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Dear Phil

Scottish Executive Consultation – Future European Structural Funds Programmes in Highlands and Islands and Lowlands and Uplands Scotland 2007-2013

The Cairngorms National Park Authority welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Scottish Executive's consultation on the Future of European Structural Funds in Highlands and Islands 2007-2013 and would offer the following comments

General Comments

Given the strategic role the 2 National Parks play - and will continue to play - in the economic, social, and environmental aspects of the future of rural Scotland we would strongly suggest that these two areas are identified as priority areas for investment – as they were in the recent Objective 2 programme. This is discussed in more detail in the specific comments section.

The incorporation of 'legacy' into the ERDF Programme is perhaps worth emphasising although this may be embodied in the horizontal themes. This fits well with the statutory responsibility of the Park Authority in the area of the natural and cultural heritage. The Cairngorms National Park Authority would assert that 'green' tourism is of vital importance to the sustainable future of the area and welcomes the inclusion of this activity in the programme Priorities.

Although a reduction of some 50% of the 1999-2006 Programme, the proposed funding arrangements are still a significant opportunity of investment in the region especially when geared up by whatever intervention rate is arrived at. However the level of intervention is not spelled out in the consultation document. Whilst there may be good reason for this it should perhaps be explained as soon as possible.

On a more detailed administrative level, the Cairngorms National Park Authority would suggest that the application form for both Uplands and Lowlands and Highlands and Islands Programmes should be common - or at least share a degree of commonality - for the several organisations which have to work within and apply for funding assistance from

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the 2 Structural Funds Programmes. In this respect Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park falls into this category.

Highlands and Islands

Question 1

'Are there any additional economic factors to be considered and which structural funds can address in assessing the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities of Highlands and Islands?'

The analysis of Statistical areas setting the definition of "poorer" and "prosperous" regions of Scotland was established some years ago and it could be argued that the two EU Programmes which effectively divide the Cairngorms National Park in half, may not accurately reflect the economic reality. It is asserted that the eastern parts of the Park ie Upper Strath Don, Upper Deeside, and the Angus Glens are as, if not more, severely disadvantaged than the areas to the west of the Park such as Strathspey and Glenlivet. There are concerns that the Park will not be viewed as a cohesive whole and thus fail to receive parity of treatment from the two Programmes.

It may be that the Scottish Executive could clarify this through a small amount of additional work in analysing the current situation in the relevant ED's.

Otherwise the Cairngorms National Park Authority would urge that the issue of pan-Park parity is addressed in the management of the 2 funding programmes.

Question 2

'Do the proposed priorities for the 2007-2013 ERDF Programme in Highlands and Islands address the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities of the region?.'

It is noted in the Programme for the Uplands and Lowlands Scotland that forestry is viewed as a specific opportunity in terms of the sustainable economic future of the region. The Cairngorms National Park Authority would argue that this applies equally well, if not more so, to the Highlands and Islands Programme where forestry, and in particular the Caledonian pine forest reserve, offer a unique asset upon which to develop sustainable tourism.

Question 3

'Do the proposed priorities for the 2007-2013 ERDF programme in Highlands and Islands show appropriate coherence and concentration?'

The above would appear to satisfy the aspirations of the National Park as well as the communities of the Park.

One additional funding source of significance to fragile rural areas such as the Cairngorms National Park is the Heritage Lottery's 'Landscapes Partnership' Programme which has a

fund value of up to £2M and which targets of the rural heritage as a major determinant in the future sustainable development of the tourism industry.

Objective 3 – the Cairngorms National Park Authority welcomes the targeting of structural funds into the region’s environmental assets and their potential contribution to the tourism industry.

Whilst it is noted that the Programme will be targeted at “existing sites and assets” the Cairngorms National Park Authority would hope that innovative and new tourism products could still find favour with the decision making processes.

