

Glover Review recommendations for a National Landscapes Service – The Exmoor Society responds:

1 In its response to questions set by the Glover Panel, the Exmoor Society argued for a national champion for national parks that is given a leadership role to raise their profile locally, nationally and internationally. It should be an independent body, ideally a partnership, that includes representatives from the national parks and the charity sector with similar remits. Giving strong advice to national parks and all government departments is important, not just to Defra and its agencies that are limited to specific functions.

2 The Society therefore welcomes The Landscapes Review proposals for a national body to champion designated national landscapes and provide oversight at a local level. It should be ambitious, guiding the effective delivery of Management Plans, ensuring that they deliver both purposes of the national parks – in the first giving equal priority to nature recovery and climate resilience, landscape conservation and cultural heritage and, in the second, fostering understanding, access and enjoyment.

3 However, there is concern as the recommendations stand. The risk is that a new quango will lead to greater centralisation with powers to set and monitor targets. Each National Park is uniquely endowed with its own special natural capital assets. These may be easily lost as a direct result of mistakenly treating them as essentially the same and subject to decisions of a centralised bureaucracy that views them as identical. For example, Exmoor's priority moorland habitats have suffered from central targets for moorland management based on northern moors rather than on local conditions. National targets are a clumsy tool, unable to take into account the geographical nuances of any given place.

5 We have asked the Defra team to focus on a more limited range of functions than Glover proposed, creating a National Landscapes Partnership rather than a Service. We would hope that once the functions of this new body have been clarified a way of guiding, advising, assessing and promoting the National Parks might be achieved without the loss of local autonomy and expertise.