



National Park Campaigning in the Age of Misinformation

The accusation of disseminating misinformation is a claim repeatedly directed towards the No campaign by supporters of the proposed Park. Yet, when challenged to provide specific evidence no substantive examples have been forthcoming. Indeed, it could equally be argued that the accusation itself is an example of misinformation, the lack of evidence indicates it is simply a slur to discredit those who question the proposal.

It could equally be argued that the presentation of NatureScot as an 'unbiased' consultation Reporter is misinformation. NatureScot's own website is filled with information proclaiming the value of National Parks ¹. When this is considered alongside their statutory role as adviser to Scottish Government on natural heritage, it is abundantly clear why they are not perceived as unbiased.

On the other hand, there are numerous examples of misinformation being propagated by GNPA with perhaps the most egregious being their response to the outcome of the meeting of Dumfries and Galloway Council on 5th February. At this meeting, the Council considered the draft response to the NatureScot consultation. This had been prepared by Council officers and highlighted numerous concerns alongside potential benefits.

After reviewing and amending the main response Councillors turned to Q1 'To what extent do you support the idea of a new National Park being established in the southwest of Scotland?' The consultation presented five options, 'strongly support / tend to support / tend to oppose / strongly oppose / undecided.' The debate reduced these to a vote between two: 'tend to support' or 'undecided.' Councillors voted, by a substantial majority, that 'undecided' was the only realistic option.

The flawed and partial information which has been provided on the proposal, along with the implications of the forthcoming Natural Environment Bill, meant they had little other choice. This decision overturned previous 'in principle' support for the GNPA bid given by the Economy and Infrastructure Committee.

Despite this clear reversal in the Council's position, the GNPA Facebook page was headlined with a post: 'Galloway Councillors say Yes to National Park'. Their Instagram account also

¹ <https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/protected-areas-and-species/protected-areas/national-designations/national-parks/value-national-parks-scotland>

reported 'Galloway Councillors have voted to continue the National Park Process.' There was no such vote as the process is being run by NatureScot for the Scottish Government.

The GNPA chair Rob Lucas went further, presenting the outcome as 'excellent news.' He stated, 'Councillors from across the political spectrum and from all Dumfries and Galloway will be contacting NatureScot to make clear that they believe a new National Park represents a once-in-a-lifetime chance to build a better future. All of them recognise that with a national park, we have the chance to help our communities and environment thrive, without it they will continue their long decline².'

We are somehow expected to accept that the Council move from 'support in principle' to 'undecided' is excellent news for Park supporters. Mr Lucas' view of the meeting is totally at odds with any sense of reality. It must surely give us pause for thought about the reality of what a new National Park will mean for the area, as opposed to the fairy tale being presented by GNPA.

This includes their description of the proposed park as an 'opportunity for the community to create a 'new kind' of Park' and their slogan, 'A National Park made in Galloway for Galloway.'³ They have stated a new National Park 'could assist local democracy...and contribute to the desired de-centralisation of power,'⁴ claiming a new National Park would 'work with our communities to give them a strong voice in their future through the National Park Board and Partnership Plan.'

Yet NatureScot consultation documents⁵ make it clear that the reality of the situation is rather different. They state any new Park would operate within the legislative framework of the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000. Whilst there is a limited degree of flexibility in some areas such as planning authority⁶ and the makeup of a Park Authority Board, this is not a radically 'new kind' of National Park.

Meanwhile the Scottish Government are proposing sweeping changes to the legislation in the forthcoming Natural Environment Bill. Is a consultation based on the current Act, at the same time as introducing major changes to the legislation yet another example of misinformation within the process? Whilst full details of the Bill are not yet available proposals include changes to the purpose, aims, powers and governance of National Parks.

² Daily Record, 6th Feb 2025, **Rival campaigners hail council's 'undecided' stance on controversial Galloway National Park bid**

³https://static1.squarespace.com/static/62b44bc860c165721b088e9c/t/672a68b52c1713213dde5aa3/1730832570072/7966+GNPA+leaflet+A5_v3.pdf

⁴ It's Our Time GNPA May 2019

⁵ <https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/2024-11/full-technical-consultation-proposed-national-park-in-galloway.pdf> Nov 2024

⁶ There is some variability in the approach planning, with Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority responsible for deciding all planning applications, and the Cairngorms National Park Authority can 'call in' key planning proposals for it to decide, rather than the proposals being decided by the local planning authority.

Whatever final legislative rules emerge, the view that National Parks can assist local democracy and contribute to a decentralisation of power is misinformation and fails to stand up to scrutiny. National Parks are run by a Park Authority, an executive non-departmental public body, directly accountable to Scottish Ministers, not the community the park is located within. They do not de-centralise power or assist local democracy. In fact, they achieve the opposite, to suggest otherwise is not just misinformation, it is simply not true.