

Draft Contribution to the Lake District National Park Nature Improvement Area Bid

The Federation of Cumbria Commoners (FCC) represents over 600 commoners in Cumbria, around 400 of these are in the Lake District. Common land makes up 25% of the land area of the National Park, making it the greatest concentration of common land in England.

The FCC is keen to work with the LDNPA and its partners in order to protect and enhance the special qualities of the National Park. We are also supportive of the nomination of the LDNP as a World Heritage Site (WHS) and note the pivotal role that traditional farming plays in creating the Outstanding Universal Value of the LDNP.

The FCC consider the NIA 1st Stage bid is a significant intervention in land management in the catchments of Bassenthwaite and Ullswater, which includes over 17,000 ha of common land. Our concern is that this proposal is, to a large extent, a reflection of its name with a major focus on the improvement of nature. We believe that utmost care should be taken in a complex area, such as the LDNP, to develop a proposal that looks at sustainable land management in the round, rather than mainly through the lens of environmental protection. Our approach is consistent with the LDNP partnership plan which recognises there are inherent tensions between the variety of uses of the land in the National Park with considerable challenges when attempting to enhance and deliver all the special qualities of the Park simultaneously. We believe that careful discussion is needed in the development of this bid to ensure intervention in one field does not result in the degradation of another.

The LDNP is a multi-functional landscape where the cultural landscape is an assemblage of a range of ecosystem services from the provision of food and water, to the regulation of floods and the delivery of cultural services of which commoning and hill farming is at the heart. The wide open landscapes of the fells combined with small in-by fields and rougher intakes demarcated by drystone walls are the product of thousands of years of farming. Hill farming is a keystone activity within the landscape providing both environment benefits and food production. Hill farmers and in particular commoners have created and maintain the landscape and are the glue of many sparsely populated rural communities in the Lake District.

The FCC therefore proposes the Lake District NIA 2nd stage bid develops and adopts a multi-functional approach to developing project aims, outcomes, outputs and activity at the catchment, common and farm level. For example, project outcomes should aim to deliver increased resilience of traditional hill farms as well as favorable condition of biological targets. Integral to these would be well defined socio-economic indicators of success that monitor and measure the health of the hill farming industry. Data both in terms of absolutes and as important trends would be required to measure achievement against these indicators.

Below are some examples of indicators for measuring the status of traditional farming in the LDNPA that could be included in the NIA:

1. Number of commercial farm businesses

2. Number of people employed in agriculture and their ages
3. Net Farm income of farms
4. Number of commoners/ ha common land
5. Age of commoners
6. Number of commercial flocks and number of ewes of traditional breeds (Herdwick and Swaledale)
7. Number of breeding cows
8. % household income from agriculture
9. Number km walls (and hedges)
10. Number of active commons associations
11. Number of agricultural shows
12. Maintenance of traditional hill farming systems (hefting, regular flock ages, at least three generations)
13. Level of skills and knowledge base in hill farming
14. Maintenance farm animal genetic diversity

In summary, the FCC would be keen to work with a LDNP NIA project that develops portfolio of activities to enhance and protect traditional farming systems along with environmental protection, and where project success is measured against a series of cultural landscape indicators (consistent with the bid for World Heritage Site status) in addition to biological indicators.

We are aware our proposal is ambitious and would involve a significant shift in the tone of the document and activities as set out in the Stage 1 application for the NIA. To this end the FCC would be able to offer some technical support to assist the revisions. We believe that such an approach would be walking the talk as set out in the recent 'Our commitment to supporting farming in the Lake District' paper approved by the Members of LDNPA. The prize for this adjustment would be a scheme supported by hill farmers, commoners and owners of common land so increasing dramatically the likelihood of the NIA delivering all its outcomes.

Finally, we would like to seek assurances that the focus of activity and funding on these two catchments would not prejudice activities elsewhere in the National Park and in Cumbria more widely.

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