensure environmental issues are fully integrated and addressed at appropriate stages of decision making, with a view to promoting sustainable development.

The SEA is a means of supporting the evidence base for the new National Park proposals, and for providing an opportunity for proposals and alternative approaches to be effectively evaluated in terms of their likely significant effects on the environment. It is being undertaken in line with the procedures prescribed by the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005.

The key stages of the SEA process for the new National Park proposals are set out below:

SEA Stage 1:

- Establish the context and baseline for the SEA
- Identify key environmental issues for The Future of National Park proposals
- Develop the SEA Framework
- Key output: SEA Scoping Report

SEA Stage 2:

- Develop and refine alternatives for elements of the Future of National Parks proposals
- Appraise the significant effects of these alternatives

SEA Stage 3:

- Appraise the draft Future of National Park proposals
- Prepare the SEA Environmental Report for stakeholder engagement
- Key output: Environmental Report

SEA Stage 4:

- Stakeholder engagement on the Environmental Report

SEA Stage 5:

- Monitor the significant effects of the Future of National Park proposals
- Prepare the SEA post-adoption statement
- Key output: SEA post-adoption statement

Purpose and content of this Environmental Report

This Environmental Report, which is the main output of the SEA process, accompanies the Future of National Parks proposals for consultation between September and November 2023.

Its purpose is to:

- Identify, describe, and evaluate the likely significant environmental effects of the Future of National Parks proposals and alternative approaches;
- Provide a perspective on the likely environmental performance of the Future of National Parks proposals and key areas for monitoring during its implementation; and
- Provide an opportunity for statutory consultees, interested parties and the public to offer views on the SEA process carried out to date.

The Environmental Report is the second document to be produced as part of the SEA process. The first document was the combined SEA Screening and Scoping Report (May 2023), which included information about the baseline and the 'framework' against which 'The Future of National Parks' proposals has been assessed.

In line with the provisions of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005, this Environmental Report presents:

- An overview of the scoping process for the SEA
- An assessment of the current version of the Future of National Parks proposals, in terms of the likely significant environmental effects of the proposals
- An assessment of alternative approaches relating to the broad principles underpinning the legislative changes and the criteria for new National Parks

- An exploration of the relative merits of taking forward a new National Park in various broad locations in Scotland, recognising the different characteristics of these areas in terms of the potential benefits and disbenefits such a designation would provide
- Proposals for monitoring the significant environmental effects of the Future of National Parks proposals
- The next steps for the Future of National Parks proposals and accompanying SEA process.

The information presented in this Environmental Report has been presented through the following seven SEA topics:

- Biodiversity and geodiversity
- Climate change
- Environmental quality
- Material assets
- Cultural heritage
- Landscape
- Population and human health

Assessment of reasonable alternatives

The assessment of 'reasonable alternatives' is a key element of the SEA process to meet the requirements of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005.

In light of the increased recognition of National Parks' role in addressing biodiversity loss and climate change, and changes in the national policy framework in Scotland, there is potential to amend the general purpose of a National Park Authority and strengthen National Park aims to reflect these issues.

To explore these possibilities further, three options have been assessed through the SEA process. These have explored different approaches to the broad principles underpinning the proposed changes:

- **Option NP1:** Do not make changes to the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 and do not designate any new National Parks in Scotland. This would be a 'do nothing' option.
- **Option NP2:** Deliver new National Park(s) in Scotland, with no amendments to the aims, purpose, and powers.
- **Option NP3:** Deliver new National Parks(s), with amendments to the aims, purpose and powers applicable to all National Parks (these changes would apply to any new National Parks and the two existing National Parks in Scotland).

Chapter 4 of this Environmental Report presents details of the options assessed and the reasoning behind their choice as reasonable alternatives. This is accompanied by an assessment of the options against the SEA Framework developed during scoping.

Assessment of draft proposals

Chapter 4 of the Environmental Report presents an assessment of the draft proposals for consultation relating to the legal framework for and powers of National Park Authorities.

The current proposals have been grouped together to reflect how they are presented within the consultation paper.

- **Proposal NNP1:** Change to the purpose of National Park Authorities, which provides a greater emphasis on nature restoration and tackling climate change (Question 1)
- **Proposal NNP2:** Changes to the aims of National Parks (Questions 2 – 5)
- **Proposal NNP3:** Changes to the application of the National Park 'principle', highlighting that when conflicts arise between the aims of National Parks, National Park Authorities should give priority to the protection and restoration of natural assets, biodiversity and ecosystems (Question 6)
- **Proposal NNP4:** Role of public bodies operating within National Parks with respect to the National Park aims and 'principle', and the duty on public bodies to support implementation of National Park Plans (Questions 7 – 9)

The key significant effects of the proposals are as follows:

- The proposals offer additional scope for National Parks to deliver actions and initiatives which support climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- Increased focus on 'sustainable management' of natural resources in National Parks will widen opportunities for delivering environmental enhancements beyond the existing scope of the purpose and aims of such designations.
- Due to the additional focus on climate change mitigation, there is potential for renewable energy generation and associated provisions to give rise to adverse impacts on landscape character and ecological assets; likewise changes to the landscape brought about by climate change mitigation measures such as reafforestation or woodland planting may lead to changes to the landscape which do not reflect or engage with historic landscape character. There would be a need for such provisions to be appropriately informed by landscape and historic environment considerations and devised with input from landscape and heritage specialists from the outset.
- The proposals will strengthen the duty on public sector bodies operating within existing and new National Parks. This will support implementation of National Park management plans and will promote greater collaboration between public bodies in support of the National Parks' aims. This will support mutually beneficial environmental outcomes.
- The proposals will reinforce the role that National Parks can have in terms of conserving, enhancing, and promoting Scotland's historic environment, including designated and non-designated assets (and their settings).
- The proposals reinforce the role that National Park authorities have with regard to climate action.
- The proposals provide an additional focus on the enhancement of biodiversity networks and associated ecosystems, and the facilitation of opportunities for nature improvements and recovery. There is a need for such enhancements to

be sensitive to the surrounding areas, and take into consideration factors such as landscape character, the historic environment and cultural heritage.

- Proposals will provide additional focus on reinforcing the cultural resilience of the area's communities.
- Proposals will facilitate improved opportunities to connect individuals and communities with National Parks. This will help boost engagement with environmental conservation and enhancement activities.

Overall, the assessment has highlighted that the Future of National Park Proposals have the potential to bring a range of significant medium and long-term positive effects across the SEA topics. Whilst broad ranging, these specifically link to a strengthening of National Park provisions in relation to nature restoration and tackling climate change mitigation and adaptation, and an additional focus of the provisions on community engagement and collaboration. The assessment has also highlighted that there are no likely significant negative environmental effects arising as a result of the proposals.

In this respect, within the context within which they sit, the proposals have the potential to support a wide range of Scottish Government policy initiatives positively and cumulatively. The provisions will also help ensure that the two existing National Parks in Scotland – and any new National Parks that are designated - are more effectively able to support actions which tackle the climate and biodiversity emergencies, whilst delivering a wider range of environmental benefits.

The assessment has however highlighted some uncertainties with regards to the effect of nature restoration and climate change mitigation and adaptation activities on the fabric and setting of the historic environment and landscape character. In this respect, there is a need to recognise that not all solutions will be appropriate for the existing cultural landscape and historic environment of areas covered by National Park designations. As such, there is a need for the changes to the principles underpinning existing National Parks and the designation of new National Parks to be accompanied by a recognition of these potential indirect impacts.

Recommendations in light of assessment findings

To help ensure that the environmental value of the proposals are maximised, and the uncertainties identified through the assessment are addressed, a number of recommendations can be made for the implementation of the proposals. For example:

- To facilitate a balance between nature recovery, climate resilience, and wider National Park aims, ecological enhancements should be sensitive to the surrounding areas (e.g., with respect to their special qualities), and exercises in habitat restoration and creation should be carefully selected to complement existing character and setting with input from relevant experts.
- To help maximise benefits to cultural heritage, and limit potential negative effects, appropriate methods for enhancements should be devised with input from historic environment specialists from the outset.
- To further support visitor management, opportunities for sustainable travel and active travel within and to/from new National Parks should be encouraged wherever possible. Any sustainable transport initiatives should be undertaken in conjunction with the protection and reinforcement of the special qualities of the National Park with input from the relevant local and national transport authorities.

Consideration of broad locations for a new National Park

Subsequent to the current consultation on the proposed legislative changes to the aims, functions, powers and governance of National Parks in Scotland, the selection and designation of new National Park(s) will take place.

In light of this ongoing process, it is recognised that it is appropriate at this initial stage for potential broad locations for new National Park(s) to be considered through the current SEA. This is with a view to exploring the relative merits of taking forward a new National Park in different broad locations in Scotland, recognising the different characteristics of these wide areas in terms of the potential benefits and disbenefits such a designation would provide.

Chapter 5 of the Environmental Report therefore presents an appraisal of the potential impacts and considerations associated with taking forward a new National Park in five broad areas in Scotland, as follows:

- North & West Coast and Islands
- North
- North East
- Central
- South

These areas align with the five broad regions of Scotland as set out in National Planning Framework 4.

SEA monitoring programme

Schedule 2 of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act highlights that the Environmental Report should include "*a description of the measures envisaged concerning monitoring*."

Monitoring in SEA is a means of evaluating the environmental performance of the plan or strategy and monitoring compliance through its implementation. It is also a way to check whether the effects predicted in the SEA arise as envisaged, or whether unforeseen issues arise.

Chapter 6 therefore sets out a proposed preliminary monitoring programme for measuring the new National Park proposals' implementation. It pays particular attention to the areas where the SEA has identified potential significant effects and also suggests where monitoring is required to help ensure that the positive effects of the proposals are achieved through implementation.

Next steps

The current consultation on the proposed legislative changes to the aims, functions, powers and governance of National Parks in Scotland will conclude in November 2023. Following this, the selection and designation of new National Park(s) will take place.

In Autumn 2023 nominations for new National Parks will be invited, and communities will have five months to develop their nominations. All nominations for new National Parks will be considered following the finalisation of an appraisal framework.

In 2024, Ministers will announce their decision on which proposal(s) for new National Park(s) should go forward for designation and a reporter will be appointed to undertake an investigation and report to Ministers. This will include a public consultation on the new National Park proposal(s).

As more detailed information becomes available, it will be important to consider whether any new or previously unidentified significant affects may arise, and whether therefore any additional assessment may be required.

The designation of new National Park(s) will then take place during 2025-2026 through the development of and consultation on a Designation Order, and laying of the Designation Order before Parliament.

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1. Introduction

Background

1.1 AECOM has been commissioned to undertake an independent Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to inform The Future of National Parks in Scotland (hereafter referred to as "the Future of National Parks proposals"), on behalf of The Scottish Government.

1.2 SEA is a systematic process for evaluating the likely significant environmental effects of proposed plans, strategies, or programmes to ensure environmental issues are fully integrated and addressed at the earliest appropriate stage of plan-making.

1.3 This Environmental Report, which is the main output of the SEA process, accompanies the Future of National Parks proposals for consultation between September and November 2023.

The Future of National Parks in Scotland

1.4 Scotland has ambitious targets and priorities to meet the climate and nature emergencies, including a commitment to protect at least 30% of Scotland's land and sea for nature by 2030 (30x30 Target)[1] and a target date for net zero emissions[2] of all greenhouse gases by 2045.

1.5 Within this context, Scottish Ministers wish to see Scotland's National Parks as special places for wildlife and biodiversity that will actively support nature recovery and the transformational change needed to achieve a just transition to net zero in Scotland.

1.6 In recognition of this, the Scottish Government has committed to designate at least one new National Park in Scotland by 2026. Given it is 20 years since Scotland's first two National Parks were created at Loch Lomond and the Trossachs and the Cairngorms, Scottish Ministers also wish to review the role of Scotland's National Parks[3].

1.7 In the period since there has been an increased recognition of National Parks' role in addressing the twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change, with a refreshed purpose of Scotland's National Parks being seen as essential if they are to provide leadership for nature recovery and contribute to a just transition to a nature positive and net zero Scotland. National Parks are also seen as having a key leadership role in the implementation of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy[4], and delivery of the 30x30, Nature Networks and net zero commitments.

[1] NatureScot (2022): 30x30 Target explained
[2] The Scottish Government (2020): Climate Change policy
[3] National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000
[4] The Scottish Government (2022): Biodiversity strategy to 2045: tackling the nature emergency

Objectives and content of the proposals

1.8 The Scottish Government is progressing proposals for:

- The establishment of a new National Park(s) in Scotland, including draft proposed appraisal criteria for site selection.
- Potential changes to the governance arrangements for existing and new National Parks; and
- Potential amendments to the aims, purpose, and powers of existing and new National Parks.

1.9 The overall objective of the proposals is to further The Scottish Government's commitments to: protect and restore nature; tackle climate change; and promote sustainable land use.

1.10 Key facts relating to The Future of National Parks in Scotland proposals are set out below:

Responsible authority: The Scottish Government

Title of plan: The Future of National Parks in Scotland

Subject: Natural Environment

Purpose: To strengthen the leadership role of Scotland's National Parks for nature recovery and just transition to net zero. National Parks are also expected to make an important contribution towards the commitment to protect 30% of Scotland's land for nature by 2030.

Area covered by the plan : Scotland. Scotland's existing National Parks are located in Loch Lomond and the Trossachs, and the Cairngorms. The location of a further National Park(s) will be shaped by the proposals currently being developed.

Summary of content: The Scottish Government is progressing proposals for establishing a new National Park(s) in Scotland, including draft proposed evaluation criteria for site selection, potential changes to the governance arrangements for existing and new National Parks, and potential amendments to the aims, purpose, and powers of existing and new National Parks. The main objective of the proposals is to further The Scottish Government's commitments to: protect and restore nature; tackle climate change; and promote sustainable land use.

Contact point: Nick Breslin, Project Lead: New National Park(s) Biodiversity Team, Nature Division, Scottish Government. Email address: nationalparks@gov.scot

Current stage of development for The Future of National Parks in Scotland

1.11 In May 2022, The Scottish Government held an initial public dialogue exercise[5] on the Future of National Parks proposals. This consultation sought views and ideas on the role that National Parks can play in helping to restore nature, tackle climate change, promote sustainable land use and support public and community wellbeing[6]. Following this, NatureScot (a key organisation involved with the protection and enhancement of Scotland's natural environment) was asked to lead a further public consultation with a wide range of stakeholders who have an interest in Scotland's National Parks in order to provide advice to Scottish Ministers[7].

1.12 These consultations have shown that many people want to see new National Parks in Scotland. They also highlighted the important leadership role of National Parks in tackling the interlinked crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, whilst also welcoming visitors and supporting local communities and businesses.

1.13 The responses received have informed the development of a draft appraisal framework and selection criteria which will be used to appraise nominations received and identify where Scotland's next new National Park(s) will be located. Based on appraisal of the nominations, Scottish Ministers will determine the area(s) to progress to National Park designation. Since May 2023, individuals, groups, or organisations interested in submitting a nomination for a new National Park(s) have been invited to register their interest[8].

1.14 This Environmental Report, which is the main output of the SEA process, accompanies the Future of National Park proposals. A public consultation on 'New National Parks in Scotland - Nomination process and draft appraisal framework' took place from May to August 2023. A public consultation on proposed legislative changes to the aims, functions, powers and governance of National Parks in Scotland will take place from September to November 2023.

