



THE MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL OF SCOTLAND

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Dear Sir / Madam

Please accept these comments from the Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCoFS) in response to the Scottish Labour Ideas for a Fairer Scotland second stage consultation. The MCoFS is the representative body for hill walkers, climbers and ski tourers, and is the only national representative body of the sport of mountaineering in Scotland. We have 10,500 members, and are recognised by the Scottish Government as representing the interests of all mountaineers. Mountaineers contribute approximately £150 million to Scotland's rural economy each year and are attracted to Scotland mainly where there are mountains, crags or a relatively wild experience. Our concerns are wide-ranging, including opportunities, landscape, health, biodiversity, etc. Mountaineers, even if they would not label themselves as such, originate from a wide spectrum of demographics and geographical locations.

Tourism

“We must improve the quality of our existing tourist attractions”

A diversity of tourist opportunities is needed to sustain and develop the industry as a whole. “Attractions” are part of this, but so too is Scotland's wild landscape. This is an existing tourist attraction, and landscape is the most commonly quoted attraction by visitors to Scotland as the primary draw, even when the visitors do not intend entering the core wild areas. This is already a hugely important existing attraction, and as such there should be a commitment to conserve and retain this as an attraction and for future generations.

Q1. How can we improve the marketing of Scottish tourism? Should there be a greater focus on local tourism, how we make tourism “greener” and encouraging activity tourism?

Currently there is a lack of sustainable transport options. This is particularly evident in the difficulty of promoting linear routes where returning to the start can be difficult.

Rural Scotland and Remote Communities

“Labour has worked to deliver new legislation to protect our marine environment”

The Marine Act has a requirement to prepare a strategic plan for development of renewable energy installations in the marine environment. This is to protect the seascape and biodiversity of the marine environment. It is very disappointing that such a measure was not proposed, and delivered, for similar terrestrial development prior to the proliferation in renewable, particularly wind, developments across Scotland. The current SPP and NFF2 are not delivering the renewable developments to the most sustainable, least impacting, areas. There is an immediate need for a

similar strategic plan such that wind energy developments are directed to sites that are the most efficient (such as near to point of use) and have the least negative impact on finite resources such as wild areas.

“Build on Labour’s successful work on National Parks, land reform and access to the countryside, promoting tourism, biodiversity, recreation and wildlife preservation.”

The land reform and access legislation is a great achievement and is already delivering a greater feeling of connection to our land. It is also presenting opportunities to promote mutual understanding between land owners and access users. Tourists can be more confident than ever in being able to access the wild landscapes they have travelled to enjoy. Our National Parks are successfully attracting a wide variety of visitors with those seeking a wilder experience at CNP where there are extensive opportunities for facility-based enjoyment and a wild area at its heart. Scotland has some of the most accessible wild areas in Europe. More could be made of promoting these wild opportunities in conjunction with economic activities sensitive to preserving the resource. This applies equally within and outside of national parks. The West Highland Way has been a great success, with many businesses dependent on this continued success. There are other similar opportunities throughout Scotland along the lines of the Great Walks in New Zealand, although routes would need to be carefully chosen such as not to require new construction in wilder areas. This could be done in conjunction with existing sustainable transport facilities to promote a wholly “green” experience.

3. How can the growth of green jobs and renewable energy industries be best exploited to tackle unemployment in rural areas?

Truly green jobs would not impact upon the wilder landscape resource that attracts visitors to rural areas, sustains tourism jobs, sustains local communities, attracts residents to live in wilder areas, is a source of clean water for industries like whisky and bottled water production, stores carbon, is a marketing tool for rural products and is central to Scottish cultural identity. Renewable developments are an industrial activity and completely alter the landscape where they are introduced, and the experience of those viewing that landscape from a significant distance. Over-reliance on certain industries and a lack of strategic thinking on sustaining rural areas is threatening the very resource that sustains these remoter areas. Decommissioning plans for renewable developments in all instances MCoFS are aware of are at best partial, leaving concrete foundations and many kilometres of access tracks despite labelling as “reinstatement.” At higher altitudes vegetation will only very slowly, if ever, re-vegetate spontaneously. These developments are not sustainable in the environmental sense. Construction phases create jobs in some numbers, but operational phases in many instances create no rural jobs at all. For greatest energy efficiency these developments must be near the point of energy use due to the significant loss through transmission. For all these reasons there is an urgent need for a Scotland-wide strategic planning for terrestrial renewable development, as is presently underway for offshore wind developments. In remoter area, developments should be encouraged at the householder and community level for their own use, rather than commercial scale developments. This is likely to have greater benefit on truly rural jobs. Larger developments that support the grid should be encouraged on urban fringes where the users are, and can associate the connection between power generation and effects on the environment. Energy use reduction needs to take a much higher profile in combating climate change, and politicians need to find the courage to lead on this matter. Scotland could and should be at the forefront of landscape-sensitive renewable energy technology such as tidal and wave and not just rely on “quick fix” wind.

