

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

19th Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday
21 December 2022

PE1966: Formally recognise and incorporate local knowledge into Scottish Government policy

Petitioner	Helen Ferguson on behalf of the Scottish Gamekeepers Association
Petition summary	Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to formally recognise local knowledge and ensure it is given full consideration alongside scientific knowledge throughout consultation, decision-making processes and in policy development, specifically within the conservation arena.
Webpage	https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1966

Introduction

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 5 October 2022.
2. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.
4. While not a formal requirement, petitioners have the option to collect signatures on their petition. On this occasion, the petitioner elected to collect this information. 1,316 signatures have been received.
5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered. A response has been received from the Scottish Government and is included at **Annexe C** of this paper.
6. Two submissions have been provided by the petitioner. These are included at **Annexe D**.

Action

7. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take on this petition.

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A

PE1966: Formally recognise and incorporate local knowledge in Scottish Government policy

Petitioner

Helen Ferguson on behalf of the Scottish Gamekeepers Association

Date lodged

5 October 2022

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to formally recognise local knowledge and ensure it is given full consideration alongside scientific knowledge throughout consultation, decision-making processes and in policy development, specifically within the conservation arena.

Previous action

Following the successful online Rural Workers Protest #RWP21 an email was sent to The First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon on 24.3.21 requesting cognisance of local knowledge. The response received ignored the full conceptual understanding of local knowledge per se.

Ongoing discussions with Scottish Government representatives and Nature Scot regarding the new biodiversity strategy currently under development and the role of local knowledge in safeguarding biodiversity and climate change mitigation.

Background information

Local knowledge prevents biodiversity loss, contributes towards climate change mitigation, the economy and well-being of Scotland's people.

Local knowledge is recognised within the Convention on Biodiversity and Malawi principle 11: 'The ecosystem approach should consider all forms of relevant information, including scientific and indigenous and local knowledge, innovations and practices'.

Local knowledge, the unique skill-set and pragmatism, often acquired over generations, which provides an invaluable toolkit including wildfire mitigation, peatland restoration and species management, contributes to the health of Scotland's unique habitats and biodiversity.

The Scottish Government have previously funded initiatives that include local knowledge: 'Understanding predation' and 'Working for Waders.'

The incorporation of local knowledge within Scottish Government policy is in the interests of social justice; statutory incorporation would help to address conflict, avoid structural discrimination and marginalisation and contribute towards positive outcomes for biodiversity.

Annexe B

The logo for SPICe (The Information Centre) is located in a purple rounded rectangle. It features the text 'SPICe' in a large, white, sans-serif font.

The Information Centre
An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition [PE1966: 'Formally recognise and incorporate local knowledge in Scottish Government policy'](#), lodged by Helen Ferguson on behalf of the Scottish Gamekeepers Association

Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

The petitioner calls on the Scottish Parliament to “urge the Scottish Government to formally recognise local knowledge and ensure it is given full consideration alongside scientific knowledge throughout consultation, decision-making processes and in policy development, specifically within the conservation arena.”

- The petitioner expresses the view in their submission that “Local knowledge is often considered inferior to scientific knowledge. Formal recognition of local knowledge would contribute to egalitarianism within the conservation arena.”
- The petition references the [Rural Worker’s Protest](#), which was a virtual protest organised by the [Scottish Gamekeepers Association](#) and [Scotland’s Regional Moorland Groups](#) on 19 March 2021. The protest was intended to “send a message to Scottish Government that [rural workers] need a new politics - a politics that works for them and their families.” [Five core demands](#) of protestors were for the Scottish Government to:
 - Back the establishment of a cross-party group to hear rural workers’ concerns;
 - “afford equal weight in law making to local and indigenous knowledge”;

- Commit to auditing conservation projects it funds and “return cash” if targets are not met;
- Review public access rights to land (as enshrined by the [Land Reform \(Scotland\) Act 2003](#)) and incorporate the Scottish Outdoor Access Code in the school curriculum; and
- Address the findings of two parliamentary inquiries into salmon farming. See the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee’s 2018 report [”Salmon farming in Scotland”](#) and the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee’s 2018 report on the [environmental impacts of salmon farming](#).