[5] The Scottish Government (2022): New National Parks - nomination process and draft appraisal framework: consultation
[6] The Scottish Government (2023): National Parks - challenge exercise: summary analysis
[7] NatureScot (2023): National Parks Advice to Ministers - February 2023
[8] The Scottish Government (2023): New National Parks: Annex A - Nomination Form

2. Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) explained

Purpose of SEA

2.1 SEA considers and communicates the likely significant effects of an emerging plan, programme or strategy, and the reasonable alternatives considered during the plan making process, in terms of key environmental issues. The aim of SEA is to inform and influence the plan-making process with a view to avoiding or mitigating negative effects and maximising positive effects.

2.2 Whilst the focus of the SEA process will consider the likely significant environmental effects of the Future of National Parks proposals, opportunities for delivering enhancements and socio-economic benefits will also be considered. It is anticipated that this approach will effectively inform the development of the Future of National Park proposals to help enable the numerous 'win-win' opportunities provided by the proposals to be realised.

2.3 An SEA is undertaken in line with the procedures prescribed by the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005.

2.4 The Act requires that an environmental report is published for consultation alongside the draft plan that '*shall identify, describe and evaluate the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing (a) the plan or programme; and (b) reasonable alternatives to the plan or programme…taking into account the objectives and the geographical scope of the plan or programme*.' The report must then be taken into account, alongside consultation responses, when finalising the plan.

2.5 The *'likely significant effects on the environment'*, are those defined in the Act as '*including on issues such as biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the interrelationship between the above factors'.* Reasonable alternatives to the plan need to take into consideration the objectives of the plan and its geographic scope. The choice of 'reasonable alternatives' is determined by means of a case-by-case assessment.

Stages of SEA

2.6 The key stages of the SEA for the Future of National Parks proposals are set out below.

SEA Stage 1:

- Establish the context and baseline for the SEA
- Identify key environmental issues for The Future of National Park proposals
- Develop the SEA Framework
- Key output: SEA Scoping Report

SEA Stage 2:

- Develop and refine alternatives for elements of the Future of National Parks proposals
- Appraise the significant effects of these alternatives

SEA Stage 3:

- Appraise the draft Future of National Park proposals
- Prepare the SEA Environmental Report for stakeholder engagement
- Key output: Environmental Report

SEA Stage 4:

- Stakeholder engagement on the Environmental Report

SEA Stage 5:

- Monitor the significant effects of the Future of National Park proposals
- Prepare the SEA post-adoption statement
- Key output: SEA post-adoption statement

This Environmental Report

Purpose of this Environmental Report

2.7 This Environmental Report accompanies the latest version of the Future of National Parks proposals and is a key output of the SEA process. Its purpose is to:

- Identify, describe, and evaluate the likely significant environmental effects of the Future of National Parks proposals and alternative approaches; and
- Provide a perspective on the likely environmental performance of the Future of National Parks proposals and key areas for monitoring during its implementation.

2.8 The Environmental Report is the second document to be produced as part of the SEA process for the Future of National Parks proposals. The first document was the combined SEA Screening and Scoping Report (May 2023), which included information about the baseline and the 'framework' against which The Future of National Parks proposals has been assessed.

Structure of this Environmental Report

2.9 In line with the provisions of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005, this Environmental Report has been structured as follows:

- **Chapter 3** presents an overview of the scoping process for the SEA (**Stage 1** in **Figure 2.1**).
- **Chapter 4** presents an assessment of the current version of the Future of National Parks proposals, in terms of the likely significant environmental effects of the proposals (**Stage 3**). Alongside, alternative approaches relating to the Future of National Parks Proposals have been assessed. These have been assessed as reasonable alternatives (**Stage 2**).
- **Chapter 5** explores the relative merits of taking forward a new National Park in various broad locations in Scotland, recognising the different characteristics of these areas in terms of the potential benefits and disbenefits such a designation would provide **(Stage 2).**
- **Chapter 6** presents proposals for monitoring the significant environmental effects of the Future of National Parks proposals, and opportunities for enhancements (linked to **Stage 5**).
- **Chapter 7** subsequently sets out the next steps for the Future of National Parks proposals and accompanying SEA process.

2.10 Consultation on this Environmental Report alongside the Future of National Parks proposals comprises **Stage 4**.

3. Scope of the SEA

What is the scope of the SEA?

SEA Scoping Report

3.1 The Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 requires that: "Before deciding on the scope and level of detail of the information to be included in the environmental report to be prepared in accordance with section 14; the responsible authority shall send to each consultation authority such sufficient details of the qualifying plan or programme as will enable the consultation authority to form a view on those matters." In Scotland, the consultation bodies are Historic Environment Scotland, the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) and Scottish Natural Heritage (NatureScot).

3.2 These authorities were consulted on the scope of the Future of National Parks proposals through initial scoping and screening undertaken in early 2023, and a Combined SEA Screening and Scoping Report was released to consultees in May 2023. Responses were received from Historic Environment Scotland and SEPA in May 2023, and from NatureScot in June 2023.

3.3 The Screening responses are detailed in **Appendix A**. The Scoping responses, and how these have been considered and addressed, are presented in **Appendix B**.

3.4 As per Schedule 3 of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005, a summary of the environmental baseline information and the relationship of the Future of National Parks proposals with other plans, programmes, and strategies is included in **Appendix C** and **Appendix D** (and presented in further detail within the Combined SEA Screening and Scoping Report).

Content of the Scoping Report

3.5 Developing the draft scope for the SEA as presented in the Scoping Report has involved the following steps:

- Exploring the policy context for the Future of National Parks proposals and SEA to summarise the key messages arising.
- Establishing the baseline for the SEA (i.e., the current and future situation in the area in the absence of the Future of National Parks proposals to help identify the likely significant effects of the proposals).
- Identifying particular problems or opportunities ('issues') that should be a particular focus of the SEA; and
- Considering this information, developing an SEA framework comprising SEA objectives and assessment questions, which can then be used as a guiding framework for the subsequent assessment.

3.6 Given the strategic and national level focus of the Future of National Parks proposals, all environmental topic areas have been scoped into the SEA (see **Table 3.1** below).

Table 3.1: Scoping of SEA topics

SEA topic	Scoped In?
Biodiversity, flora and fauna, and geodiversity	Yes
Climatic factors	Yes
Air	Yes
Water	Yes
Soil	Yes
Cultural heritage	Yes
Landscape	Yes
Material assets	Yes
Population and human health	Yes

3.7 For the purposes of the assessment, the air, water and soil topics have been amalgamated into one 'Environmental quality' topic heading. This is given the significant overlaps between the topics.

Key issues for The Future of National Parks in Scotland

3.8 Drawing on the review of the environmental context and baseline, the Combined SEA Screening and Scoping Report identified a range of environmental issues that should be a particular focus of SEA, ensuring it remains targeted on the most important issues. These key issues are presented below by SEA topic heading.

Biodiversity, flora and fauna, and geodiversity

- The abundance and distribution of Scotland's species has on average declined over recent decades.
- 78% of protected sites are in favourable or recovering condition while 22% of sites are in unfavourable condition.
- 11% of species have been classified as threatened with extinction from Great Britain and 133 (of those assessed) have already become extinct.
- The greatest drivers of change in biodiversity in Scotland are climate change, urbanisation, pollution, woodland management, fisheries, invasive non-native species, deer and other herbivore impacts, freshwater management and agricultural management.

- Aquaculture development, energy generation development, including on and offshore windfarms, can impact geodiversity assets. Geodiversity assets are also expected to be affected by climate change.
- Currently, 37% of Scotland's marine environment receives protection with 18.2% of terrestrial land protected for nature. There is a commitment to increase the area on land protected and managed for biodiversity to at least 30% by 2030. Options for delivering this commitment are currently being taken forward with stakeholders.

Climatic factors

- Changes in climate resulting in the loss of certain habitats and species, or changes in species range, migration and breeding. For example, through sea-level rise.
- Healthy ecosystems in National Parks are likely to play a key role in helping Scotland reach net zero. As such there is a need to recognise the contribution of habitats such as peatland, woodland and sea grasses to meeting climate mitigation targets.
- Climate change and biodiversity loss are twin crises that should be tackled together. Conserving, managing, and restoring ecosystems are key to success. For example, restoring river and wetland systems to their natural state and reconnecting them with their floodplains will support climate change resilience through natural flood management.
- In 2020, domestic transport was the largest source of net emissions. Degraded peatland also produces 10% of Scotland's carbon emissions and preventing these emissions is a vital part of the national drive to reach net zero by 2045.

Environmental quality

- Air pollution can affect habitats and species. In this respect ecosystems are impacted by air pollution, particularly sulphur and nitrogen emissions, and ground-level ozone as it affects their ability to function and grow.
- Under section 83(1) of the Environment Act 1995, Local Authorities have a duty to designate any relevant areas where the air quality objectives are not (or are unlikely to be) being met as Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs). Currently, 36 AQMAs have been declared in Scotland; 34 are transport-related and the remaining two have been declared for industrial emissions.
- Emissions of the eight main air pollutants are lower in 2020 than they were in 2005. Ammonia, however, has remained at a steady level.
- The main sources of emissions are transport, domestic, agriculture, and industrial.
- Policies that improve air quality can potentially have multiple co-benefits for biodiversity, as well as population health, for addressing inequality and for mitigating and adapting to climate change.
- Water quality in most of Scotland is in good or better condition, however, some localised areas of concern remain.
- Pressures on the surface water environment include urbanisation, invasive non-native species, intensive agriculture/aquaculture and climate change.

- Groundwater quality and flow can be affected by diffuse pollution from rural sources, discharges from industries such as mining and quarrying, and agriculture irrigation.
- Water abstraction and storage can also place a burden on water resources, with demand growing.
- Airborne pollution can impact water bodies causing overgrowth of plants and algae and depleting oxygen levels.
- Climate change is expected to lead to increases in water scarcity, flood risk, and to increase the risk of non-native species spreading and becoming established in water environments.
- Approximately 80% of peatland is thought to be damaged.
- Climate change and loss of organic matter pose significant threats to Scottish soils, with both likely to affect soil function.
- Changes in land use and land management practices are also a key pressure on soil.
- Contaminated and vacant and derelict land can have a number of negative impacts on the environment, including on soil.

Cultural heritage

- Existing pressures affecting the historic environment, including development pressures, maintenance, land use, coastal erosion, and climate change.
- Tourism and recreational access can lead to pressures and opportunities for the historic environment.
- Climate change has the potential to affect cultural heritage and historic sites by accelerating decay, this may increase the pressure on natural assets needed to repair or maintain sites.
- The net zero agenda will drive a significant increase in demand for the retrofit of traditional and historic buildings.
- Communities, such as coastal communities, are intimately tied to the environment and biodiversity surrounding them - which provide a rich Scottish cultural heritage.
- Biodiversity driven land management changes such as increasing hedgerows, native and semi-ancient woodland expansion and reinstatement of field patterns could impact on landscape and cultural heritage.
- Scotland's Fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4) has an increased emphasis on retaining and reusing existing buildings and structures.

Landscape

- Regional and local landscapes are becoming less distinct due to more similarities in building form, settlement patterns, and agricultural practices.
- A move towards a monoculture has created a less diverse landscape of field types and hedgerows.
- Climate change is expected to lead to extensive landscape change across Scotland, including by land use change, changes in habitats, and through

direct impacts on landscape components. The greatest changes are likely to occur in lowland and coastal areas where human population is highest.

- The coast and foreshore are under many pressures, particularly from climate change, rising sea levels and coastal erosion.
- Aquaculture development, energy generation development, including on and offshore windfarms, can impact landscape and seascape.
- Biodiversity driven land management changes such as increasing hedgerows, native and semi-ancient woodland expansion and reinstatement of field patterns could impact on Scotland's landscape.

Material assets

- Material assets is considered to comprise all natural and built assets in Scotland.
- Increasing demand for goods and services puts pressure on natural resources.
- Increasing use of recycled aggregate may mean a decrease in new extractions of primary resources, resulting in a reduction of negative impacts on habitats and species.
- Flooding poses the greatest long-term climate related risk to infrastructure performance, however, growing risks posed from heat, water scarcity and slope instability caused by severe weather could also prove significant.
- Expanding the area of Scotland's forests and woodlands can also contribute to reduced GHG emissions, and provide an important commercial natural resource, improve biodiversity, and provide spaces for people to enjoy.

Population and human health

- Projections forecast that the population will start to fall from around 2029 onwards. Most of the central belt and other urban areas are projected to grow in population. But it is projected that the population in almost half of the 32 local authorities will decline.
- Life expectancy is projected to increase.
- Climate change poses a wide range of potential effects on human health. It is expected that climate change's potential risks and benefits to population and health will not be evenly distributed.
- The quality of Scotland's parks and greenspaces has continued to decline. It also remains to be seen whether a recent increase in the use of green spaces[9] will be sustained following the recovery from the Covid pandemic.
- Scientific research highlights the clear physical and emotional health benefits where enhanced green infrastructure encourages spending more time outdoors and exposure to nature. Studies show that spending time with nature reduces blood pressure, lowers body mass index, helps to tackle depression, and improves social cohesion.

[9] As indicated by the Scottish Household Survey 2021 Telephone Survey – key findings.
(The following url links to the Scottish Government website. The page presents key findings from the 2021 telephone survey)
https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-household-survey-2021-telephone-survey-key-findings/

- Derelict and vacant land can affect a community's health, environment, economy, and social cohesion.

SEA Framework

3.9 The key environmental issues for the Future of National Parks proposals, as set out above, have been translated into an SEA 'Framework' of objectives and assessment questions.

3.10 The SEA Framework, which has been tailored for the Future of National Parks proposals, provides a way in which the likely significant environmental effects of the proposals and alternatives can be identified and subsequently analysed based on a structured and consistent approach.

3.11 Whilst all topics have been scoped-in to the assessment (see **Table 3.1**, above), the SEA Framework and the assessment findings in this Environmental Report have been streamlined and presented under seven SEA topics to deliver a proportionate and effective assessment process. The accompanying objectives and assessment questions for each topic have been refined as appropriate in recognition of the high-level nature of the proposals at this stage.

3.12 The SEA Framework is presented below: **Table 3.2** below.

Table 3.2: SEA Framework for The Future of National Parks in Scotland

SEA topic	SEA objective	Assessment questions (will the proposals help to…)
Biodiversity and geodiversity	Support the integrity of internationally, nationally, and locally designated sites in Scotland.	• Protect the integrity of internationally, nationally, and locally designated sites? • Manage the pressures on designated sites for biodiversity, fauna, and flora? • Expand and connect protected areas and improve their condition?
	Support the integrity of habitats and species in Scotland.	• Protect, enhance, and restore priority habitats, and the habitats of priority species? • Recover and protect vulnerable and important species? • Protect, enhance, and restore ecological networks and connectivity, supporting nature restoration and regeneration? • Effectively balance ecological benefits with the socio-economic potential of habitats and species? • Maximise benefits to biodiversity and geodiversity while realising socio-economic potential?
	Enhance understanding of biodiversity,	• Encourage opportunities for engagement with biodiversity?