Recent statements by enterprise companies reported in the press illustrate that they do not accept that there is an opportunity cost to renewable developments. They must be encouraged to explicitly recognise that such developments are not utilising economically inactive land in the uplands. Economic activities in these areas include, but are not restricted to; field sports, outdoor

tourism, eco-tourism, adventure tourism, upland farming and ecosystem services such water, carbon storage etc. They also have an inherent non-monetary value. It should be considered whether there could be a mechanism for encouraging enhancement of the land to benefit these land uses such as re-wetting peat, upland path repair to enhance visitor experience and sustain the resource of wildness that has drawn people to the area, which in turn sustains the economy of the area.

We cannot afford, financially or culturally, to sacrifice Scotland's wild landscape (none of which are conserved for their wildness).

5. Labour's groundbreaking land reform, access and national parks legislation has been in place for over a decade, so what new approaches do we need to help our rural communities?

The MCofS congratulates Labour on its role of enabling these pieces of legislation. Scotland can now celebrate having some of the best access legislation in the world and MCofS is playing an instrumental role in promoting responsible behaviour to hill walkers, climbers and ski tourers in Scotland, whether resident or visitors from abroad. Help is still needed to support this continued work through promoting mutual understanding and respect between land managers and access users for the benefit of all people concerned, and the environment.

National Parks need to be the planning authorities with environment as the overarching core aim. To deliver on all their aims they must have influence over developments that impact on that delivery. In the June Scottish Parliament debate on hill tracks supported by Labour MSP Peter Peacock, there was a call for planning control over Permitted Development Rights of hill tracks. This needs urgently implemented, including throughout national parks. Currently this is only the case in part of our National Parks courtesy of the areas existing designation as a National Scenic Area. It is vital that the CNPA has powers over these developments throughout the entire Park. It may be appropriate to address this through a review of the National Parks legislation. Labour speakers also called for removal of Permitted Development Rights from hill tracks in line with a report previously commissioned by the Scottish Executive outwith National Park as well. This may be better achieved through the planning system.

Environment

Since 1992, biodiversity has become a commonly recognised and understood term. It is valued for the economic benefits it brings to rural areas, such as White-tailed Eagle "industry" on Mull as well as its inherent importance. The same marketing process needs to move on to the diversity of landscapes. This is a potentially major selling point for Scotland, and similar to biodiversity, has inherent value. We have biodiversity, it now time we recognised the value of our landiversity.

Improving Scotland's Mental Health

"Scottish Labour will look to other therapies and methods of treatment to avoid increasing the number of people who are prescribed anti-depressants."

5. How do we reduce dependence on anti-depressants?

6. How can we best target preventative interventions and anticipatory care for mental illness and how can we improve care services for those living with a mental

Many hill walkers and climbers describe their valuing of wild land through the feelings of being "relaxed / calm," peaceful," "happy," and "content." Scotland's wilder areas are an existing natural therapy. It should be considered how economically-accessible sustainable transport options or partnership projects in communities could deliver low cost group visits to these areas. The clubs affiliated to the MCofS offer low cost methods for people to enjoy such areas, although are not currently capable of leading novices.

Potentially a network of groups that had this capacity could be an alternative therapy or mechanism to prevent depression or reliance on anti-depressants.

Please do not hesitate to contact me to discuss these issues further.

Yours sincerely

Hebe Carus
Access & Conservation Officer