# Scottish Government scraps Galloway National Park plans amid local opposition



The recent announcement by the Scottish Government to abandon plans for the proposed Galloway and Ayrshire National Park has ignited significant debate and disappointment among various stakeholders. Initially proposed as part of the Bute House Agreement, which was established to solidify the alliance between the SNP and the Scottish Greens, this move aimed to enhance the natural heritage of Scotland by designating at least one new national park alongside the existing Cairngorms and Loch Lomond and Trossachs.

The Scottish Government had a vested interest in developing a new national park to foster sustainable land management and promote local economic growth within Galloway, an area steeped in rich biodiversity and far-reaching landscapes. Applications for national park status had seen Galloway shortlisted alongside several other regions, such as Lochaber and the Scottish Borders, with the proposal gaining traction amidst public consultations. However, despite the initial enthusiasm, the results yielded a divided response. The formal consultation overseen by NatureScot received over five thousand surveys, but a slight majority—54% overall—opposed the idea. When considering local responses alone, opposition intensified, with figures suggesting that 57% of local participants were against the park's establishment.

In addressing the Scottish Parliament, Mairi Gougeon, the Rural Affairs Secretary, cited the lack of local support and clarity as primary reasons for scrapping the proposal. “...while it considers that the proposed area meets the conditions for a national park set out in the legislation, the proposal does not have sufficient clarity, nor has it garnered sufficient local support to proceed to the next stage of designation,” she stated. This acknowledgment reflects the complex and often contentious landscape of local interests and political feasibility that underpins such initiatives.

Pushed to the forefront of the discussion were the voices of local political representatives. Finlay Carson, the Conservative MSP for Galloway, expressed that his support waned amid concerns regarding the imposition of a "top-down structure", suggesting that the initiative had become too closely aligned with Green policies rather than reflecting local aspirations. Conversely, Colin Smyth, a Labour MSP, lamented the decision, emphasising that Galloway had been neglected for far too long, and accused the government of undermining potential economic developments.

Criticism does not solely come from political figures; community leaders have also voiced their grievances. Rob Lucas, chair of the Galloway National Park Association, described the government's decision as a profound loss, not just for nature but also for the fragile communities within the region. He noted, “Our disappointment is not just for the loss of a National Park but for the whole future of Galloway, which has been badly let down once again.” Many proponents of the park, including environmental groups and local advocates, highlighted that the proposed national park could have attracted investment, enhanced environmental protections, and improved community cohesion.

The opposition campaign, led by vested interests, raised concerns about rising property prices and the potential for tourism to disrupt local life. This sentiment was echoed by figures such as Denise Brownlee, who warned that creating a national park could make housing unaffordable for many residents. Likewise, the National Farmers Union of Scotland has consistently opposed the idea, arguing that it could impose restrictions that hinder local agricultural practices.

The decision to scrap the Galloway National Park proposal has stirred frustrations not only among local communities but also among broader environmental and advocacy groups. Mark Ruskell, a Green MSP, accused the government of yielding to misinformation and powerful interests, further asserting that the benefits of national park status—such as enhanced tourism management and investment—are now lost to the community.

As Galloway finds itself back in a state of uncertainty, advocates for the area's preservation now look to future steps that could foster collaboration and environmental restoration without the formal designation of a national park. Kat Jones from Action to Protect Rural Scotland starkly observed that this setback may discourage future conservation efforts, particularly during a time when strong leadership is crucial in navigating the challenges posed by climate change and biodiversity loss.

The regional debates over the Galloway National Park reflect broader themes in Scottish land-use policy: the contention between local interests and larger environmental goals, and the intricate balance of political authority versus community engagement. As the region grapples with this latest government decision, the hope remains that the dialogue surrounding Galloway's potential will continue, even if only as a result of the heightened awareness that has emerged from this scrutiny.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25200928.scottish-government-scraps-galloway-ayrshire-national-park-plan/?ref=rss), [[5]](https://www.ayradvertiser.com/news/24467896.new-national-park-set-galloway-parts-ayrshire/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25200928.scottish-government-scraps-galloway-ayrshire-national-park-plan/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cgj2pvx7y28o), [[4]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/24468909.farmers-union-opposes-galloways-national-park-proposals/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ced11z2g8xvo), [[6]](https://www.east-ayrshire.gov.uk/PlanningAndTheEnvironment/galloway-national-park-proposal.aspx)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25200928.scottish-government-scraps-galloway-ayrshire-national-park-plan/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cgj2pvx7y28o), [[6]](https://www.east-ayrshire.gov.uk/PlanningAndTheEnvironment/galloway-national-park-proposal.aspx)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25200928.scottish-government-scraps-galloway-ayrshire-national-park-plan/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cgj2pvx7y28o> - Dumfries and Galloway councillors have voted to respond to the official consultation on creating a new national park in the area as 'undecided'. The consultation on the proposal to create Scotland's third national park in Galloway closed on 14 February. The council convened a special meeting to discuss its response and also agree whether it was generally in favour or opposed to the plans. A move to get behind the proposals, tabled by Labour councillors, was voted down by 25 to 15 in favour of saying the council was 'undecided'.
3. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ced11z2g8xvo> - Opponents to the creation of Scotland's third national park in Galloway have launched a campaign against the plan. The area was recently selected as the preferred site to receive the designation by the Scottish government. Denise Brownlee, who is opposed to the move, said it could push house prices up beyond the means of many local residents. A thorough investigation of the area's suitability has been promised before it joins the Cairngorms and Loch Lomond and the Trossachs in having the status.
4. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/24468909.farmers-union-opposes-galloways-national-park-proposals/> - Farmers in the south west of Scotland have hit out at plans to make Galloway the nation’s latest National Park. The National Farmers Union Scotland (NFUS) says it will continue to oppose plans by the Scottish Government for Galloway to become a new National Park. The area which would span across Dumfries and Galloway and parts of Ayrshire was confirmed as the Scottish Government’s preferred choice today, as they seek to create the country’s third National Park by 2026.
5. <https://www.ayradvertiser.com/news/24467896.new-national-park-set-galloway-parts-ayrshire/> - Scotland's third national park is proposed to be located in Galloway and parts of Ayrshire, Rural Affairs Secretary Mairi Gougeon has confirmed. It was one of several areas that had bid to become home to a new national park - with ministers now confirming Galloway is the proposed choice. The proposed park will cover most of Galloway and sections of South and East Ayrshire. The South Ayrshire elements are expected to include the land south of Girvan, covering Ballantrae and inland as far as Colmonnell, as well as parts of the Carrick forest.
6. <https://www.east-ayrshire.gov.uk/PlanningAndTheEnvironment/galloway-national-park-proposal.aspx> - On 22 July 2024, the Scottish Government made a statutory proposal that a new National Park be established in Galloway. NatureScot has now been asked to investigate the detail of the proposal and to explore public opinion. As part of its role, NatureScot will explore: if National Park status should be granted, what the geographic area should be, what its governance should be and what powers it should have. NatureScot will conclude its assessments and provide advice to Scottish Ministers by the end of April 2025.
7. <https://www.nature.scot/naturescot-launches-consultation-scotlands-proposed-new-national-park-galloway> - NatureScot has opened the formal (statutory) consultation on whether a new National Park should be established in Galloway and parts of South and East Ayrshire. The consultation will include looking at what a potential new Park might consist of - from its boundary to its board makeup, and even what the Park could be called. It will also seek to gauge opinion on the proposal and alternatives to it. The formal consultation will run from today (7 November) until 14 February 2025 and is accessible on the NatureScot website and in print, audio and Gaelic versions.