SEA topic	SEA objective	Assessment questions (will the proposals help to…)
	fauna, and flora in Scotland.	
	Support the integrity of geodiversity resources in Scotland.	• Protect the integrity of Scotland's internationally significant geodiversity resources? • Protect and enhance geodiversity and support enhanced understanding of geodiversity resources?
Climate change	Support Scotland's resilience to the potential effects of climate change, including flooding.	• Effectively manage existing and emerging pressures associated with climate change? • Prevent, mitigate, and adapt to the effects of climate change, including flood risk? • Improve and extend green and blue infrastructure networks?
	Promote climate change mitigation efforts within Scotland.	• Contribute to Scotland's net zero ambitions? • Support nature-based solutions for emissions reductions?
Environmental quality	Maintain and enhance air quality in Scotland.	• Maintain and enhance the contribution of healthy ecosystems in the regulation of air quality? • Reduce levels of pollution and help enhance the environment?
	Maintain and enhance water resources in Scotland.	• Maintain and enhance the contribution of healthy ecosystems to the quality and quantity of water? • Reduce levels of pollution and help enhance the quality of water environments?
	Maintain and enhance soil resources in Scotland.	• Maintain and enhance the contribution of healthy ecosystems to the quality of soil resources? • Support the reinvigoration of areas of previously developed land, or vacant/ underutilised land?
Material assets	To reduce pressures on and facilitate the sustainable use of natural and built resources in Scotland.	• Secure the sustainable use of resources to maximise benefits for biodiversity, climate, and people? • Protect, enhance, and restore natural and built resources?

SEA topic	SEA objective	Assessment questions (will the proposals help to…)
Cultural heritage	Conserve, enhance, and promote Scotland's historic environment, including designated and non-designated heritage assets.	• Conserve, enhance and promote the significance of buildings, structures, and features of architectural or historic interest, both designated and non-designated, and their setting? • Conserve, enhance and promote the special interest, character and appearance designated and non-designated heritage assets and areas? • Conserve and enhance Scotland's archaeological resources, including features listed on the National Record of the Historic Environment?
	Promote opportunities for enhancing the understanding of Scotland's distinct historic environment.	• Support access to, interpretation and understanding of the historic evolution and character of the environment?
Landscape	Conserve and enhance Scotland's landscapes, seascapes, cityscapes, townscapes and villagescapes.	• Protect the special qualities and integrity of Scotland's landscapes, seascapes, cityscapes, townscapes and villagescapes? • Encourage opportunities for collaboration and partnerships between key public bodies to address the most important issues in relation to nature, people, and place?
	Protect and enhance the character and quality of Scotland's landscapes, seascapes, cityscapes, townscapes and villagescapes.	• Conserve, enhance or restore landscape character and local distinctiveness and the special qualities of the area? • Protect and enhance key landscape, seascape, cityscape, townscape and villagescape features? • Improve understanding and enjoyment of Scotland's distinctive landscape, seascape, cityscape, townscape, and villagescape resources?
Population and human health	Support thriving communities in Scotland.	• Promote the economic, social, cultural, and environmental wellbeing of communities, and responsible investment in natural resources? • Support nature-rich environments?

SEA topic	SEA objective	Assessment questions (will the proposals help to…)
	Improve the health and wellbeing of residents and visitors to Scotland.	• Promote understanding and enjoyment of Scotland's special qualities by the public? • Maintain or enhance the quality of life of local residents and visitors? • Increase the area of, access to, and benefits from green and blue spaces? • Increase access for recreation and the role of environment and place in mental and physical well-being (e.g., their experiential qualities)?

4. Assessment of draft proposals and reasonable alternatives

Introduction

4.1 This chapter presents an assessment of the draft proposals currently being consulted on relating to the legal framework for and powers of National Park Authorities.

4.2 The key facet of the proposals is to ensure that both existing and new National Park Authorities have the legal framework and powers they need to fulfil the leadership role relating to tackling the interlinked crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, whilst also welcoming visitors and supporting local communities and businesses. It is also recognised that it is important that existing and new National Parks have effective and efficient governance, ensuring that the membership of their boards is diverse, that it reflects and represents local communities whilst also bringing relevant skills, expertise and experience into the organisation.

Assessment of the current draft proposals

4.3 The following sections present the assessment findings of the current proposals as set out in the consultation paper on the proposed legislative changes to the aims, functions, powers, and governance of National Parks in Scotland.

4.4 For the purposes of the assessment, the current proposals have been grouped together to reflect how they are presented within the consultation paper. The paper includes a number of questions which are organised under four headings. In this context, the groupings are as follows:

- **Proposal NNP1:** Change to the purpose of National Park Authorities, which provides a greater emphasis on nature restoration and tackling climate change (Question 1)
- **Proposal NNP2:** Changes to the aims of National Parks (Questions 2 – 5)
- **Proposal NNP3:** Changes to the application of the National Park 'principle', highlighting that when conflicts arise between the aims of National Parks, National Park Authorities should prioritise the protection and restoration of natural assets, biodiversity and ecosystems (Question 6)
- **Proposal NNP4:** Role of public bodies operating within National Parks with respect to the National Park aims and 'principle', and the duty on public bodies to support implementation of National Park Plans (Questions 7 – 9)

4.5 During the screening stage of the SEA, two additional sets of proposals were screened out as not requiring further assessment. These relate to the general powers of National Park Authorities (Questions 10 and 11) and relating to the governance of National Parks (Question 12). With regards to these proposals, it was viewed that these would chiefly improve business and administrative efficiency rather than lead to direct significant effects.

Approach to the assessment and limitations encountered

- The SEA topics have been reworked and streamlined to reflect the high-level nature of the proposals.

- The SEA Framework of objectives and assessment questions have provided a useful steer when considering the potential impacts of the proposals, rather than each of the proposals being tested against every objective and assessment question.
- The key issues have been pitched at a national level at this time in the absence of any shortlisted nominated areas for a potential new National Park location and are therefore relevant for the whole of Scotland.
- Likely significant environment effects of the current proposals largely relate to how the proposals interact. In this respect, considering each proposal in isolation would not necessarily enable the SEA to present the most important potential effects (i.e., the in-combination effects of proposals). Reflecting this, the assessment findings are presented as a commentary of likely effects under each SEA topic.
- The determination of significance has been informed by the inherent assumptions / implications associated with the designation of new National Park(s), which are presented in the following section. It is also recognised that specific environmental effects arising may partly depend on the eventual geographic location and circumstances of a new National Park(s).
- Given the high-level nature of the current proposals, and as there is limited information on the eventual geographic location and circumstances of a new National Park(s) at this stage, it is challenging to meaningfully assess what cumulative effects, if any, would occur. As more detailed information becomes available, it will be important to consider whether any new or previously unidentified significant effects may arise, and whether therefore any additional assessment may be required.

Assumptions / implications of designating a new National Park(s)

- There is likely to be additional emphasis on the proactive management and planning for these area(s) (e.g., inclusion of a ranger service), with an associated increase in possible funding opportunities, job opportunities, and government expenditure.
- There are likely to be new or additional statutory assessment obligations and / or policy protections where an area is designated as a National Park.
- There is likely to be an increase in visitor numbers to parts of the designated area(s), with potential recreational pressures and impacts to natural and built-environment assets (e.g., from access, disturbance, traffic).
- There may be possible divergences or convergences in aims between key stakeholder groups within the National Park(s). This could include for example, balancing the competing priorities or objectives of landowners, tenants, business owners or visitors.
- Scotland is diverse, and the implications of the designation of a new National Park depends on a range of environmental and socio-economic factors. These factors have been explored further in **Chapter 4**, which considers options relating to the broad principles underpinning the legislative changes and the criteria for National Parks, and **Chapter 5**, which considers the relative merits of designating a new National Park in a number of broad locations in Scotland.

Assessment findings

Biodiversity and Geodiversity

4.6 With respect to Proposal NNP1, an additional emphasis on nature restoration has the potential to focus the priorities of National Park authorities on one of the pressing issues across Scotland in terms of tackling the nature emergency[10]. This is further recognised through Proposal NNP3, which seeks to retain the National Park 'principle' but with greater weight given to the protection and restoration of natural assets, biodiversity, and ecosystems. Whilst there are likely to be benefits with this additional emphasis, potential impacts are uncertain at this stage as they are linked to effective planning and monitoring.

4.7 Currently, the first National Park aim is *"*to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area*"*. The proposed revision to the first National Park aim (see Proposal NNP2) provides an additional focus on nature protection and enhancement of biodiversity and ecosystems. Through highlighting the importance of restoring natural assets, biodiversity and ecosystems within National Parks, the revision to the aim also supports one of the key priority areas for Scotland[11] by encouraging opportunities for nature improvements and recovery. This has the potential to indirectly support the interpretation and understanding of Scotland's biodiversity and geodiversity by raising awareness of the key issues facing Scotland's ecological and geological assets and prioritising efforts to address these concerns. Additionally, this would support a network of healthy, resilient ecosystems which, in combination with the proposals which seek to strengthen the role of public bodies operating within National Park boundaries (see Proposal NNP4), will likely facilitate **significant positive effects** for both nature and society.

4.8 Proposal NNP4 outlines the potential opportunities associated with partnership working between key public bodies operating within the National Park, recognising that the special qualities of National Parks are influenced by and dependent upon the relationships between people and place. For example, collaborating to deliver the National Park aims has the potential to lead to **positive effects**, managing the pressures on designated sites for biodiversity and geodiversity through applying coordinated approaches to nature recovery. Proposal NNP4 confirms that the duties on public bodies should be strengthened so that they have an obligation to support and contribute to the implementation of National Park Plans.

4.9 On balance, a statutory purpose specifically referring to nature recovery is likely to increase the focus of new and existing National Parks on the restoration of habitats and ecological networks, with increased benefits for biodiversity and geodiversity. When combined with the proposals which encourage greater collaboration between public bodies operating within National Parks, including with respect to the delivery of objectives within the National Park management plans, this is likely to lead to **significant long-term positive effects** for biodiversity and geodiversity.

Climate Change

[10] Scottish Government (2022): Biodiversity strategy to 2045: tackling the nature emergency
[11] Nature Scot (2023): 30x30 commitment to protect at least 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030

4.10 There is a focus across Scotland on addressing the twin crises of climate change and nature loss and to capture the opportunities presented by the transition to net zero[12]. A key proposal in this regard is Proposal NNP1, which reinforces the role that National Park authorities can have with respect to climate action. Whilst this is likely to positively contribute towards Scotland's net-zero ambitions and both tackle and adapt to climate change impacts, it is recognised that the application of mitigation and adaptation measures may conflict with some of the additional aims of Scotland's National Parks. For example, retrofitting historic buildings may detract from the significance and character of the built environment and there is potential for renewable energy generation to give rise to adverse impacts on landscape character and ecological assets. In this respect, the potential benefits of the additional focus on climate action are dependent on the extent to which such proposals effectively balance the potential climate change benefits against the wider National Park aims (as highlighted within Proposal NNP2) to deliver sustainable futures for Scotland. The proposals which encourage collaborative efforts between public bodies operating within National Parks through Proposal NNP4 are likely to support this balance.

4.11 With regards to Proposal NNP2, the proposed changes to the aims of National Parks will help enhance the resilience of National Parks to the impacts of climate change. For example, an increased focus of the first National Park aim on natural assets, biodiversity and ecosystems will help support the resilience of ecosystems in adapting to the likely impacts of climate change. This includes through reinforcing the regulating and provisioning role of ecosystem services within National Parks, which will help limit impacts from extreme weather events such as excess rainfall or drought, both within the immediate area and downstream. The proposed changes to the first National Park aim will also support climate change mitigation by directly and indirectly promoting carbon sequestration, including through activities such as peatland or woodland restoration.

4.12 Reinforcing the benefits seen through Proposal NNP2, the role of National Parks in supporting climate change mitigation and adaptation will also be supported by NNP3, which seeks to retain the principle that greater weight should be given to the protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems within the National Park where there is a conflict between the National Park aims.

4.13 Overall, the proposals are likely to support the transition to net-zero and facilitate opportunities to tackle the climate crisis. Whilst this is likely to lead to **significant long-term positive effects**, there will be a need to ensure that impacts on landscape character from climate mitigation and nature enhancement activities are appropriately considered, ensuring that potential conflicts which may arise between climate change objectives and the wider National Park aims are reconciled. This has been discussed in more detail under the 'Landscape' topic below.

Environmental Quality

4.14 Water, soil and air quality and the effective functioning of ecosystems are intrinsically linked. Recognising that habitats and species comprise a key ecosystem service role in regulating water, soil and air quality and ensuring a

[12] Scottish Government (2021): Guiding principles on the environment: draft statutory guidance

resilient water supply, the commitment to protecting and improving Scotland's environmental quality is embedded in decision-making across different policies and sectors[13].

4.15 In this respect the proposed change to the purpose of National Park Authorities to provide a greater emphasis on nature restoration and tackling climate change through Proposal NNP1 will help reinforce the regulating and provisioning role of ecosystems within National Parks in supporting water and soil quality and availability. This will be further supported by Proposal NNP2, which seeks to reinforce the focus of the first National Park aim on natural assets, biodiversity and ecosystems, and increase the focus of the second National Park aim on the sustainable management of natural resources.

4.16 These direct and indirect positive effects on environmental quality will be further supported by Proposal NNP3, which seeks to retain the principle that greater weight should be given to the protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems within the National Park where there is a conflict between the National Park aims.

4.17 Whilst it is acknowledged that specific environmental effects arising are influenced by the eventual geographic location and circumstances of a new National Park(s), the proposals which encourage greater collaboration between key public bodies operating within National Park boundaries (see Proposal NNP4) will likely facilitate opportunities to reduce levels of pollution and deliver the wider benefits for air, soil and water quality from nature restoration and climate regulation.

4.18 Overall, the proposals are likely to provide additional opportunities for maintaining and enhancing the contribution of healthy ecosystems in the regulation, provision and restoration of air quality, and the quality and quantity of water and soil resources. This likely to lead to **significant long-term positive effects** for Scotland's environmental quality, and further support opportunities for nature recovery and climate resilience.

Material assets

4.19 The current National Park aims support material assets through seeking to promote the sustainable use of the natural resources of an area under National Park designation. This has a role in supporting natural and built assets within National Parks. Changes to the aims and an increased focus of provisions on aspects such as climate change and nature restoration through Proposal NNP1 will help reinforce National Park's role in supporting natural and built material assets, which is likely to lead to short-term positive effects. This includes through increasing the resilience of National Parks to change, enhancing opportunities for improvements to the natural and built environment, and facilitating the more effective management of natural resources.

4.20 This will be supported by Proposal NNP2, which seeks to refocus National Park aims. A key proposal in this regard is to refocus the second National Park aim relating to the promotion of the sustainable use of natural resources. This will expand existing provisions to also include a commitment to facilitate the sustainable management of the area's natural resources "to maximise the benefits for the environment, climate, economy and people". These provisions recognise the wider benefits that the sustainable management of resources can

[13] Scottish Government (2021): Guiding principles on the environment: draft statutory guidance

provide for material assets. Material assets will be further supported by the proposal to update the fourth National Park aim to support the growth of nature-based jobs and skills, increase investment in the area's natural capital and working with communities and businesses to help them transition to net zero whilst supporting and developing the local wellbeing economy.

4.21 Whilst retaining the National Park 'principle' (which gives greater weight to the protection and restoration of natural assets, biodiversity, and ecosystems within the National Park if there is a conflict between the National Park aims), may impact on some economic opportunities, it is anticipated that that the reassertion of this principle will have indirect positive effects for material assets overall. This includes through supporting the economic activities associated with a high quality and well managed environment, including for nature-based jobs and skills, increased investment in the area's natural capital and support for new economic opportunities.

4.22 Proposal NNP4 places additional emphasis on public bodies with respect to the delivery of objectives within the National Park Plans. This is likely to enhance opportunities for improvements to the natural and built environment and help to facilitate the sustainable management of natural resources.

