

National Parks, Brexit and the Common Agricultural Policy

Description

What is the connection between national parks and Brexit? Not much might be your first reaction, but read on.....

The European Union's Common Agricultural Policy has an influence on most of the UK's countryside, from the intensively managed fields adjacent to our villages and towns to the highest summits where the sheep roam freely. Most of our land in most of the UK's national parks is affected by CAP policy which controls the way that subsidy is paid in support of agriculture and forestry.

On 1 March this year, at the launch of the Cairngorms National Park Forest Strategy, I welcomed the aspirations behind this project, but with a word of caution. Last September, in an email to all Board members the day before they approved the strategy, I had warned that the fine aspirations embedded within the strategy could not be met. Basically, the financial incentives in support of forestry were heavily biased towards intensive techniques instead of more sensitive means of forest expansion through natural regeneration. In support of this I referenced the Park's own ecologist, David Hetherington, who had just published an excellent paper in British Wildlife (August edition) which explained the problems of state forest funding – too much of this was “*predicated on fencing and planting*” in ways which were inappropriate within the Cairngorms National Park.

At the Forest Strategy launch earlier this month a senior official of Forestry Commission Scotland responded to my criticism of the financial incentives. He explained their hands were tied by EU regulations which required state forest funding to be restricted to a limited range of management activities which could be readily costed and monitored. As a consequence private landowners are inevitably drawn to fencing and planting to expand their native woodland rather than natural regeneration because the financial support is biased in favour of the former. The playing field is anything but level. So it is the CAP, apparently, which is primarily responsible for degrading the character of our native woodlands, especially the ancient Caledonian Pinewoods, which are some of the finest Old Growth Forests left in Europe. The danger is that the CNPA aspirations to expand these woodlands across the Park and up to the natural treeline will have to be done largely by fencing and planting rather than by natural regeneration because the financial support mechanisms are all wrong. These problems appear to be endemic within the CAP and pose a danger to Old Growth Forest expansion in all member states of the EU. Brexit gives us the chance to escape from this crazy situation.

In a recent briefing to politicians I have tried to explain, whatever the outcome of the Brexit process, whether we leave or remain in the EU, the UK must remove itself from the influence of the CAP. It is the most destructive factor at work in our national parks today, destroying wildlife habitats in the lowlands and promoting the wrong type of forestry in the uplands.

What can be done?

If you agree with what I am saying about the CAP and our national parks you might like to see my recent briefing about Brexit to UK politicians ([see here](#)). This outlines the problems with the CAP, its relevance to Brexit and why I think we need a second referendum, providing it is not simply a re-run of the first. If you support what I am saying please copy my briefing to your local member of the UK parliament asap and, if possible, copy to your constituency and list members of the Scottish Parliament. If we have a second referendum, in which there is a choice between leaving and remaining, it is essential that both options include departure from the CAP. Many thanks.

Category

1. Cairngorms
2. National Parks

Tags

1. CNPA
2. conservation
3. EC
4. Forestry Commission Scotland

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