[UNESCO defines](#) ‘local knowledge’ as “the understandings, skills and philosophies developed by societies with long histories of interaction with their natural surroundings. For rural and indigenous peoples, local knowledge informs decision-making about fundamental aspects of day-to-day life.”

As mentioned in the petition, the UK is party to the 1992 [Convention on Biological Diversity](#) which makes reference to local knowledge:

- Article 8(j) requires that parties to the convention “[...], respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and promote their wider application [...]”
- Principle 11 regarding the implementation of the convention says that: “The ecosystem approach should consider all forms of relevant information, including scientific and indigenous and local knowledge, innovations and practices.”

The petitioner says that the Scottish Government has previously funded initiatives that include local knowledge:

- [Understanding predation](#) was a review undertaken by Scotland’s Moorland Forum that it describes as “bringing together natural science and local knowledge of recent wild bird population changes and their drivers in Scotland”. It was funded by Scottish Natural Heritage, now [NatureScot](#), and culminated in a [report published in 2016](#).
 - The report states that “Scotland’s Moorland Forum recognised the need to [...] find ways of bringing together

scientific and local knowledge to examine the role of predation in influencing populations of ground-nesting birds”. The review included a study involving more than 400 stakeholders, 211 of which identified “personal field observations or field management experience” as the most important source of knowledge. However, the report also states that “[m]any who stated that local knowledge was most important also habitually used scientific knowledge, and vice versa.”

- The study included work comparing the extent to which scientific and local knowledge were in conflict with one another. Of this, the report said that “Establishing the commonalities between these two forms of knowledge should help to build consensus. Establishing differences, and exploring the reasons for these, should identify where there may still be knowledge gaps or areas of contention that may limit positive progress if they are not resolved.”
- [Working for Waders](#) is an initiative intended to address the decline of wading birds across Scotland. It is a partnership between farming, sporting and conservation organisations, universities, and public bodies.
 - Working for Waders provides a number of documents designed to facilitate the gathering and amalgamation of local knowledge. These include [survey materials](#) and [guidance documents](#).
 - [Its annual report](#) mentions several projects and engagement events designed to facilitate the sharing of local knowledge between farmers and landowners.

The petitioner states that the “incorporation of local knowledge within Scottish Government policy is in the interests of social justice; statutory incorporation would help to address conflict, avoid structural discrimination and marginalisation and contribute towards positive outcomes for biodiversity.” The following documents set out the Scottish Government’s current commitments with regards to community planning and public engagement in relevant policy areas:

- The Scottish Government’s [Consultation Good Practice Guidance](#) sets out eight steps for running Scottish Government consultations. It does not mention local knowledge specifically but notes that face to face events may afford the consultation team

[“awareness of any local and regional dimensions of the policy review implications”](#).

- The [Community Empowerment \(Scotland\) Act \(2015\)](#) introduced a number of changes to how communities are involved in decision-making. Two areas covered by the Act are of particular significance to this petition:
 - [Part 2](#): The Act requires public authorities to work together through Community Planning Partnerships and to involve community organisations in community planning.
 - [Part 3](#): The Act makes it possible for community bodies to enter into discussion with public authorities about local issues and how local services are provided through something called ‘participation requests’.
- The [Climate Change \(Scotland\) Act 2009](#) and [Climate Change \(Emissions Reduction Targets\) \(Scotland\) Act 2019](#) place a duty on Scotland to achieve net-zero emissions by 2045. The [Scottish Government’s Public Engagement Strategy](#) sets out how it will approach public engagement during 2021-2026 in areas relevant to the transition to net-zero. The strategy includes the following commitments relevant to the petition:
 - “[The strategy] recognises the important role that people (individuals, communities, civil society organisations, professional stakeholders, and experts) have in bringing different types of knowledge and experiences to address the challenges faced by government”
 - “We will continue to embed the Place Principle with partners. This principle underlines a commitment to work with local communities in order to improve the lives of people, support inclusive and sustainable economic growth and create more successful places.”
- The [Just Transition Commission](#) is a Scottish Government-appointed group that supports and scrutinises the production of plans facilitating the transition to net-zero and advises on approaches to monitoring and engagement.
 - The Commission is tasked with “undertaking meaningful engagement with those most likely to be impacted by the transition, hearing from a broad range of representative voices and advising on how to ensure these can shape and contribute to just transition planning work in Scotland”.
 - It lists [recent and future engagement events](#).