4.23 Overall, the proposed revisions to the aims and purpose of National Parks, the reassertion of the National Park principle and reinforcement of public bodies' role are likely to lead to **long-term positive effects** with respect to material assets. These will result from supporting the sustainable use of resources, and realising the economic opportunities associated with a high quality and well managed environment, including for nature-based jobs and skills, increased investment in environmental assets, and support for the green economy.

Cultural Heritage

4.24 Proposal NNP1 seeks to initiate changes to the purpose of National Park Authorities through providing a greater emphasis on nature restoration. This will be supported through Proposal NNP2, which seeks to increase the focus of the first National Park aim on natural assets, biodiversity and ecosystems, and Proposal NNP3, which seeks to retain the application of the National Park 'principle'. With regards to the historic environment, enhancements to local character from nature restoration may have benefits for the setting of the historic environment. However, an increased focus of the National Park proposals on nature restoration, including habitat restoration and new habitat creation, may have negative impacts (direct and indirect) on the significance of heritage assets including their settings. Peatland restoration, for example, can have impacts on archaeology. In addition, localised ecologies, which reflect historic industry and character, should be considered for protection where possible, such as around historic mining areas. This includes plants that have adapted to changes in soil mineral levels or localised thermal differences. Care needs to be taken with the location, species and sizes of any new planting to avoid negative impacts, e.g. to archaeological sites or the setting of a listed building, or to minimise these and maximise opportunities for enhancement. Planting and other types of habitat restoration and re-creation will need to be informed by appropriate research and historic environment/landscape character assessments. For this reason, appropriate methods for enhancements should therefore be devised with input from historic environment specialists from the outset.

4.25 It is recognised that an increased focus on climate change within National Parks and the net zero agenda will likely drive a significant increase in demand for the retrofit of traditional and historic buildings. Additionally, there is potential for renewable energy generation to give rise to adverse impacts on the fabric and setting of the historic environment; likewise changes to the landscape brought about by climate change mitigation measures such as reafforestation or woodland planting may lead to changes to the landscape which do not reflect or engage with historic landscape character. Any such solutions would need to be carefully designed to support the significance of local heritage resources.

4.26 One of the key aims of National Parks is to conserve and enhance the cultural heritage of the area(s) covered by the designation. Proposal NNP2 seeks to expand the wording of the existing aim to include '*historic environment assets'*, therefore specifically acknowledging the relationship between historic environment assets (e.g., historic buildings and monuments, archaeological sites, and historic landscapes) and their contributions to Scotland's cultural heritage value. This reinforces the role that National Parks can have in terms of conserving, enhancing, and promoting Scotland's historic environment, including designated and non-designated assets (and their settings).

4.27 In order to support the collective achievement of the aims, functions, and management of Scotland's National Parks in this context, Proposal NNP4 encourages greater collaboration between key public bodies operating within their boundaries. This is likely to deliver long-term positive effects for Scotland's historic environment through helping to enable the 'win-win' opportunities associated with the effective management of the historic environment to be realised.

4.28 Overall, the proposals will bring **medium and long-term positive effects** for heritage assets by reinforcing the link between cultural heritage and the historic environment, supporting the effective management of the historic environment, and facilitating enhancements to the setting of the historic environment. However, an increased focus on nature restoration and climate change mitigation has the potential to bring **negative impacts** if nature enhancements and climate initiatives are poorly designed and do not reinforce the significance of heritage assets and historic landscape character. In this respect appropriate methods for enhancements should therefore be devised with input from historic environment specialists from the outset.

Landscape

4.29 The proposed provisions will in many respects help reinforce landscape character in and around National Parks.

4.30 Proposal NNP1 seeks to initiate changes to the purpose of National Park Authorities through providing a greater emphasis on nature restoration. This will be supported through Proposal NNP2, which seeks to increase the focus of the first National Park aim on natural assets, biodiversity and ecosystems, and Proposal NNP3, which seeks to retain the application of the National Park 'principle'. These provisions have the potential to engage positively with landscape character given that habitats form central components of the landscape, with enhancements to habitats providing significant opportunities to reinforce a landscape's special qualities. It should be recognised though that biodiversity enhancements would need to be appropriately designed to ensure that these special qualities are supported.

4.31 An increased focus of the National Park Authorities towards climate change mitigation and adaptation proposed through NNP1 would also potentially support landscape character given the importance of developing landscape-scale solutions to carbon sequestration and adaptation. Through emphasising the important leadership role that National Park authorities can play in restoring nature and in mitigating and adapting to climate change, the proposals will also help enhance the resilience of landscapes to the impacts of climate change.

4.32 However, there is potential for renewable energy generation to give rise to adverse impacts on landscape character and ecological assets; likewise changes to the landscape brought about by climate change mitigation measures such as reafforestation or woodland planting may lead to changes to the landscape which do not reflect or engage with historic landscape character.

4.33 As such, for both biodiversity enhancements and climate change mitigation and adaptation measures in National Parks, any such solutions would need to be carefully designed to support the special qualities of a landscape. Appropriate methods for enhancements should therefore be devised with input from landscape specialists from the outset.

4.34 In terms of the other proposed provisions, currently, the third National Park aim is *"to promote understanding and enjoyment (including enjoyment in the form of recreation) of the special qualities of the area by the public"*. The review of the third National Park aim through Proposal NNP2 qualifies the 'special qualities' as their natural and cultural assets, whilst also recognising the importance of supporting sustainable tourism and visitor management. This is likely to have positive effects with respect to understanding and awareness of the special qualities of National Parks by enhancing opportunities for people to access and experience these areas. In combination with the proposals which promote opportunities for collaboration and partnerships between public bodies to deliver key objectives (see Proposal NNP4), this has the potential to facilitate a network of healthy, resilient ecosystems which provide services and benefits for both nature and society. This is likely to support the concept of 'living landscapes'[14] and help to deliver long-term positive effects.

4.35 Otherwise, it is recognised that the designation of a new National Park(s) has the potential to lead to further positive and negative impacts. For example, positive impacts are likely to result from more balanced tourism and increased investment in visitor management. Comparatively, negative impacts may occur from the potential recreational pressures and impacts to natural and cultural assets associated with an increase in visitor numbers (e.g., from access, disturbance, traffic). Overall however, given the strong focus of National Park purpose, aims and principles on the protection and enhancement of landscape character (and the components which reinforce landscape character), it is anticipated that any potential effects are likely to be mitigated.

4.36 Overall, the proposals will help reinforce the existing role of the National Park provisions for protecting and enhancing the special qualities of landscapes. This includes through initiating approaches that will support landscapes that are resilient and adaptable to change, whilst recognising the central role of landscapes in addressing the biodiversity and climate emergencies. This will bring **significant medium and long-term positive effects** for this topic. However, **uncertainties** relate to the potential for climate change mitigation and

[14] Scottish Wildlife Trust (2023): The 'Living Landscape' project

adaptation solutions to lead to negative impacts on landscape character if poorly and inappropriately initiated. As such, any such solutions would need to be carefully designed to support the special qualities of a landscape, and appropriate methods for enhancements devised with input from landscape specialists from the outset.

Population and Human Health

4.37 Access to nature plays an important role with respect to human health and wellbeing. Scotland's National Parks are delivering on this agenda by supporting high quality walking and cycling infrastructure; and by enabling people to be active through green health partnerships, health walks, outreach and volunteer programmes.[15] It is recognised that enhanced opportunities for recreation is a likely outcome of designating a new National Park(s), with the existing third aim promoting the enjoyment and understanding of the areas by the public (including enjoyment in the form of recreation). The proposed revision to the third aim within Proposal NNP2 provides additional emphasis on *'inclusion and improved accessibility'*, with the revisions to the fourth aim including a focus on promoting *'cultural development and wellbeing'* of the area's communities. This is likely to facilitate long-term significant positive effects by improving opportunities to connect all individuals and communities more widely to National Parks, enabling them to access and experience these areas whilst also supporting their mental and physical well-being.

4.38 The increased impetus on nature restoration and adaptation will help to reinforce the resilience of communities to the impacts of climatic and environmental changes in and around National Parks. This has the potential to lead to significant long-term positive effects for population and human health by enhancing green and blue infrastructure networks, supporting nature-rich environments and active travel opportunities, and encouraging better connected areas and communities. However, it is recognised that the potential significance of potential effects is dependent on the eventual location of a new National Park(s) and the extent to which natural and built resources are protected, enhanced, and restored through effective planning and monitoring.

4.39 Overall, the proposals have the potential to bring **significant medium and long-term positive effects** for the Population and Communities topic through promoting the quality of life and health and wellbeing of communities and increasing engagement with the special qualities of (and opportunities provided) by existing and new National Parks.

Assessing reasonable alternatives in SEA

4.40 The assessment of 'reasonable alternatives' is a key element of the SEA process to meet the requirements of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005.

4.41 To meet this requirement, the SEA process has assessed a number of options as reasonable alternatives for the Future of National Parks proposals. The Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 is not prescriptive as to what constitutes a reasonable alternative, stating only that the Environmental Report should "identify, describe and evaluate the likely significant effects on the

[15] Scottish Government (2020): The Environment Strategy for Scotland: vision and outcomes

environment of implementing the plan…and reasonable alternatives to the plan… taking into account the objectives and geographical scope of the plan…"

4.42 In developing reasonable alternatives for the SEA, a central consideration has been with respect to the strategic nature of the proposals. The focus has therefore been on the proposed changes to the aims, powers, and functions of National Parks in Scotland.

4.43 In this regard, this Environmental Report has assessed options as reasonable alternatives, with a view to exploring the potential for significant environmental effects. These assessments are designed to inform plan makers and stakeholders on the relative merits of alternative approaches that the proposals could take on various issues and decisions.

Development of options to assess as reasonable alternatives

4.44 The overall aims of the current proposals are to consider (i) the provisions in relation to the aims, powers and functions of National Parks and (ii) the Scottish Government's commitment under the Bute House Agreement and Programme for Government to establish at least one new National Park in Scotland by 2026.

4.45 In developing options to assess through the SEA process, AECOM engaged plan-makers to understand where reasonable alternatives might arise. From this process, it was agreed that the assessment of reasonable alternatives should mirror the strategic level of the proposals.

4.46 In addition, it was agreed that it would be appropriate at this stage for the SEA to assess options relating to the broad locations of where a new National Park could potentially be located.

4.47 The following overview presents the details and assessment of the options assessed relating to the broad principles underpinning the legislative changes and the criteria for new National Parks.

4.48 **Chapter 5** subsequently presents a high-level assessment of the five broad regions of Scotland within which new National Park(s) could potentially be located.

Options exploring the broad principles underpinning the legislative changes and criteria for new National Parks

4.49 The current purpose of a National Park Authority in Scotland, as set out in the 2000 Act (section 9(1)), is *"*to ensure that the National Park aims are collectively achieved in relation to the National Park in a coordinated way*".*

4.50 These are supported by the four National Park aims which are as follows:

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.

4.51 In light of the increased recognition of National Parks' role in addressing biodiversity loss and climate change, and changes in the national policy framework in Scotland, there is potential to reframe the general purpose of a National Park Authority and strengthen National Park aims to reflect these issues.

4.52 To explore these possibilities further, three options have been assessed through the SEA process. These have explored different approaches to the broad principles underpinning the proposed changes.

4.53 The options are as follows:

- **Option NP1:** Do not make changes to the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000, with a view to not designating any new National Parks in Scotland. This would be a 'do nothing' option.
- **Option NP2:** Deliver new National Park(s) in Scotland, with no amendments to the aims, purpose and powers.
- **Option NP3:** Deliver new National Parks(s), with amendments to the aims, purpose and powers of all National Parks (these changes would apply to any new National Parks and the two existing National Parks in Scotland).

4.54 It should be noted that Option NP1, which would propose no changes to the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000, and not deliver new National Parks, is not considered to be a 'reasonable' alternative. This is due to the Scottish Government's statutory and other objectives on climate and nature (including those set out in the 2009 Climate Change Scotland Act, the 2019 Emissions Reduction Targets Scotland Act and Scottish Ministers' commitments set out in the Bute House Agreement and the Programme for Government. Option NP1 is however appropriate to consider given the 'do nothing' approach proposed by the option will help enable the relative merits of different approaches to be more effectively explored through the SEA process.

Assessment of options: findings

4.55 The following overview presents assessment findings in relation to the three options introduced above.

4.56 This is organised by the seven SEA topics and use the SEA Framework set out above.

4.57 For each SEA topic, a commentary on the likely effects is presented. Options are also ranked numerically reflecting their relative environmental performance in relation to the relevant SEA topic, with '1st' the most favourable ranking and '3rd' the least favourable ranking.

Biodiversity and geodiversity

4.58 Whilst the current provisions (Option NP1) seek to conserve the natural heritage of an area covered by a National Park, the existing impetus of the provisions does not reflect the reality of the nature emergency acknowledged by the Scottish Government (including through its Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and associated draft 5 year delivery plan). The establishment of a new National Park under the current provisions through Option NP2 would therefore provide a missed opportunity to increase the focus of new a National Park more firmly on nature restoration. In this respect, Option NP3, with a statutory purpose specifically referring to nature restoration, would increase the focus of new and existing National Parks on the restoration of habitats and ecological networks, with increased benefits for biodiversity and geodiversity. In addition an increased focus on climate change will help increase the resilience of habitats and species to the likely effects of climate change.

4.59 Option NP1 would also not deliver a new National Park. In this respect any benefits of National Park designation for biodiversity would be limited to the areas in the vicinities of the Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park and Cairngorms National Park.

Ranking:

1st: Option NP3

2nd: Option NP2

3rd: Option NP1

Climate change

4.60 The current provisions of the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 do not explicitly acknowledge climate change mitigation or adaptation. Whilst the current provisions indirectly support climate change mitigation and adaptation (including from the principles to conserve and enhance the natural heritage of the area and to promote the sustainable use of the area's natural resources), Option NP1 could limit the scope for National Park authorities to proactively initiate actions which help tackle the climate emergency. Similarly, the delivery of a new National Park under the current provisions via Option NP2 would provide a missed opportunity to increase the focus of a new National Park on climate change, specifically on the reduction of carbon emissions and adapting to the effects of climate change.

4.61 It should also be noted that under Option NP1, the existing benefits of National Park designation for climate change mitigation and adaptation would only

continue to be seen in the vicinities of the current two National Parks at Loch Lomond & the Trossachs and Cairngorms.

4.62 In contrast, Option NP3, through including specific provisions on mitigating and adapting to climate change, will help ensure that new National Parks take a proactive role in addressing climate change, whilst also reinforcing existing National Parks' role in tackling the climate emergency. The option is therefore mostly likely to offer significant medium and long-term effects in relation to this SEA topic.

1st: Option NP3

2nd: Option NP2

3rd: Option NP1

Environmental quality

4.63 The current National Park provisions, through seeking to conserve and enhance the natural heritage and promote the sustainable use of the natural resources of the area, have a role in supporting water, soil and air quality. Under Option NP1, the existing benefits of National Park designation for water, soil and air quality would only continue to take place in the vicinities of the Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park and Cairngorms National Park. Option NP2 would therefore widen these existing benefits to the additional areas covered by National Park designation.

4.64 An increased focus of the National Park provisions on nature restoration and climate will help reinforce the regulating and provisioning role of ecosystems within National Parks in supporting water and soil quality and availability. In this respect, in comparison to the existing provisions, Option NP3 will bring additional benefits for this SEA topic, and is most likely of the approaches to lead to a wider range of significant positive environmental effects.

Ranking:

1st: Option NP3

2nd: Option NP2

3rd: Option NP1

Material assets

4.65 The current National Park aims support the material assets topic through seeking to promote the sustainable use of the natural resources of an area under National Park designation. This has a role in supporting natural and built assets within National Parks.

