

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

3rd Meeting, 2021 (Session 6), Wednesday 8
September 2021

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

Note by the Clerk

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| 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 Session 5 Public Petitions Committee (PPC) last considered this petition at its meeting on [10 March 2021](#). At that meeting, 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.
2. A summary of past consideration of the petition and suggested areas for future investigation is provided for the Committee's consideration.

Committee consideration

3. During its consideration of this petition, the PPC received 19 written submissions and 146 comments. It considered this petition on four 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.

Scottish Government submission

4. In response to issues raised in written submissions to the SPPC, the Scottish Government's submission [dated 1 March 2021](#) stated:

- the first Biodiversity Target relating to native woodland condition was to increase the amount of native woodland in good condition (upwards from 46% as identified by the Native Woodland Survey of Scotland). They reported that the proportion of Scotland's protected woodland sites in favourable or recovering condition at 31 March 2020 was 64.3%.
- Their second target to restore approximately 10,000 hectares of native woodland into satisfactory condition in partnership with private woodland owners through Deer Management Plans had not yet been quantified.
- It had commissioned a review of deer management in Scotland by the independent Deer Working Group. The review, which was published on 29 January 2020, made a number of recommendations. The Scottish Government advises it is giving careful consideration to its findings before publishing a response.
- The [Statement of Intent on biodiversity](#) explains that Scottish Ministers have committed to maintaining or exceeding EU environmental standards where appropriate and practicable to do so. This will be achieved through the Scottish Government's Environment Strategy Vision and Outcomes, and in legislation through the Continuity Bill.
- That a draft policy statement, regarding the use of the discretionary power to align with EU law, will be brought forward for consultation early in the new Parliamentary session.
- Its intention is to produce a new Scottish Biodiversity Strategy no later than 12 months after the Convention on Biological Diversity's 15th Conference of Parties (CoP15).

- It intends to increase the area protected for nature in Scotland to at least 30% of land area by 2030.

Petitioner submission

5. In their written submission [dated 4 March 2021](#), the petitioners raise concerns that the Scottish Government's response is a "catalogue of failure barely disguised by 'statements of intention' on meaningful action to protect native woodland and stem biodiversity loss in the future".
6. The petitioners highlight that most of their petition objectives have been ignored. They highlight that the Scottish Government has not even agreed to take action to update legislation that is no longer fit for purpose, which would help to protect "iconic national treasures like ancient bluebell woods".
7. The submission also raises concerns that the Scottish Government's focus appears to be on blaming other species for the catastrophic decline in biodiverse habitats. The submission highlights that the Deer Management Group work has not yet quantified impact / improvement to native woodlands and it is unknown if the 10,000-hectare target has been met.
8. The submission concludes by stating that the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy Post-2020 Statement of Intention sounds 'great' but highlights concerns that global governments last year missed every single biodiversity target set 10 years ago. The petitioner believes the target to keep global warming to 1.5 degrees will not be achieved. The petitioner also highlights that the Covid-19 pandemic has shown that legislation can be passed quickly in an emergency and therefore questions why this cannot be achieved for climate change and biodiversity issues.

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/Q: Scottish Government submission of 1 March 2021 \(132KB pdf\)](#)
- [PE1812/R: Petitioner submission of 4 March 2021 \(118KB pdf\)](#)
- [PE1812/T: Woodland Trust submission of 31 August 2021](#)

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](#).