The Cairngorms National Park Authority welcomes the targeting of the key regional event of ‘Highlands 2007’ however it is moot whether the Programme will be able to cater for any applications given the likely start date of the Programme proper and the 2007 programme current lead in times. Consideration might be given to the establishment of a 2007 contingency fund as proposed for Priority 1 of the ESF fund until such times as the new programme gets underway.

Question 4

Do the proposed priorities of the 2007-2013 ESF Programme in Highlands and Islands address the weaknesses and opportunities of the region?

and

Question 5

“Do the proposed priorities of the 2007-2013 ESF Programme in Highlands and Islands show appropriate coherence and concentration and should they be configured separately?”

The Cairngorms National Park Authority has few comments to make on the 2 ESF programmes as they appear to be a welcome continuation of the current programmes. Indeed the Cairngorms National Park Authority has already accessed funds from the 2006 ESF Programme and would see the continuation of this as necessary and appropriate.

However it is suggested that multi-year programmes should be accepted at the outset rather than managing a series of continuations - although both may be relevant.

Uplands and Lowlands Scotland - ERDF

Question 1

‘Are there any additional socio economic factors to be considered and which structural funds can address in assessing the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities of Lowlands and Uplands Scotland?’

The analysis of Statistical areas setting the definition of “poorer” and “prosperous” regions of Scotland was established some years ago and it could be argued that the two EU Programmes which effectively divide the Cairngorms National Park in half, may not accurately reflect the economic reality. It is asserted that the eastern parts of the Park ie

Upper Strath Don, Upper Deeside, and the Angus Glens are as, if not more, severely disadvantaged than the areas to the west of the Park such as Strathspey and Glenlivet. There are concerns that the Park will not be viewed as a cohesive whole and thus fail to receive parity of treatment from the two Programmes.

It may be that the Scottish Executive could clarify this through a small amount of additional work in analysing the current situation in the relevant ED's.

Otherwise the Cairngorms National Park Authority would urge that at least the issue of pan-Park parity is addressed in the management of the 2 funding programmes.

Question 2

'Do the proposed priorities for the 2007-2013 ERDF Programme in Highlands and Islands address the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities of the region?.'

The Cairngorms National Park Authority has no comments to make regarding this question

Question 3

'Do the proposed priorities for the 2007-2013 ERDF programme in Lowlands and Uplands Scotland show appropriate coherence and concentration?'

The above would appear to satisfy the aspirations of the National Park as well as the communities of the Park.

The incorporation of 'legacy' into the ERDF Programme is perhaps worth emphasising although this may be embodied in the horizontal themes. This fits well with the statutory responsibility of the Park Authority in the area of the natural and cultural heritage. The Cairngorms National Park Authority would assert that 'green' tourism is of vital importance to the sustainable future of the area and welcomes the inclusion of this activity in the programme Priorities.

One additional funding source of significance to fragile rural areas such as the Cairngorms National Park is the Heritage Lottery's 'Landscapes Partnership' Programme which has a fund value of up to £2M and which targets of the rural heritage as a major determinant in the future sustainable development of the tourism industry.

Question 4

Do the proposed priorities of the 2007-2013 ESF Programme in Lowlands and Uplands and Lowlands Scotland address the weaknesses and opportunities of the region?

and

Question 5

"Do the proposed priorities of the 2007-2013 ESF Programme in Lowlands and Uplands Scotland show appropriate coherence and concentration and should they be configured separately?"

The Cairngorms National Park Authority has few comments to make on the 2 ESF programmes as they appear to be a welcome continuation of the current programmes. Indeed the Cairngorms National Park Authority has already accessed funds from the 2006 ESF Programme and would see the continuation of this as necessary and appropriate.

However it is suggested that multi-year programmes should be accepted at the outset rather than managing a series of continuations - although both are relevant.

We hope you find the above comments of some assistance in determining the final shape of the forthcoming Structural Funds Programme. Should you wish any further clarification on any of the matters please do not hesitate to contact me or my External Funding Manager Quentin McLaren on the number above.

Yours faithfully



Jane Hope
Chief Executive