4.66 Changes to the aims and an increased focus of provisions on aspects such as climate change and nature restoration through Option NP3 will though help reinforce National Park's role in supporting natural and built material assets. This includes through increasing the resilience of National Parks to change, enhancing opportunities for improvements to the natural and built environment, and facilitating the more effective management of natural resources.

4.67 In this respect, Options NP1 and Option NP2 comprise a missed opportunity to strengthen the role of National Parks in a way which will support this SEA topic.

4.68 In addition, under Option NP1, the existing benefits of National Park designation relating to the sustainable use of natural resources would only continue to take place in the vicinities of the Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park and Cairngorms National Park. Option NP2, whilst comprising a missed opportunity to strengthen the role of new National Parks, would serve widen existing benefits to additional areas.

Ranking:

1st: Option NP3

2nd: Option NP2

3rd: Option NP1

Cultural heritage

4.69 The current National Park aims seek to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area, promote understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the area by the public and promote sustainable economic and social development of the area's communities. In this respect the existing provisions have a strong focus on elements which support the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment and promote the enjoyment and understanding of heritage assets. They also facilitate the socio-economic opportunities afforded by a distinctive and well managed historic environment.

4.70 Under Option NP1, the existing benefits of National Park designation would only continue in the vicinities of the Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park and Cairngorms National Park. Option NP2 would take this further through widening these existing benefits to new areas covered by National Park designation.

4.71 In terms of Option NP3, a change in focus of the provisions towards nature restoration and climate change mitigation and adaptation would potentially reduce the current impetus on the conservation and enhancement of the cultural heritage of the area covered by a National Park. However, the changes are unlikely to diminish the role of National Parks in conserving and enhancing the historic environment, particularly given this role would be retained as one of the key aims of National Parks. In addition, the updates to the provisions could also reinforce benefits for the historic environment. This could include through factors such as: increasing the resilience of the historic environment to the effects of climate change; enhancing the role of the historic environment within wider environmental improvement activities; or actions which more effectively marry the natural and cultural heritage of National Parks.

4.72 It should be noted though that an increased focus of National Park provisions on biodiversity and climate change mitigation, including habitat restoration and new habitat creation, or activities to support climate change adaptation, may have negative impacts (direct and indirect) on the significance of heritage assets including their settings. For example, care would need to be taken with the location, species and scales of any new biodiversity enhancement activities to avoid negative impacts, e.g., to archaeological sites or the setting of a listed building. As such, there would be a need to ensure that biodiversity enhancements or enhancements relating to climate change mitigation and adaptation are appropriately informed by historic environment considerations and devised with input from heritage specialists from the outset.

Ranking:

1st: Option NP2

2nd: Option NP3

3rd: Option NP1

Landscape

4.73 The current National Park aims seek to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area and promote understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the area by the public. In addition, where there is a conflict between aims, the aim to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the National Park area should have greater weight. In this respect the existing provisions have a strong focus on elements which support landscape character and promote the enjoyment and understanding of the landscape.

4.74 Under Option NP1, the existing benefits of National Park designation would only continue in the vicinities of the Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park and Cairngorms National Park. Option NP2 would take this further through widening these existing benefits to new areas covered by National Park designation.

4.75 In terms of Option NP3, a change in focus of the provisions towards nature restoration would be likely to reinforce landscape character. This is given that habitats form central components of the landscape, with enhancements to habitats providing significant opportunities to reinforce a landscape's special qualities. However, it should be recognised that biodiversity enhancements would need to be appropriately designed to ensure that these special qualities are supported.

4.76 A change of focus towards climate change mitigation and adaptation would also potentially support landscape character given the importance of developing landscape-scale solutions to carbon sequestration and adaptation. However, there is potential for renewable energy generation to give rise to adverse impacts on landscape character and ecological assets. Any such solutions would again need to be carefully designed to support the special qualities of a landscape. As for biodiversity improvements, appropriate methods for enhancements should therefore be devised with input from landscape specialists from the outset.

Ranking:

1st: Option NP3

2nd: Option NP2

3rd: Option NP1

Population and Human Health

4.77 The two latter National Park aims seek to promote understanding and enjoyment (including enjoyment in the form of recreation) of the special qualities of the area by the public and promote sustainable economic and social development of the area's communities. Whilst the conservation and enhancement of the natural and cultural heritage of the area would be given

greater weight in the event of a conflict between the aims, socio-economic considerations are a key element of the current aims.

4.78 Whilst a reconfiguring of the aims towards nature restoration and climate change mitigation and adaptation through Option NP3 may change this direct focus, a similar change in impetus has the potential to bring a range of wider socio-economic benefits. This includes improved and diversified employment and education opportunities, increased community engagement with environmental improvement activities, and support for a range of positive quality of life and health outcomes. In addition, an increased impetus on nature restoration and adaptation will help reinforce the resilience of communities to the impacts of climatic and environmental changes in and around National Parks. In this respect Option NP3 has the potential to bring additional benefits for the quality of life and health and wellbeing of communities.

4.79 With regards to a comparison between Options NP1 and NP2, under Option NP1, the existing socio-economic benefits of National Park designation would only continue in the vicinities of the Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park and Cairngorms National Park. Option NP2 would take this further through widening these existing benefits to new areas covered by National Park designation.

Ranking:

1st: Option NP3

2nd: Option NP2

3rd: Option NP1

What are the conclusions of the assessment at this stage?

4.80 The assessment has highlighted that the Future of National Park Proposals have the potential to bring a range of significant medium and long-term positive effects across the SEA topics. Whilst broad ranging, these specifically link to a strengthening of National Park provisions in relation to nature restoration and tackling climate change mitigation and adaptation, and an additional focus of the provisions on community engagement and collaboration. The assessment has also highlighted that there are no likely significant negative effects arising as a result of the proposals.

4.81 In this respect, within the context within which they sit, the proposals have the potential to support a wide range of Scottish Government policy initiatives positively and cumulatively. As such, the National Park provisions will help inform the selection of candidate areas for National Park designation which are more likely to contribute towards the delivery of emerging environmental policy drivers and aspirations, particularly with respect to nature recovery and facilitating opportunities to tackle the climate crisis. The provisions will also help ensure that the two existing National Parks in Scotland are more effectively able to support actions which respond to the climate and biodiversity emergencies, whilst delivering a wider range of environmental benefits.

4.82 The assessment has however highlighted some uncertainties with regards to the effect of nature restoration and climate change mitigation and adaptation activities on the fabric and setting of the historic environment and landscape character. In this respect, there is a need to recognise that not all solutions will be appropriate for the existing cultural landscape and historic environment of areas covered by National Park designations. In this respect, there is a need for the changes to the principles underpinning existing National Parks and the designation of new National Parks to be accompanied by a recognition of these potential indirect impacts.

Recommendations in light of assessment findings

4.83 To help ensure that the environmental value of the proposals are maximised, and the uncertainties identified through the assessment are addressed, a number of recommendations can be made for the implementation of the proposals. For example:

- To facilitate a balance between nature recovery, climate resilience, and wider National Park aims, ecological enhancements should be sensitive to the surrounding areas (e.g., with respect to their special qualities), and exercises in habitat restoration and creation should be carefully selected to complement existing character.
- To help maximise benefits to cultural heritage, and limit potential negative effects, appropriate methods for enhancements should be devised with input from historic environment specialists from the outset.
- To further support visitor management, opportunities for sustainable travel and active travel within new National Parks should be encouraged wherever possible.

4.84 As the proposals are implemented, monitoring will occur to determine whether there are any unexpected effects (see **Chapter 6**), with appropriate measures implemented where necessary to address any unexpected effects.

5. Consideration of broad locations for a new National Park

Process for selecting and designating new National Parks

5.1 Subsequent to the current consultation on the proposed legislative changes to the aims, functions, powers and governance of National Parks in Scotland, the selection and designation of new National Park(s) will take place. This will take place through the following process:

- In Autumn 2023 nominations for new National Parks will be invited following the finalisation of an appraisal framework. Communities and organisations wishing to develop and submit a nomination will have 5 months to develop their proposals. In Spring 2024 all nominations received by the Scottish Government will be appraised.
- In Summer 2024, Ministers will announce their decision on the proposal(s) for new National Park(s) that will go forward for designation. A reporter will be appointed to undertake an investigation and report to Ministers on the proposal(s). This process will include a public consultation on the new National Park proposal(s).
- The designation of the National Park(s) will then take place during 2025-2026 through the development of and consultation on a Designation Order, and laying of the Designation Order before Parliament.

Options exploring the broad location of where a new National Park could potentially be located

5.2 In light of the process outlined above, it is recognised that it would be appropriate at this initial stage for potential broad locations for new National Park(s) to be considered through the current SEA. This is with a view to exploring the relative merits of taking forward a new National Park in different broad locations in Scotland, recognising the different characteristics of these wide areas in terms of the potential benefits and disbenefits such a designation would provide.

Options exploring the broad location of where a new National Park could potentially be located

5.3 The National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) is the Scottish Government's national spatial strategy for Scotland, setting out spatial principles, regional priorities, national developments and national planning policy.

5.4 The NPF4 presents Regional Spatial Priorities for the five broad regions of Scotland, as follows:

North & West Coast and Islands

5.5 This area broadly comprises the island communities of Shetland, Orkney, the Outer Hebrides, and parts of Highland and Argyll and Bute. It also incorporates the north and west coastline of the Scottish mainland.

North

5.6 This area broadly includes parts of Highland with parts of Argyll and Bute, Moray, Cairngorms National Park, as well as the north of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park, Stirling and Perth and Kinross, with links west and north to coastal and island communities.

North East

5.7 This area focuses on Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire with cross-boundary links to Moray, and south towards Angus and the Tay estuary.

Central

5.8 This area broadly covers central Scotland from the Glasgow city region and the Ayrshires in the west to Edinburgh city region in the east, including the Tay cities, the Forth Valley and Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park

South

5.9 This area broadly includes Dumfries and Galloway and the Scottish Borders, South and East Ayrshires, South Lanarkshire in the west, with links to the Lothians towards the east.

5.10 The assessment considers at a high level these five areas in terms of the potential delivery of new National Park(s). This is with a view to exploring the relative merits of taking forward a new National Park in different broad locations in Scotland, recognising the different characteristics of these areas in terms of the potential benefits and disbenefits such a designation would provide.

Assessment findings

5.11 The following overview present an appraisal of the opportunities and key considerations associated with potentially taking forward a new National Park within each of the five broad areas.

North & West Coast and Islands

Opportunities

5.12 The area has wide range of coastal and island landscapes that are an important part of Scotland's national identity. This is reflected by the designation of a significant number of landscapes and seascapes as National

Scenic Areas (NSAs). These include the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA, the South Uist Machair NSA, the Assynt - Coigach NSA, the Wester Ross NSA, the Knoydart NSA, the Morar, Moidart and Ardnamurchan NSA, the Jura NSA, the Hoy and West Mainland NSA, the Shetland NSA and numerous others. National Park designation would support the protection of areas of distinctive landscape and seascape character. (Landscape)

5.13 The area is rich in biodiversity, sustaining many internationally significant ecological sites, including the UNESCO Global Geoparks in the North West Highlands and Shetland, and Wester Ross UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. (Biodiversity and Geodiversity)

5.14 A significant proportion of the area's coastal waters are internationally and nationally designated for their biodiversity interest. For example, the Inner Hebrides and the Minches Special Area of Conservation (SAC) covers much of The Minch and the Sea of the Hebrides, and most of the coastal waters in the Orkney isles are covered by Special Protection Area (SPA) designation. A National Park designation would provide additional scope for the enhanced management of habitats and species associated with these designations. (Biodiversity and Geodiversity)

5.15 The area is home to significant areas of rare and vulnerable habitats and species. This includes some of the best remaining temperate rainforest sites in Europe. A new National Park has the potential to protect and enhance these key habitats and the ecological connections supporting them. (Biodiversity and Geodiversity)

5.16 The area has a rich history, language and distinctive cultural heritage, including linked to the Gaelic language. In this context the National Park designation has the potential to support and reinforce the cultural vitality of communities. (Population and Human Health, Cultural Heritage)

5.17 The area includes a rich and varied historic environment, and includes heritage-led international designations, including the St Kilda and the Heart of Neolithic Orkney UNESCO World Heritage Sites. A new National Park would help ensure that historic environment assets receive careful management to ensure they continue to benefit communities. (Cultural Heritage)

5.18 There will be significant climate challenges for this part of Scotland. Island and coastal ecosystems, and the communities they support, are naturally more vulnerable to the effects of climate change, sea level rise and extreme events. Of particular concern are the impacts on vulnerable low-lying coastal zones and infrastructure, with potentially wide-ranging effects from biodiversity loss to coastal erosion, flooding and landslips. A new National Park can play a key role in helping to address these challenges. (Climate Change)

Considerations

5.19 There are substantial economic opportunities presented by developments in sectors such as renewable energy generation, agriculture and fisheries. In this respect, consideration would be required throughout the process of designating a new National Park to ensure that the significant economic and employment opportunities available in the area associated with these sectors, including within the renewables sector, can be realised. (Climate Change, Population and Human Health)

5.20 The area has a number of complex demographic challenges, with areas of population growth and depopulation varying between islands and coastal communities, and issues such as ageing populations. National Park designation should recognise associated issues such as changes in property prices and other aspects which have the potential to affect the diversity, vitality and viability of communities. (Population and Human Health)

North

Opportunities

5.21 The area has a range of landscapes and seascapes that are an important part of Scotland's national identity. This is reflected by the designation of a number of landscapes and seascapes as National Scenic Areas (NSAs) including the Kyle of Tongue NSA, the Dornoch Firth NSA, the Glen Strathfarrar NSA, the Glen Affric NSA and the Kintail NSA. National Park designation would support the protection of areas of distinctive landscape and seascape character. (Landscape)

5.22 The area is rich in biodiversity, sustaining many internationally significant ecological sites, including the significant coverage of the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands SAC, SPA and Ramsar site in the area. Other internationally designated sites include the Glen Etive and Glen Fyne SPA, the Rannoch Lochs SPA, the Moidart and Ardgour SPA, the Ben Nevis SAC and a number of others. The Moray Firth is also designated as an SPA and SAC, with Noss Head and the East Caithness Cliffs both designated as Marine Protected Areas. (Biodiversity and Geodiversity)

5.23 There are significant opportunities to reinforce existing ecosystems and deliver landscape-scale enhancements which enhance the flows of ecosystem services in the area. This is given the area's rich natural capital resource. (all SEA themes)

5.24 The area has a significant climate sequestration resource given existing land uses, with peatland and forestry resources contributing to the area being a net carbon sink overall. A new National Park provides additional opportunities to reinforce this role. (Climate Change)

5.25 The area includes a rich and varied historic environment. A new National Park will help ensure that historic environment assets receive careful management to ensure they continue to benefit communities. (Cultural Heritage)

5.26 A number of thriving communities are in the area, and they depend on local jobs and learning to support their quality of life. Some communities (especially outside of Inverness) have however experienced outmigration, particularly the loss of younger people. Further population decline in these locations is a future risk, particularly for the west and north of the area. In this respect the economic opportunities provided by new National Park in an appropriate location could help alleviate these trends. (Population and Human Health)

Considerations

5.27 The area has a National Park already: the Cairngorms National Park. The northern part of the Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park also extends into this area. A new National Park may therefore not provide as many benefits for local people as elsewhere in Scotland. (Population and Human Health)

