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Peter Rawcliffe
National Strategy Manager
Scottish Natural Heritage
Great Glen Road
Leachkin Road
Inverness
IV3 8NW



Consultation response: Enjoying the Outdoors

This is the response of Scottish Environment LINK to the SNH consultation on Enjoying the Outdoors. LINK is the forum for Scotland's voluntary environment organisations - 36 member bodies representing a broad spectrum of environmental interests. Member bodies will be responding more specifically to the consultation. This response has been developed by the LINK Access Network, and is supported by the following members of LINK:

Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland
Mountaineering Council of Scotland
National Trust for Scotland
North East Mountain Trust
Ramblers' Association Scotland
RSPB Scotland
The Royal Zoological Society of Scotland
Scottish Council for National Parks
Scottish Countryside Rangers Association
Soil Association Scotland
The Woodland Trust Scotland

LINK is pleased to have the opportunity to comment on the update of SNH's policy statement on outdoor recreation and access. We believe it is timely to review this document now that the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 is in place and its implementation underway.

We agree with much of the document, but feel that it needs to be more visionary in scope if it is to contribute towards a cultural shift within Scotland which will make outdoor recreation more central to everyone's lives. We would like to see Scotland drawing on experience in other countries – particularly in Scandinavia - to develop a closer relationship between the residents of Scotland and their landscape. Visits to the outdoors should be a regular part of people's leisure time. Responsible access should be built into the school curriculum and other educational activities, with all schools participating in outdoor activities. This document should set the scene for this cultural shift to take place.

While we note the links with other policy areas, we feel that to date outdoor access has not been raised high enough within other agendas to achieve the anticipated levels of participation across the whole population. SNH, with its understanding of landscape and land management is the right body to promote outdoor access, but at the same time, we do not

feel SNH has managed to influence other areas of government sufficiently to raise the profile of outdoor recreation and ensure it is taken seriously. Clearly, as noted in Box 1, outdoor

recreation delivers considerable economic benefits, particularly for rural areas. We would like to see far more partnership working with other government departments, such as health, transport planning and education, and not only those organisations listed in paragraph 38 as sharing this agenda. Having said that, the roles of organisations such as **sportscotland**, the Forestry Commission and Paths for All Partnership need to be clarified to ensure there is no overlap.

The aim of the implementation phase of the access legislation should now be on facilitating appropriate access and ensuring there is increased provision of paths and access infrastructure. This should be reflected more clearly in the document. The policy also needs to be more explicit about how SNH ensures that those charged with implementing the legislation are doing so, and integrated path networks are being developed, etc. For example, whether SNH will take on a monitoring role.

Specific points

Caring for the resource

We feel there is a need for SNH to balance its conservation expertise with the landscape and recreation needs identified in this document. We specifically welcome statements in sections 15 & 16 which suggest a more balanced approach would be taken when promoting conservation, and more effort would be made to provide reasonable access.

Key priorities for SNH action and outputs

This section is not sufficiently clear in terms of targets and actions required in order to achieve these outputs. We feel there is a need for SMART targets here.

We hope the above comments are useful, and would be happy to discuss them further at any time.

Contact:

Ian McCall
Convenor, Scottish Environment LINK Access Network
Ramblers' Association Scotland
Kingfisher House
Auld Mart Business Park
Milnathort
Kinross
KY13 9DA
Tel: 01577 861222
Email: ianm@scotland.ramblers.org.uk