

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

2nd Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday 2
February 2022

PE1812: Protect Scotland's remaining
ancient, native and semi-native woodlands
and woodland floors

Note by the Clerk

Lodged 5 August 2020

Petitioner Audrey Baird and Fiona Baker on behalf of Help Trees Help Us

**Petition
summary** Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to deliver world-leading legislation giving Scotland's remaining fragments of ancient, native and semi-native woodlands and woodland floors full legal protection before COP 26 (UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties) in Glasgow in November 2021.

Webpage petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1812

Introduction

1. The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on [8 September 2021](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Government to seek an update on its response to the deer working group.
2. To date no response has been received from the Scottish Government however the petitioner has provided a submission.

Committee consideration

3. During its consideration of this petition, the Committee has received 21 written submissions. The Public Petitions Committee (our predecessor committee in Session 5) considered this petition on five occasions:

- [17 September 2020](#), the Committee agreed to write to NatureScot, Strategic Development Planning Authorities and Scottish Land Estates.
 - [13 January 2021](#), the Committee agreed to defer consideration of the petition to its next meeting.
 - [27 January 2021](#), the Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Government.
 - [10 March 2021](#), the Committee agreed to continue this petition and include it in its legacy paper for its successor Committee, along with a suggestion to seek an update from the Scottish Government on its response to the independent Deer Working Group, any progress that has been made to develop its new biodiversity strategy and further information on any legislation it intends to bring forward relevant to the issues raised by the petition.
 - [8 September 2021](#), The Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Government for an update on its response to the independent Deer Working Group; information regarding what progress it has made to develop its new biodiversity strategy; whether it is considering how it could use the National Planning Framework to protect ancient, native and semi-native woodlands and woodland floors; and information on any legislation it intends to bring forward relevant to the issues raised by the petition.
4. Following the meeting, the Clerks wrote to the Scottish Government. To date no response has been received.

Petitioner Submission

5. In their submission, the petitioners raise concerns that Scotland's ancient woodland, Atlantic rainforest, country parks, remote glens, areas of outstanding beauty and farmland are all now being overrun by invasive, non-native, 'eco-system engineer' conifer species. The submission explains that this species already covers around one sixth of our country and where conifers are not being deliberately planted, they are planting themselves. It is the petitioners' understanding that Scotland added around 10,500 hectares of new invasive conifer dominated plantations last year and is aiming for a further 18,000 hectares of Scotland for timber EACH YEAR for felling by 2024.
6. The submission explains that at the first part of the United Nations' COP15 biodiversity conference in China, the IPBES (Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity) stated invasive species and destructive land use are two of the five biggest threats to the natural world.
7. The submission continues by stating that the UK law on escaped non-native trees is set out in the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and states:

'any person who plants, or otherwise causes to grow, any plant in the wild at a place outwith its native range is guilty of an offence'.

8. The petitioner is concerned that no-one appears to be upholding this law, with the forestry industry being exempt. The petitioner calls for the Act to change to reflect the growing scientific understanding of the impact of invasive eco-system engineers, as well as the forestry industry's inability to manage the risks associated with planting invasive conifers across Scotland.

Action

9. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe

The following submissions are circulated in connection with consideration of the petition at this meeting -

[PE1812/V: Help Trees Help Us submission of 27 January 2022](#)

The Scottish Parliament launched a new website at the end of Session 5.

All written submissions received on the petition before May 2021 can be viewed on the petition on the [archive webpage](#). Written submissions received on the petition after May 2021 can be viewed on its [new webpage](#).