5.28 Like many parts of Scotland, land and sea assets in the area can play an internationally significant role in renewable energy generation. Consideration would be required throughout the process of designating a new National Park to ensure that priorities for renewable electricity generation and transmission infrastructure are realised in full. (Climate Change)

5.29 As highlighted by NPF4, many parts of the area have recently experienced an accelerated increase in house prices. The Covid-19 pandemic has reinforced long standing issues of affordability and a more mobile remote workforce has been attracted to the area, adding increased pressure. In this respect there will be a need for a new National Park to recognise impacts of designation on existing affordability pressures. (Population and Human Health)

North East

Opportunities

5.30 Whilst the area is amongst the most prosperous parts of Scotland, it has experienced significant economic challenges in recent years and has pockets of deprivation. For example, there are lower levels of educational attainment and limited access to services for communities along the Aberdeenshire and Moray coast. A new National Park will help support diversification of the economy from the traditional sectors such as oil and gas, agriculture and fishing through utilising and embracing the opportunities provided by the area's natural assets. (Population and Human Health)

5.31 The area includes a rich and varied historic environment. A new National Park will help ensure that historic environment assets receive careful management to ensure they continue to benefit communities. (Cultural Heritage)

5.32 A significant proportion of the area's coastal waters are internationally and nationally designated for their biodiversity interest. This includes the areas covered by the Loch of Strathbeg SPA, the Ythan Estuary, Sands of Forvie and Meikle Loch SPA, the Buchan Ness to Collieston Coast SPA, the Fowlsheugh SPA and the Moray Firth SPA. The north eastern coast of the area is also covered by the Southern Trench Marine Protected Area. A coastal National Park designation would provide additional scope for the enhanced management of habitats and species associated with these designations. (Biodiversity and Geodiversity)

5.33 Away from the coast, area is also rich in biodiversity, sustaining many internationally and nationally significant ecological sites including the River Dee SPA, the Cairngorms Massif SPA and a significant number of Sites of Special Scientific Interest. A National Park would help protect and reinforce ecological connections to these key biodiversity assets. (Biodiversity and Geodiversity)

5.34 The designation of a new National Park has the potential to reinforce the creation of multi-functional blue and green infrastructure networks and improve access to nature in the area. This includes through connecting with national long-distance cycling and walking networks. This supports health and wellbeing and the quality of life of residents. (Population and Human Health)

Considerations

5.35 The area already has good access to a National Park: the Cairngorms National Park. (Population and Human Health)

5.36 The area has two landscapes which are designated as National Scenic Areas (NSAs). These areas are however within the Cairngorms National Park. (Landscape)

5.37 Affordability and choice of homes is acute across the area. The growing proportion of retirees in Aberdeenshire presents a further challenge to housing and service delivery. In this respect consideration of these issues would be required through the process of designating a new National Park to help ensure that associated socio-economic challenges are reflected. (Population and Human Health)

5.38 The area is a centre for the skills and expertise that will be needed to meet Scotland's climate change commitments. Consideration would be required throughout the process of designating a new National Park to ensure that priorities for renewable electricity generation and transmission infrastructure are realised in full. (Climate Change, Population and Human Health).

Central

Opportunities

5.39 Outside of the Loch Lomond National Park, the area has landscapes and seascapes that are an important part of Scotland's national identity. This is reflected by the designation of a number of landscapes and seascapes as National Scenic Areas (NSAs) including the River Earn (Comrie to St Fillans) NSA, the Kyles of Bute NSA and the North Arran NSA. National Park designation would support the protection of areas of distinctive landscape and seascape character. (Landscape)

5.40 A significant proportion of the area's eastern coastal waters are internationally and nationally designated for their biodiversity interest. For example, the Outer Firth of Forth and St Andrews Bay Complex SPA covers much of the coastline between St Abbs Head in the south and the Tay Estuary in the north. A coastal National Park designation would provide additional scope for the enhanced management of habitats and species associated with these designations. (Biodiversity and Geodiversity)

5.41 Further areas are also rich in biodiversity, sustaining a number of internationally significant ecological sites. These include: the Renfrewshire Heights SPA; the Inner Clyde SPA and Ramsar site; the Slamannan Plateau SPA; the Black Loch Moss and Blawhorn Moss SACs; and, on and around the Isle of Arran, the Arran Moors SPA and South Arran Marine Protected Area. There are also numerous nationally designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest. A National Park would help protect and reinforce ecological connections to these key biodiversity assets. (Biodiversity and Geodiversity)

5.42 A new National Park has the potential to help implement upstream measures (including nature-based solutions) that will help mitigate the growing risk of flooding resulting from the effects of climate change. This has particular potential to support adaptation to climate change given many key settlements and economic assets in the central belt are located in flood risk areas, including associated with the river basins and estuaries of the Clyde, Forth and Tay. (Climate Change)

5.43 Poor levels of health are a key issue within many communities in the central belt of Scotland. The designation of a new National Park within this densely populated area has the potential to have particular benefits for health and

wellbeing through reinforcing the creation of multi-functional blue and green infrastructure networks and improving access to nature in the area. In this respect the delivery of a new National Park in a location with ready accessibility to key population centres is likely to help improve physical and mental health and mitigate health inequalities. (Population and Human Health)

5.44 A new National Park in the area has the potential to provide an anchor role for economic activities associated with recreation, tourism and nature conservation. In this respect a new National Park can provide a role in the diversification of the economy through a utilisation of the area's natural environment and built assets. (Population and Human Health)

5.45 A number of locations in the area have a legacy of heavy industry and mining. A new National Park in these locations would help ensure that historic environment assets in these areas receive careful management, helping to restore, reuse and reinvigorate areas that were historically a focus for these activities. A new National Park would also provide significant opportunities for enhancing the understanding and awareness of the historic environment, including historic landscapes. (Cultural Heritage, Population and Human Health)

5.46 The western part of the Central area already has good access to a National Park: the Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park. However, given the population density of the Central belt, and its accessibility to population centres, a new National Park has the potential to bring a range of benefits to a large population. (Population and Human Health)

South

Opportunities

5.47 The area does not currently have ready access to a Scottish National Park. A new National Park in this area would increase accessibility for local people to the opportunities associated with such a designation. (Population and Human Health)

5.48 In addition to a number of locations covered by National Scenic Area designations (including Upper Tweeddale, Eildon & Leaderfoot, the Nith Estuary, East Stewartry Coast and the Fleet Valley), the area contains many further distinctive landscapes and seascapes. In this respect, National Park designation would help conserve and enhance the character of key areas of landscape and seascape value. (Landscape)

5.49 The area is renowned for its tranquillity and dark skies, as highlighted by the designation of the UK's first Dark Sky Reserve (Galloway Forest Park). A National Park would help reinforce the important dark sky resource of the area. (Landscape, Cultural Heritage)

5.50 The area is rich in biodiversity, sustaining many internationally significant ecological sites including the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere and numerous Special Protection Areas and Special Areas of Conservation. A National Park would help protect and reinforce ecological connections to these key biodiversity assets. (Biodiversity and Geodiversity)

5.51 The area has a significant climate sequestration resource, with significant areas of woodland and peatland which act as a carbon sink. A new National Park in

this area provides additional opportunities to reinforce this role. (Climate Change)

5.52 A new National Park has the potential to support the protection of the area's wide range of environmental assets and stimulate investment in natural solutions to climate change and nature restoration. (all SEA themes)

5.53 Although the area has relatively high levels of wellbeing and quality of life, population decline is projected to continue in some locations in the west of the area, with fewer younger people and more retired people likely to live in the area in the future. A new National Park therefore has the potential to support community vitality through promoting diversification of the economy and supporting employment opportunities. (Population and Human Health)

5.54 Coastal erosion and flood risk is expected to be a significant challenge in the future for the area. National Park designation has the potential to support the implementation of nature-based solutions to this risk. (Climate Change)

Considerations

5.55 Consideration would be required throughout the process of designating a new National Park to ensure that priorities for renewable electricity generation and transmission infrastructure are realised in full. (Climate Change, Population and Human Health).

6. Proposed SEA monitoring programme

Monitoring in SEA

6.1 Monitoring in SEA is a means of evaluating the environmental performance of the plan or strategy and monitoring compliance through its implementation. It is also a way to check whether the effects predicted in the SEA arise as envisaged, or whether unforeseen issues arise.

6.2 Monitoring can help to evaluate whether a plan or strategy is fulfilling its core objective of delivering sustainable development and providing for a high level of protection of the environment. The information gathered through monitoring provides a basis to inform the review and preparation of subsequent iterations of plans, strategies and projects that sit within them, thus better informing future decisions.

6.3 Measuring indicators over time can identify long-term positive or negative changes and trends in the environment and can build knowledge on how these trends will affect (or will be affected by) the implementation of the plan or strategy itself. In this respect monitoring environmental changes occurring during the new National Park proposals' implementation phase can help to identify the need for additional mitigation measures or for appropriate remedial action to be undertaken where issues are identified, as well as to inform project-level assessments.

Proposed SEA monitoring programme for the new National Park proposals

6.4 Schedule 2 of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act highlights that the Environmental Report should include "*a description of the measures envisaged concerning monitoring*."

6.5 In response to this, this Environmental Report presents a proposed draft monitoring programme for measuring the proposals' implementation.

6.6 It draws on the identified potential significant effects identified through the assessment of the various components of the proposals, and also suggests where monitoring is required to help ensure that the potential benefits of the proposals are effectively achieved through implementation.

6.7 This will enable appropriate interventions to be undertaken if monitoring highlights negative or underperforming trends relating to the proposals' implementation.

6.8 The Scottish Government intends to monitor and evaluate the performance of key performance indicators and use the data to enable them to adjust their approach if necessary. It is therefore beneficial if the SEA monitoring strategy builds on monitoring systems which are already in place. To this end, many of the indicators of progress chosen for the SEA are likely to reflect data that is already being routinely collected by the Scottish Government. As such, the indicators proposed for the SEA will be integrated into the Scottish Government's monitoring approach.

6.9 The following overview therefore outlines a proposed monitoring programme for measuring the proposals' implementation. It pays particular attention to the areas where the SEA has identified potential significant effects and also suggests where monitoring is required to help ensure that the positive effects of the proposals are achieved through implementation. It includes:

- The significant effect or environmental change to be monitored
- The SEA topic(s) to which the monitoring proposal relates
- The indicator to be monitored
- The source of information and frequency of monitoring; and
- The trigger for where intervention should take place if monitoring suggests it is required.

6.10 It should be noted that the programme set out below comprises preliminary suggestions for the types of indicators which can be monitored. It is anticipated that a refined set of indicators will be developed following further engagement with stakeholders and during the selection and designation stage for the new National Park(s) (**Chapter 7**)

Indicator 1:

- **Significant effect/ environmental change to be monitored:** Area of key biodiversity habitats
- **Indicator:** Hectares of land supporting key habitats in designated areas
- **Data source:** Scottish Government
- **Frequency of monitoring:** Annual
- **Trigger for intervention:** When areas of specific habitat do not increase on a year-by-year basis to targets set by the Scottish Government.

Indicator 2:

- **Significant effect/ environmental change to be monitored:** Area of restored habitat
- **Indicator:** Hectares of former farmland or other uses restored as biodiversity habitats in designated areas
- **Data source:** Scottish Government
- **Frequency of monitoring:** Annual
- **Trigger for intervention:** When area does not increase on a year-by-year basis to targets set by the Scottish Government.

Indicator 3:

- **Significant effect/ environmental change to be monitored:** Impact of proposals on woodland creation
- **Indicator:** Area of woodland in designated areas
- **Data source:** Scottish Government
- **Frequency of monitoring:** Annual
- **Trigger for intervention:** When area does not increase on a year-by-year basis to targets set by the Scottish Government.

Indicator 4:

- **Significant effect/ environmental change to be monitored:** Community involvement in ecological restoration projects
- **Indicator:** Percentage of management and stewardship roles associated with biodiversity conservation and ecological restoration filled by those from local communities
- **Data source:** Scottish Government
- **Frequency of monitoring:** Annual
- **Trigger for intervention:** Where percentage decreases year on year.

Indicator 5:

- **Significant effect/ environmental change to be monitored:** Impact of proposals on landscape character
- **Indicator:** Landscape character assessment findings
- **Data source:** Scottish Government
- **Frequency of monitoring:** Ongoing
- **Trigger for intervention:** Where landscape character assessment suggests significant change has taken place.

Indicator 6:

- **Significant effect/ environmental change to be monitored:** Impact of proposals on dark skies
- **Indicator:** Dark sky and tranquillity rating
- **Data source:** Scottish Government
- **Frequency of monitoring:** Ongoing
- **Trigger for intervention:** Where rating falls.

Indicator 7:

- **Significant effect/ environmental change to be monitored:** Impact of proposals on greenhouse gas emissions
- **Indicator:** Carbon footprint of designated areas
- **Data source:** Scottish Government
- **Frequency of monitoring:** Annual
- **Trigger for intervention:** Where emissions increase year-on-year

7. Next steps

7.1 The current consultation on the proposed legislative changes to the aims, functions, powers, and governance of National Parks in Scotland will conclude in November 2023. Following this, the selection and designation of new National Park(s) will take place.

7.2 In Autumn 2023 nominations for new National Parks will be invited following the finalisation of an appraisal framework. Communities and organisations wishing to develop and submit a nomination will have five months to develop their proposals. In Spring 2024 all nominations received by the Scottish Government will be appraised.

7.3 In Summer 2024, Ministers will announce their decision on the proposal(s) for new National Park(s) that will go forward for designation. A reporter will be appointed to undertake an investigation and report to Ministers on the proposal(s). This process will include a public consultation on the new National Park proposal(s). As more detailed information becomes available, it will be important to consider whether any new or previously unidentified significant effects may arise, and whether therefore any additional assessment may be required.

7.4 The designation of the National Park(s) will then take place during 2025-2026 through the development of and consultation on a Designation Order, and laying of the Designation Order before Parliament.