The petitioner mentions “Ongoing discussions with Scottish Government representatives and Nature Scot regarding the new biodiversity strategy (currently under development) and the role of local knowledge in safeguarding biodiversity and climate change mitigation.”

- The Scottish Government held a consultation on its [Biodiversity Strategy](#) in Summer 2022. The consultation document states that “This consultation forms part of an engagement process with a wide range of stakeholders who have an interest in Scotland’s biodiversity, including land managers, environmental organisations, local authorities and other partners. We held a series of workshops to scope out the detail of the strategy, develop ideas and test concepts. We now want to hear the views of a wider range of organisations and individuals to test and further develop our ideas.”
- The Scottish Government is also [currently consulting on land reform](#). The consultation will close on 30 October 2022.

Annie Bosse

Researcher

05/10/2022

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

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Annexe C

Scottish Government submission of 5 October 2022

PE1966/B – Formally recognise and incorporate local knowledge in Scottish Government policy

The Scottish Government recognise that local knowledge can form an important part of the evidence base in taking local action for biodiversity. That is why we are taking a co-design approach to developing the new Scottish Biodiversity Strategy (SBS), and its underpinning Delivery Plan. We have carried out a significant programme of engagement with a wide range of stakeholders, including specific engagement with groups such as the Scottish Gamekeepers Association, during our recent consultation on the strategy. We will continue to work closely with a wide range of stakeholders as we develop our strategy further and as we commence work on our Delivery Plans. In addition, we are carrying out specific engagement on particular policy commitments, including Nature Networks, National Parks and 30x30.

The SBS will set out approaches to address biodiversity loss at landscape scale. It recognises that a ‘whole of society’ and ‘whole of government’ approach is needed to make the transformational changes required to halt and reverse biodiversity loss

We are leading the Edinburgh Process on behalf of the Convention on Biological Diversity, bringing together a global partnership to advocate for the Edinburgh Declaration, which sets out the ambition and commitments of the subnational constituency. The Declaration calls for adoption of a renewed Plan of Action for Biodiversity for Subnational and Local Governments which will be discussed at CoP15 in relation to the Mainstreaming of Biodiversity. This recognises the critical contribution made at local level to implementing global policy frameworks and targets for biodiversity.

Furthermore, Scottish Government Ministers and officials regularly meet with stakeholders to discuss a wide range of wildlife issues offering opportunities for both formal and informal consultation. This includes chairing meetings and facilitating discussions with, e.g. the Scottish Beaver Forum and the National Goose Forum, which are made up of relevant individuals and organisations. Where policy decisions impact particular communities, the Scottish Government, or one of our agencies such as NatureScot, will engage with local area experts who can provide specific knowledge and advice.

We also consult with stakeholders seeking their views on various issues, such as grouse moor licensing and other recommendations from the [Grouse Moor Management Group \(Werritty\) Report](#), and [Scotland's Beaver Strategy 2022-2024](#), which was published on 22 September 2022 and involved more than 50 stakeholder organisations.

Finally, before introducing new legislation we always undertake a public consultation. For example full, public consultations were undertaken prior to introducing the Animals and Wildlife (Penalties, Powers and Protections) Act 2020 and the Hunting with Dogs Bill. We encourage participation from key stakeholders, local communities and the general public.

