

Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee

13th Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday, 27 April

Petition PE1490: Control of wild goose numbers

Petitioner	Patrick Krause on behalf of the Scottish Crofting Federation
Petition summary	Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to address the problems created by increasing populations of wild geese in the crofting areas as a matter of priority; reassess its decision to stop funding existing goose management programmes, and assign additional resources to Crop Protection and Adaptive Management programmes to ensure this threat to the future of crofting is averted.
Webpage	https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1490
SPICe briefing	http://archive2021.parliament.scot/ResearchBriefingsAndFactsheets/Petitions%20briefings%20S4/PB13-1490.pdf (Provided by SPICe for consideration by the Session 4 Public Petitions Committee)

Introduction

1. This paper supports the Committee's evidence session on petition PE1490, which was referred to the Committee following previous consideration by the Public Petitions Committee and The Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee in Session 4, and the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee in Session 5.

Background

2. Although wild geese have long formed an important part of Scotland's natural landscape, the growing population can cause significant losses to farmers and crofters.
3. Scotland has had a [national goose policy](#) since 2000. A number of local goose management schemes and pilots operate across Scotland within the [national goose policy framework](#). These aim to minimise agricultural losses whilst ensuring that Scotland fulfils its international nature conservation objectives.

4. NatureScot provides funding and administrative support to the schemes and pilots. Each initiative has been developed by a local goose management group, which is chaired by the Scottish Government Rural Payments and Inspections Directorate.

Managing Greylag Geese

5. In recent years the number of resident greylag geese has increased significantly in particular locations; on Orkney from the estimated population of 1,500 birds in 2001, 21,367 birds in 2012 to 26,500 birds in 2021. This increase in the population of resident greylag geese can cause agricultural damage to barley crops and improved pasture, from cropping (being eaten) and trampling.
6. NatureScot established four adaptive management pilot projects in 2012 (in Orkney, Uist, Tiree & Coll and Lewis and Harris) to test whether local populations of resident greylag geese could be managed effectively to reduce their impacts on agricultural activity, whilst retaining their conservation interest.
7. Following recent discussions with representatives of farming and crofting communities, additional funding (£50,000) has been made available by the Scottish Government for the current financial year and next.
8. The additional funding was announced by Environment and Land Reform Minister Mairi McAllan in [February 2022](#).
9. When the Minister announced the additional funding, she stated:

“I have listened to the concerns of farmers and crofters on Orkney, Lewis and Harris, Uist, Tiree and Coll about the difficulties they have had in controlling resident greylag populations.

I understand how serious the impacts can be for crofting communities, and for the unique machair habitat and biodiversity that their traditional form of agriculture supports.

That’s why we are contributing up to £50,000 towards resident greylag goose control on these islands over the next two years to mitigate the impact on agriculture and support unique and important habitats.

This is part of our wider approach to delivering more resilient and sustainable farming systems.”

10. According to the Scottish Government, NatureScot will continue to work with stakeholders to balance the conservation of geese with reducing and preventing agricultural damage.
11. NatureScot will carry out a 5-yearly review of goose policy in 2022. This will look at, *inter alia*, the balance between funding for management of high conservation value geese such as barnacles against the much smaller sums available for greylag goose control.

Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee consideration

12. The Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee last considered the petition at its meeting on [23 February 2021](#). The Committee agreed to keep the petition open on the grounds that the pandemic had affected the ability of NatureScot to carry out fieldwork for goose management schemes. The Committee also suggested that the successor committee should hear from the Government about its review and about how it plans to resource goose management in Session 6.

For decision

13. **Members are invited to consider whether to progress or close the petition.**

14. **If the Committee wishes to progress the petition, members may wish to—**

- **Write to the Scottish Government and NatureScot for an update on adaptive goose management projects and to request details of the timetable and likely scope of the 5-year review of goose policy which will take place in 2022.**

**Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee clerks
April 2022**