Appendix A Screening responses

Table AA.1: Screening responses

Screening Response	How the response was considered/ addressed
Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA)	
Thank you for consulting SEPA on this Screening Report by way of your email of 3rd May 2023. In accordance with Section 9(3) of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 we have reviewed the screening report using the criteria set out in Schedule 2 of the Act. In regard to our main areas of interest (air, water, soil, human health, material assets and climatic factors) we agree with the conclusions of the screening report that the proposed PPS may have significant environmental effects. When considering the scope of the assessment please refer to our SEA topic guidance notes www.sepa.org.uk/environment/land/planning/strategic-environmental-assessment/ We are committed to providing early and focused advice; if you would find it helpful to discuss your approach to the assessment prior to formal consultation please do not hesitate to contact me by email or via our SEA Gateway at sea.gateway@sepa.org.uk.	The scope of the SEA has been informed by the SEA topic guidance notes, which have been a useful source of reference throughout the SEA process.
NatureScot	
Thank you for your Screening Report consultation which NatureScot received via the Scottish Government SEA Gateway. NatureScot has considered your screening report using the criteria set out in Schedule 2 of the 2005 Act. Having reviewed the Screening Report, we agree that there are likely to be significant environmental effects. Based on the information available to date we consider that significant effects are most likely with respect to issues which fall within our remit of biodiversity, flora and fauna, population and human health (access & recreation and participation & engagement), soil, climatic factors and landscape. We note that you have also submitted a scoping report for this plan. We will provide comment on this separately. Please note that this consultation response provides a view solely on the potential for the plan or programme to have significant environmental effects. We cannot comment on whether or not the plan or programme meets other criteria determining the need for SEA as set out in the Act.	The SEA topics which fall within the remit of NatureScot have been scoped in to the SEA process, with the likely effects associated with the current draft proposals presented within the Environmental Report – see Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

Screening Response	How the response was considered/ addressed
Should you wish to discuss this screening consultation, please do not hesitate to contact me using the email address below or via our SEA Gateway at sea_gateway@nature.scot.	
Historic Environment Scotland	
Thank you for your consultation which we received on 03 May 2023 about the above screening report. We have reviewed this report in our role as a Consultation Authority under the above Act, in accordance with the requirements of Section 9(3). In doing so we have used the criteria set out in Schedule 2 for determining the likely significance of the effects on the environment. **Historic Environment Scotland's view** In light of the information and reasoning set out within the screening report, we agree with your view that there are likely to be significant environmental effects for the historic environment. **Next steps** The Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 requires you as the Responsible Authority to determine whether an environmental assessment is required. You must then notify the Consultation Authorities within 28 days of making this determination. This may be done via the SEA Gateway (sea_gateway@gov.scot). We hope our advice is helpful to you in making this determination.	'Cultural Heritage' has been scoped into the SEA process, with the likely effects to historic environment assets associated with the current draft proposals presented within the Environmental Report – see Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

Appendix B Scoping responses

Table AB.1: Scoping consultation responses

Consultation response	How the response was considered/ addressed
Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA)	
We agree that all SEA topics should be scoped into the assessment. We are satisfied with the proposed assessment approach. When refining the assessment questions in relation to air, soil, and water it will be useful to think about the overall objectives for these topic areas. For example, will the proposals help reduce levels of pollution and help enhance the environment.	The assessment questions have been refined for these topic areas, including with respect to whether the current draft proposals would help to reduce levels of pollution and enhance the environment. These are presented within the SEA Framework – see Chapter 3 of this Environmental Report.
The Scottish Government SEA Guidance provides guidance to Responsible Authorities about the type of information that is expected to be provided at each SEA stage; we have also produced SEA topic guidance for those issues which fall within our remit. Our guidance includes example objectives and assessment questions for the different topic areas. The NPF4 policy intent for the relevant polices might also be useful to consider when refining the assessment questions. For example, protecting the ecosystem services that soils provide and restoring valued soils are key policy outcomes of the soils policy.	The SEA has been informed by the guidance notes, which have been a useful source of reference throughout the assessment process.
It is not clear from the scoping report the specific time period proposed for consultation on the Environmental Report. Typical consultation periods range from 6-12 weeks depending on the content and nature of the plan. On completion, the Environmental Report and the plan to which it relates should be submitted to the Scottish Government SEA Gateway which will forward it to the Consultation Authorities.	A public consultation on proposed legislative changes to the aims, functions, powers and governance of National Parks in Scotland will take place from September to November 2023. This Environmental Report, which is the main output of the SEA process, accompanies the consultation.
NatureScot	
We agree with all the topics being scoped in. For those relevant to our remit, we are content with the scope and level of detail proposed, subject to the detailed comments that follow.	Comment noted.

Consultation response	How the response was considered/ addressed
Grouping of topics We note, as it may be useful for the Environmental Report, that the categories / division of SEA topics is different in Table 1 (paragraph 4.3.1) and paragraph 4.2.2 and section 5. In our own SEA guidance, we link geodiversity with biodiversity flora and fauna rather than landscape, and this may better reflect the range of its contributions. Alternatively, it may be better in a separate category. See also points below.	For the purposes of the SEA, 'geodiversity' has been linked with biodiversity, flora and fauna rather than landscape, reflecting the range of its contributions.
Assessment questions We have a couple of suggestions for the sample assessment questions in paragraph 4.2.2: Biodiversity, flora and fauna: In addition to *"Will the proposals help to protect and restore nature in existing and new National Parks?"* you could consider *"Will biodiversity and geodiversity benefits be maximised while realising socio-economic potential?'* and *'Will implementation secure sustainable development and management practices?'* Alternatively, put geodiversity in a category by itself. Landscape: Instead of *"Will the draft proposals help to protect and conserve landscape and geodiversity in existing and new National Parks?"* we suggest *"Will the draft proposals help to conserve, enhance or restore landscape character and local distinctiveness and the special qualities of the area?"*	The two suggested assessment questions suggested have been included in the SEA Framework presented in Chapter 3 of this Environmental Report.
Understandably, given when the report was written, it refers to previous national planning policy rather than NPF4 (for example SPP in paragraph 5.7.1 p.20). We recommend this is updated.	Reference to Scottish Planning Policy has been updated, with NPF4 referenced.
We strongly recommend that the source of landscape information in paragraph 5.8.2 is changed to the national landscape character assessment, held on the NatureScot website. This, which provides national mapped coverage at 1:50,000 scale and is based on fieldwork, should replace the JHI 'regional landscape' descriptive paragraphs. The link in the SEWeb site does not flow through to the	The national landscape character assessment (including a link) has been referenced in the baseline section of this Environmental Report. It has also been a useful source of evidence during the SEA process. The 'experiential qualities' of landscape has been considered within the 'Landscape' appraisal findings presented in Chapter 4 and

Consultation response	How the response was considered/ addressed
NatureScot dataset, and we recommend a direct link is used instead. The landscape aspects of section 5.8 could make more of the interplay between natural and cultural factors. It is not just 'iconic built landmarks and townscapes' that are relevant, but settlement more widely and also the experiential qualities of landscape.	Chapter 5 of this Environmental Report, alongside the interplay between natural and cultural factors.
We consider that geodiversity is rather underplayed in the report. Scotland's world-class geodiversity is important in its own right and integral to our natural (and arguably cultural) heritage and its protection is not just "part of landscape planning and management" (paragraph 5.8.3). This could be made clearer in the Environmental Report and SEA process.	The SEA Framework has been updated to include a specific assessment question and a set of objectives with respect to Scotland's geodiversity resources.
We welcome the inclusion of blue green infrastructure in the Material Assets topic. And that Population and Human Health includes access for recreation and the role of environment and place in mental and physical well-being.	Comment noted. The interplay between natural and cultural assets and their links to mental and physical well-being is explored within the appraisal findings for the current draft proposals, presented in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 of this Environmental Report.
Appendix B could include the European Landscape Convention in the international and EU level PPS section.	European Landscape Convention has been referenced in the 'existing environmental protection objectives' section of the landscape baseline.
Timeframe We note and are content with the consultation timeframe.	Comment noted.
Historic Environment Scotland	
Scope and level of detail It is our understanding that The Scottish Government is progressing proposals for: • The establishment of a new National Park(s) in Scotland, including draft proposed evaluation criteria for site selection. • Potential changes to the governance arrangements for existing and new National Parks; and • Potential amendments to the aims, purpose, and functions of existing and new National Parks.	Comment noted. 'Cultural Heritage' has been scoped into the SEA process, with the likely effects on historic environment assets associated with the current draft proposals and reasonable alternatives presented within the Environmental Report – see Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

Consultation response	How the response was considered/ addressed
We note that the historic environment has been scoped into the assessment. On the basis of the information provided, we are content with this approach and are satisfied with the scope and level of detail proposed for the assessment, subject to the detailed comments provided below.	
Assessment questions Policy HEPS4 of the Historic Environment Policy for Scotland sets out that 'plans, programmes, policies and strategies, and the allocation of resources, should be approached in a way that protects and promotes the historic environment.' In view of this, we recommend that the assessment question for cultural heritage is reworded to ask if proposals *promote* cultural heritage, in addition to protect and conserve.	The assessment questions and objectives for the 'Cultural Heritage' SEA topic have been updated appropriately to consider whether the current draft proposals would also 'promote' cultural heritage, in addition to protecting and conserving.
Relationship with other plans, programmes, and strategies We welcome the inclusion of the Historic Environment Policy for Scotland (HEPS) at Appendix B. We recommend that Our Past, Our Future, Scotland's new strategy for the historic environment, should also be included in the review of relevant PPS for the historic environment. Our Past, Our Future will be officially launched in June 2023. Conservation and enhancement of cultural heritage (incorporating the historic environment) is one of the aims for an area designated as a National Park as set out by the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000. In view of this, we would expect to see HEPS and Our Past, Our Future included in the summary of the policy context set out at section 2.3.	Comment noted. HEPS and Our Past, Our Figure have been sources of evidence for the SEA process.
Baseline We recommend that the reference to Scottish Planning Policy is updated to reflect the recent adoption of National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4). The discussion of key pressures and trends could also:	Reference to Scottish Planning Policy has been updated in conjunction with th adoption of the NPF4. The key pressures and trends identified have been included in the 'key issues' section in Chapter 3. Otherwise these key pressures and trends have been essential

Consultation response	How the response was considered/ addressed
• Reflect NPF4's increased emphasis on retaining and reusing existing buildings and structures. • Recognise that the net zero agenda will drive a significant increase in demand for the retrofit of traditional and historic buildings. • Recognise the pressures and opportunities that tourism and recreational access can have for the historic environment, particularly in the context of National Parks.	considerations through the assessment process, particularly with respect to considering potential impacts to Scotland's historic environmental assets associated with the current draft proposals. The assessment findings are presented in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 of this Environmental Report.
Consultation period for the Environmental Report You have indicated that the consultation is likely to run between July and September but have not set a specific time period for the consultation. We recommend that there should be a minimum period of six weeks, or longer where the consultation is lengthy or complex. Please note that, for administrative purposes, we consider that the consultation period commences on receipt of the relevant documents by the SEA Gateway.	A public consultation on proposed legislative changes to the aims, functions, powers, and governance of National Parks in Scotland will take place from September to November 2023. This Environmental Report, which is the main output of the SEA process, accompanies the consultation.

Appendix C Environmental baseline information

Biodiversity and geodiversity

Existing environmental protection objectives

The importance of halting and reversing biodiversity loss is recognised at international and national level, including through the international Aichi Targets and the 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity, which set out objectives for the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity in Scotland.

As the UN moves from the Decade of Biodiversity to the Decade of Ecosystem Restoration, Scotland is now the process of setting out a new post-2020 biodiversity strategy which will also have ties to the Natural Environment bill. With the strategic delivery framework for the strategy still to the come, currently it contains 26 of the most urgent Priority Actions which aim to put Scotland on track in halting the loss of biodiversity and being nature positive by 2030.

Habitats and species identified as of particular value are also considered in legislation and policies relating to the protection of biodiversity, flora and fauna. These establish a hierarchy of protection, from the international to local level. Beyond designated sites and species, there are longer-term aspirations for enhancing biodiversity, strengthening nature networks, and addressing the impacts of climate change on the natural environment, so that Scotland's nature is protected and restored.

The environmental protection objectives set out in legislation and policy for geodiversity are broadly aimed at protecting geological and geomorphological features from damage and disturbance. Sites are mainly protected at a national level through designation of SSSI but also through other designations such as National Parks. Some sites also have international recognition as UNESCO Global Geoparks.

Baseline conditions, pressures, and trends

Biodiversity is crucial for the functioning of healthy ecosystems and supports life by providing resources such as clean air, water and food. Biodiversity is also closely linked with the other environmental topics.

Scotland's biodiversity has been depleted due to human activity over centuries, with pockets of rich biodiversity struggling to sustain themselves in the faces of climate change. Scotland's biodiversity is complex and includes varied habitats that make up the diverse landscapes; approximately 90,000 animal, plant and microbe species are found in Scotland along with habitats, ranging from raised bog to native and ancient woodland. Scotland is home to a wide range of species and internationally important habitats. For example:

- Scotland has 90% of the high mountain habitat in the UK, which accommodates some of the best examples of near-natural habitats and wildlife in the northern and remote parts of Europe.
- Wetlands, including peatlands, can be found across Scotland and are a key provider of services such as carbon sequestration and water purification.

- Scotland's seas, which make up around 61% of the UK's total marine area, are highly dynamic, supporting a diverse range of habitats and species and an increasingly varied array of marine industries.
- Agriculture is Scotland's dominant use of land, covering over 70% of the
- country, with woodlands and forests covering 18%. These support a wide range of important flora and fauna diversity, including rare and threatened species.

Scotland's protected areas include 251 Special Areas of Conservation, 153 Special Protection Areas, 51 Ramsar sites and 2 Biosphere Reserves, 1,422 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), 43 National Nature Reserves and 2 National Parks, among other designations. There are also 244 Marine Protected Areas and a wide range of designated Priority Marine Features which help conserve and enhance the marine environment.

Greenspaces such as public and private gardens, parks, woodlands, recreational grounds, green corridors, allotments, and community growing spaces can also provide habitats and ecosystems which are not only important to wildlife, but for human health and wellbeing.

Global declines in biodiversity are mirrored in Scotland and the abundance and distribution of Scotland's species has on average declined over recent decades, with most measures indicating this decline has continued in the most recent decade.

Geodiversity underpins landscape, and protecting our rocks, landforms and soils is also an important part of landscape planning and management. Many places in Scotland are of great importance to geoscience for their rocks, fossils and landforms, demonstrating important geological processes or events that have significant value for education and research and as part of Scotland's geo-heritage.

Geodiversity is also the physical basis for Scotland's varied landscapes (both rural and urban) and scenery. It has a profound influence on terrestrial and marine habitats, wildlife and use of land and water. Geodiversity assets of regional or local importance may be protected as Local Geodiversity Sites but coverage is not complete. Around 9.5% of the total area covered by Scotland's National Parks and 37% of National Nature Reserve areas have Geological Conservation Review site status. Some of these are also protected at the national level by SSSI legislation.

Climatic factors

Existing environmental protection objectives

The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, as amended ('the Climate Change (Scotland) Act') created a statutory framework for greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction in Scotland and set targets for reduction in emissions of the Kyoto Protocol GHGs. In direct response to the Paris Agreement, a legally binding international treaty on climate change, the 2009 Act was amended by the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019. This set new, more ambitious, targets to reduce emissions of all GHGs to net-zero by 2045 at the latest, with interim targets for reductions of at least 56% by 2020, 75% by 2030, and 90% by 2040, relative to a 1990/1995 baseline. An update to the Climate Change Plan was subsequently published to set a pathway to achieve the new targets.

The Climate Change (Scotland) Act also requires a programme for climate change adaptation to be set out every 5 years. This must address risks identified in statutory UK Climate Change Risk Assessments (UKCCRA), which are also updated every

five years, based on independent expert advice. The second Scottish Climate Change Adaptation Programme (the Adaptation Programme) addresses the impacts identified for Scotland in the UK Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA). The Adaptation Programme sets out Scottish Ministers' objectives in relation to adaptation to climate change, their proposals and policies for meeting these objectives, and the period within which these proposals and policies will be introduced.

Baseline conditions, pressures, and trends

There is a global climate emergency. Due to human activities including industrialisation, deforestation, and large-scale agriculture, quantities of greenhouse gases (GHG) in the atmosphere have risen to record levels not seen in three million years. The concentration of GHGs in the atmosphere is directly linked to the average global temperature, and there is unequivocal evidence that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean, and land.

The scale of recent changes across the climate system as a whole, and the present state of many aspects of the climate system, are unprecedented over many centuries to many thousands of years. Scotland's climate has already changed and is both warmer and wetter on average. In Scotland an estimated 284,000 homes and premises are at risk of flooding; with an additional 110,000 properties predicted to be at risk by the 2080s. As such, Climate adaptation will be crucial to ensure that Scotland's society and economy will be resilient to future climate impacts.

Air

Existing environmental protection objectives

Cleaner Air for Scotland 2 sets out the Scottish Government's air quality policy framework with a series of actions to deliver continued air quality improvement and secure compliance with international commitments. The strategy notes that policies that improve air quality can potentially have multiple co-benefits for biodiversity, population health, for addressing inequality and for mitigating and adapting to climate change.

