

PE2035/H: Recognise legal control of generalist predators as a conservation act

Petitioner submission, 12 June 2024

I note the response from Minister Jim Fairlie and thank him for this correspondence.

On the first point, we are pleased that the Scottish Government has, in writing, expressed support for legal predator control and, specifically, the role it plays in halting biodiversity loss. It is important for our members to hear this, from the Scottish Government and, to that end, we would still wish it that this message (given here in writing) is declared in a Ministerial statement in the Scottish Parliament. I note the Minister says this is possible. It would mean a lot to the SGA membership who undertake legal predator control, professionally. Wildlife managers have, of late, suffered a reduction in their work tools to do the job, due to changes brought about in the Parliament.

This has impacted morale and led to legitimate questions over rural policy direction. Having the Government's support for legal predator control officially recognised, on Parliamentary record, is therefore more critical now than ever. It will also fulfil a key motivation for starting this petition in the first place and I hope this can come to pass.

The Minister makes many points I agree with and I am satisfied with the answers given.

Moving to the specific point of considering predator control in future agriculture and climate funding schemes, I would make the case that this is necessary, if we look at the pattern of species decline in Scotland in relatively recent times. I feel that increased funding for predator control, in tandem with habitat management, will see an increase in species and I noted some prominent examples of this, in my petition preamble. Nothing has changed since this petition was first considered to make me alter my view on the necessity of support for legal predator control in halting species decline and bolstering species on the brink.

While alarming declines in some favourite species can be multifactorial, and much science is being done on those aspects, there is a need to consider also the wealth of land manager knowledge in Scotland.

Ask someone like myself or a farmer, forester or crofter, who have spent major parts of their lives in daily observation of species of the Scottish countryside and they will note the palpable change in balance between predator and prey (in some species) and how this has impacted conservation over recent decades. It is not the only change, of course, but it is very visible to practitioners in the fields and hills every day.

It is important to note too that there are far fewer trained wildlife managers today than there once was. It is important that those still operating are given the encouragement they need, to continue doing an important job.