

HOW ICELAND CAN SHOW THE WAY FORWARD

As Iceland prepares for the key international conventions on climate change and biodiversity in 2021, now is the time for the Althingi to approve plans for the future. Please do not let this opportunity for agreeing to the three proposals of the national park agency, the Highland national park and the next iteration of The Master Plan for Nature Protection and Energy Utilization slip.

What the government now proposes on national parks is totally in line with the best international experience. A unified agency is essential to oversee the development and delivery of the national parks system. No longer will there be unhelpful fragmentation and bureaucratic squabbling between agencies. And there will be a significant benefit in a more effective, unified body to work with municipalities, owners and local people. It is not about taking away power. It is about sharing power. International experience has many good examples. Municipalities and the local communities they represent and the owners of land should work in partnership and alongside the national government to share power in decision making.

A new agency will have a real sense of purpose to ensure the establishment of the Highlands as a place to treasure for ever. This area is home to internationally important breeding birds, provides breeding areas for the vitally important fish species for human nutritional and economic benefit, supplies most of the water and electricity for Iceland's people and for industry and agriculture, and its globally outstanding scenery and its violent natural history make it an area for Icelanders and visitors to savour on foot, cycle or truck. Coordinating its management is both a national and international responsibility for Iceland.

Iceland has a virtually unique method of decision making for balancing energy development with the natural environment: The Master Plan for Nature Protection and Energy Utilization. But it has got stuck politically. Now is the time to break out of this bureaucratic and political log jam and make meaningful decisions for the benefit of Iceland's people for the future. Iceland does not need more electricity due to declining demand from industrial users. But it does need better distribution of electricity to the areas of the country where there are shortages. By approving the third iteration of The Master Plan, the Althingi will unlock the process and allow the next stages to proceed through the decision making process.

By the Althingi approving the government's proposals for the new national parks agency, the Highland National Park and The Master Plan, Iceland will become an international exemplar in caring for its natural environment and the future of its people. And it will be able to demonstrate proudly the way forward at next year's international conventions.

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