The National Emission Ceilings Directive (NECD) (2016/2284/EU) sets national emission ceilings for certain atmospheric pollutants in keeping with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution of 197940 (CLRTAP) and, in particular, its 1999 Protocol to Abate Acidification, Eutrophication and Ground-level Ozone of 1999, which was revised in 2012 (the revised Gothenburg Protocol).

The NECD transposes 2020 targets agreed under the revised Gothenburg Protocol, along with more ambitious targets for 2030. The NECD is part of retained EU law and has been transposed into domestic law through the National Emission Ceilings Regulations (NECR) 2018 with the requirements implemented at UK level through a National Air Pollution Control Programme (NAPCP). Objectives relevant to local air quality management (LAQM) are set out in the Air Quality (Scotland) Regulations 2000, as amended.

Baseline conditions, pressures, and trends

Air pollution effects ecosystems. Air pollution and its deposition onto vegetation, soil and water can damage vegetation directly or indirectly through the addition of nutrients or changes in acidity levels within a habitat. These can lead to a shift in the competitive balance between species, changes in plant species composition or subtle changes in vegetation structure, which can affect the use of a habitat by an animal species.

Air pollution also has significant effects on public health and animal health. Exposure to air pollution is harmful to health in terms of premature mortality and morbidity, mainly related to respiratory and cardiovascular disease.

Water

Existing environmental protection objectives

Objectives for the protection and improvement of Scotland's water environment are set out in a policy and regulatory framework, including through the Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Act 2003 (as amended) which governs objectives for rivers, lochs, transitional waters, coastal waters and groundwater resources. Objectives and action programmes are set out in River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs), produced by SEPA every six years.

Activities that may affect Scotland's water environment, including discharges of wastewater or industrial effluent; abstractions for irrigation, hydropower or drinking water; and engineering activities in or near rivers are controlled by The Water Environment (Controlled Activities) (Scotland) Regulations 2011 (as amended).

Baseline conditions, pressures, and trends

The water environment supports diverse species and habitats of national and international importance. Water also provides numerous benefits including drinking water provision, water for use in industry and agriculture, hydropower, wave and tidal energy, fisheries, aquaculture, recreation from, for example, wildlife watching, angling and water sports, and carbon storage.

Scotland has a wide range of water bodies including two thirds of British river systems and streams, varying from mountain burns to wide lowland rivers such as the Tay. There are over 30,000 lochs in Scotland, Loch Ness holds the most water with 7.4 million m^3, more than all English and Welsh lakes combined. Scotland's coast stretches 18,000 km with marine waters out to 12 and 200 nautical miles making up Scotland's territorial and offshore waters, which combined make up 13% of all European seas. There are also 1,526 protected areas associated with the water environment.

Much of the water environment in Scotland is in good condition. However, there are still significant problems affecting water quality, physical condition, water flows and levels, and the migration of wild fish. Invasive non-native species are also damaging aquatic plant and animal communities. The RBMPs for Scotland set out a range of actions to address these impacts.

Soil

Existing environmental protection objectives

Nationally, the protection of prime quality agricultural land and peatlands is set out in the Scottish Soil Framework. Soil objectives include national commitments to sustainable soil management that protect valued soils including prime quality agricultural land and those with a high carbon content, such as peat (for example via the Scottish Soil Framework, Scotland's National Peatland Plan).

Baseline conditions, pressures, and trends

Soil is a non-renewable resource and is one of Scotland's most important assets. Soils support a wide range of functions and provide many environmental, economic, and societal benefits including:

- Providing valued habitats and sustaining and supporting biodiversity
- Providing the basis for food and biomass production.
- Storing carbon and maintaining the balance of gases in the air as a major store of terrestrial carbon.
- Providing raw materials such as the use of sand and sand gravel in construction.
- Providing a platform for buildings and roads.
- Controlling and regulating environmental interactions such as water flow and quality – for example, soil sealing can change the rate at which water enters rivers and other water functions.
- Preserving cultural and archaeological heritage by providing records and protective cover.

Soil quality is defined as the ability of soil to carry out the above functions. Soils contribute to ecosystem services such as food provision, fibre, and raw material (a provisioning service), provision of clean water (a regulating service), protects and is part of Scotland's cultural heritage (a cultural service) and soil formation itself (a supporting service).

Scotland has a diverse range of soils, which are generally more organic, more acidic, more leached, and wetter than those of most other European countries. Over 25% of Scotland is used for arable crops (mostly in the eastern half of the country) and improved grassland, mostly on the more mineral soils of the central belt and in lowland areas, and predominantly found in the south west. The remainder of the country is occupied by semi natural habitats over more organic soils and minerals with over 20% of Scotland being covered in peatland habitat on peat soils.

Scotland's soils play a key role as the main store of terrestrial carbon, acting as "carbon sinks", most of it being held in soils under peatland habitat, estimated to store 1.6 billion tonnes of carbon. As with all soils, those under peatland habitat are at risk from land use change and the effects of climate change, and their loss or degradation (and the associated loss of carbon) has the potential to be a significant contributor to Scotland's GHG emissions. The role of healthy peatland in sequestering soil carbon, helping to reduce downstream flood risk and providing benefits to biodiversity is recognised in Scotland's National Peatland Plan.

There is a strong interrelation between soil deterioration and the increased number of extreme floods as soils sealing, soil compaction and capping exacerbates flooding

as the capability of soils to absorb water decreases and water runs off more quickly. Appropriate soil management therefore is a central plank for the development of a sustainable approach to flood risk management.

Cultural heritage

Existing environmental protection objectives

Existing cultural heritage objectives are set out in legislation including the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997, as amended, the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 and the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979.

These objectives are focused primarily on the protection of valued sites and features, including townscapes (i.e., places, buildings, and open spaces), buildings, archaeological sites, battlefields, wrecks, and landscapes that have been recognised at the international, national, and local levels through a hierarchy of designations. Policies such as the current NPF4 aim to improve the quality of settlements and built environment with a national level focus. These are complemented by the Historic Environment Policy for Scotland which defines how the historic environment in Scotland should be managed. Together, they emphasise the importance of preserving recognised sites, avoiding negative impacts on them and their wider setting, and contributing to their enhancement where possible.

Baseline conditions, pressures, and trends

Scotland's many and varied historical sites are unique and irreplaceable. These sites and features are regarded as making a valuable contribution to quality of life, cultural identity, education, and economy. While these assets are distributed widely throughout Scotland, there are clusters of sites in and around Scotland's settlements and coastlines.

The majority of Scotland's historic environment is undesignated, with estimates that the scale of the undesignated resource is around 90-95% of the total resource. There are more than 56,000 designated/protected historic assets across Scotland. These are protected through the process of designation, which aims to identify the most important parts of the historic environment, to recognise their significance and enhance protection.

Designations include world heritage sites, listed buildings, scheduled monuments, gardens and designed landscapes, battlefields, historic marine protected areas, and conservation areas.

Landscape

Existing environmental protection objectives

Landscape objectives, including those from the European Landscape Convention, recognise and protect special landscapes but also aim to improve degraded landscapes and highlight the importance of all landscapes. Areas identified as having outstanding scenic value in a national context are designated as National Scenic Areas, which protects the special qualities of nationally important landscapes and seascapes.

Policies include a commitment to protecting the special qualities of nationally important landscapes, with planning also recognising and protecting regional and

locally important landscapes. The importance of local places for population and human health and areas without statutory protection (e.g., wildland), are recognised.

Baseline conditions, pressures, and trends

Scotland's diverse and distinctive landscapes are a significant part of the country's natural and cultural heritage contributing to the economy and the population's wellbeing and providing a range of benefits.

Scotland is internationally renowned for its varied and dramatic landscapes including impressive mountain ranges, broad plateaus, expansive lowlands, and striking coastal features. Many of these landscapes are the result of ancient glacial and periglacial activity as well as changes in sea level. The primary classifications are the Central Lowlands, the Highlands and Islands to the north and west, and the Southern Uplands. Situated among these natural features are the many iconic built landmarks and townscapes that give Scotland its reputation as a tourist destination.

Landscapes of the highest quality have been designated and include 40 National Scenic Areas (NSA) and two National Parks (Loch Lomond and the Trossachs, and the Cairngorms). There is a high concentration of wildland areas, NSA, and other designations along the west coast of Scotland, and in the Highlands.

The NatureScot presents a detailed Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) of Scotland through a digital national mapping system. This was published in 2019 and brings together earlier LCA work. It shows Landscape Character Types (LCTs) – i.e. areas of consistent and recognisable landscape character.

The Scottish Landscape Character Types Map and Descriptions can be accessed at: (The following url will open a page of the NatureScot website hosting a digital map showing landscape character types in Scotland.)
https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/landscape/landscape-character-assessment/scottish-landscape-character-types-map-and-descriptions

Material assets

Existing environmental protection objectives

Objectives and policies related to material assets are wide-ranging, taking into account the broad nature of the topic. Multiple policies and plans address built material assets including the programme for long-term infrastructure investment in Scotland set out in the Infrastructure Investment Plan, and practices and commitments for action against climate change such as the Climate Change Plan and updates to the Climate Change Plan are also relevant. Making Things Last: A Circular Economy Strategy for Scotland sets out Scotland's ambitions for changing how waste is considered in the economy, including promoting a circular economy.

Baseline conditions, pressures, and trends

The 2005 Act requires material assets as a topic to be addressed in SEA but does not set out a specific definition of the factors it should encompass. SEPA guidance notes that consideration of material assets in SEA is usually taken to cover a wide variety of both natural and built assets.

As Scotland's energy mix continues to change, the electricity transmission network (grid) that supports the balance between energy generation and demand will change significantly, for example, as a result of the increased electrification of the transport and heat network. Infrastructure will play a key role in ensuring security of supply

and decarbonising Scotland's energy systems in the most cost effective and affordable way. This is partly because the spatial pattern of electricity generation is changing from a centralised system focused on small number of large power stations to a decentralised system with development in areas with a previously weak network.

Blue-green infrastructure is an interconnected network of natural and semi-natural areas, ranging in size from small rain gardens and green streets to larger parks and greenspace including ponds and watercourses. These features can perform several functions and provide a range of benefits within the same spatial area. Benefits of blue–green infrastructure include a reduced potential for flooding, improved water quality, reduced infrastructure costs, reduced urban heat island effect, and increased space for communities and wildlife.

Population and human health

Existing environmental protection objectives

A wide range of environmental protection objectives are relevant to population and human health. Protection against environmental effects such as impacts to air, water, land, and disturbance, particularly from noise and vibration are established in legislation at International, UK and national levels. The provision of access to the outdoors for recreational and educational purposes, sustainable transport, and housing, green infrastructure and the role of the environment and place in mental and physical health and wellbeing are also well established.

Baseline conditions, pressures, and trends

The population of Scotland was estimated at 5,479,900 in 2021. Projections forecast that the population will continue to rise until around mid-2033, peaking at 5.53 million. It is then projected to fall by 0.6% to 5.49 million by mid-2045. Whilst life expectancy is projected to increase by 2045, the expected rate of increase will be slower than previous projections.

Compared to 2019, the findings from the Scottish Health Survey 2020 found that 20% less adults undertook at least 150 minutes of moderate physical activity, 75 minutes of vigorous physical activity, or an equivalent combination per week. Frequency of participation in visits to the outdoors between mid-August and early September 2021 was higher than recorded during the initial COVID-19 lockdown period and broadly similar to that recorded at the same time of year in 2020 (77%, 80% and 71% in waves 3, 2 and 1 respectively).

Scotland has the lowest life expectancy in western Europe. There is a strong relationship between deprivation and life expectancy, with people living in more deprived areas expected to have shorter lives. In the most deprived 10% of areas in Scotland in 2019-2021, life expectancy at birth was on average 68.6 years for males and 75.0 years for females. In contrast, in the least deprived areas, it was 82.3 years and 85.5 years respectively.

The physical environment can influence health directly (e.g., through air quality or water pollution) and more widely through how people interact with the natural and built environment (e.g., enjoying well-designed public and/or green spaces within our towns and cities). The impact of environmental factors such as climate, geography, geology, topography, and environmental hazards on health is termed the environmental burden of disease, much of which (in theory) could be preventable. Key service areas such as social care, housing, education, employability, and leisure also have a relationship with health inequalities and health improvement.

Nature provides physical, consumable goods and services that humans cannot live without, such as breathable air, drinkable water and food. Beyond these, there are additional benefits including trees which provide fuel and plants which provide medicines.

Appendix D Relationship with other plans, programmes, and strategies

Introduction

This SEA must consider the relationships between the Future of National Parks Proposals and other relevant plans, programmes, and strategies (PPS) and environmental objectives. In this context, the contents of the Future of National Parks Proposals will be partially influenced by, and will also have some influence over, objectives presented within other international and national PPS of relevance for Scotland.

Appendix D therefore provides an overview of relevant PPS that are likely to inform the development of the Future of National Parks Proposals.

International

- Ambient Air Quality and Cleaner Air for Europe Directive [2008/50/EC].
- Biodiversity Strategy for 2030.
- Birds Directive [2009/147/EC].
- Bonn Convention.
- Convention of Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention).
- European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (1992).
- European Landscape Convention.
- Habitats Directive [92/43/EEC].
- Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) (2012).
- Kyoto Protocol UNFCCC (1997).
- Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (1992).
- SEA Directive [2001/42/EC].
- The Paris Agreement UNFCCC (2015).
- Waste Framework Directive.
- Water Framework Directive.
- World Heritage Convention.

National

- A Fairer, Greener Scotland: Programme for Government (2021-2022).
- Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act (1979).
- Bute House Agreement: Scottish Government and Scottish Green Party: Shared Policy Programme (2021).
- Cleaner Air for Scotland: The Road to a Healthier Future (2015).

- Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019.
- Climate Change Plan Update 2020.
- Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009.
- Draft River Basin Management Plan for Scotland (2021-2027).
- Environmental Noise (Scotland) Regulations 2006.
- Environment Strategy for Scotland 2020: Visions and Outcomes.
- Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act (2009).
- Guiding principles on the environment: draft statutory guidance (2021).
- Habitats Directive and Habitats Regulations.
- Historic Environment Policy for Scotland 2019 (HEPS)
- Historic Environment Scotland Regulations.
- Land Reform (Scotland) Act (2016).
- Land Use Strategy for Scotland (2021-2026).
- Marine (Scotland) Act 2010.
- National Parks Advice to Ministers (2023).
- National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000.
- National Performance Framework (2022)
- National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4).
- National Transport Strategy (2016).
- Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004.
- NatureScot Guidance (various).
- Offshore Marine Regulations (2017).
- Our Past, Our Future: Strategy for Scotland's Historic Environment (2023).
- Our Place in Time: The Historic Environment Strategy for Scotland (2014).
- Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act (1997).
- Planning (Scotland) Act (2019).
- Scotland's Forestry Strategy (2019-2029).
- Scotland's National Peatland Plan (2015).
- Scotland's Zero Waste Plan (2010).
- Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045.
- Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) Regulations.
- Scottish National Marine Plan (2015).
- Scottish Soil Framework (2009).
- State of Nature Scotland Report (2019).
- The Birds Directive and Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981).
- The Scottish Government's Vision for Agriculture (2022).

- The Water Environment (Controlled Activities) (Scotland) Regulations (2011).
- UK Climate Change Risk Assessment (2022).
- Updating the Climate Change Plan (2018-2032).
- Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Act (2003).

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