I hope this information is useful to the Committee in their consideration of PE1966.

Annexe D

Petitioner submission of 7 September 2022

PE1966/A – Formally recognise and incorporate local knowledge in Scottish Government policy

Local Knowledge

Local knowledge is often considered inferior to scientific knowledge. Formal recognition of local knowledge would contribute to egalitarianism within the conservation arena.

Epistemology, the study of knowledge, reveals there are different ways of knowing, through learning and reason, through the senses and from social and environmental interaction. Many knowledge systems are recognised globally; cultural, traditional, local, experiential, folk, indigenous and scientific knowledge.

In the interests of this petition, local knowledge could be considered as the extensive and unique skill-set and pragmatism, experience and know-how, often acquired over generations, which provides an invaluable toolkit contributing to Scotland's heritage and biodiversity. This cultural capital is intrinsically connected to the economy and the well-being of Scotland's people. Local practitioners with extensive local knowledge and wide-ranging competencies contribute to habitat management, peatland restoration and wildfire mitigation. Their observational skills and insight provide invaluable first-hand data pertaining to species loss and biodiversity threats.

Professor Sir Partha Dasgupta considers local knowledge is fundamental to safeguarding biodiversity and healthy ecosystems. He maintains those who live and work in an area are the key players with specific local knowledge:

'What the inhabitant of an ecosystem knows and can observe differs from what an agent from the national government knows and can observe' (Dasgupta, 2021, Abridged version p.494).

Precedent

Following the successful online Rural Workers Protest #RWP21, an email was sent (24.03.2021) to The First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, requesting local knowledge be formally recognised.

The response received failed to acknowledge the full conceptual understanding of local knowledge per se. It failed to recognise the current marginalisation of the rural workforce and power imbalance resulting from the elitist platform currently afforded the scientific community. It also failed to appreciate the extent to which local knowledge underpins positive outcomes for climate change and biodiversity in Scotland; net zero by 2045 and halting biodiversity loss by 2030.

The Scottish Government previously funded initiatives that recognise local knowledge. Understanding Predation, launched in 2016, aimed to integrate several types of knowledge to understand predation impacts on declining moorland species and reduce conflict. The follow-up project Working for Waders endorsed collaborative working. Yet, there is no formal recognition by the Scottish Government or its representatives, of the vital role that local knowledge plays in conservation objectives in Scotland.

Currently, the conservation arena is dominated by academia and the scientific elite, an arena which is distanced from the practical daily routine and reality of the rural practitioner. This distance can result from the concept of knowledge, where academia is given greater credence and recognition than traditional local knowledge, skills and expertise. This comes at a cost to both the taxpayer and biodiversity.

For many years, local practitioners expressed concern regarding conservation practices to safeguard the endangered Capercaillie. Repeatedly, they advised that much of the problem was due to predation and disturbance. Constantly, their observations and advice were ignored. However, their concerns were upheld when the results of the recent scientific report, Review of Capercaillie Conservation and Management – Report to the Scientific Advisory Committee, were published for it confirmed what they had known for decades; predation and disturbance contributed to the demise of this Scottish species:

<https://www.nature.scot/doc/review-capercaillie-conservation-and-management-report-scientific-advisory-committee>

Considerable investment estimated at over £10 million pounds since 2003, has been ploughed into safeguarding the population of Capercaillie. Despite this, since 2003, the population has dropped by over 50%. This iconic bird is now facing extinction.

Had the local knowledge that emphasised the need for effective predator manager and alteration to path networks been valued and acted on from the outset, perhaps the population of the capercaillie would be healthier than it is today, not to mention the public purse.

Summary

Currently, Scottish Government policy favours the hegemonic scientific method. Whilst this form of knowledge is essential, so too is local knowledge. It is not a dichotomy. When one form of knowledge dominates, the consequences are wide-reaching; biodiversity is compromised and structural discrimination leads to marginalisation, stigma and subsequent health problems.

Whilst consultations and meetings may be open to all, their participation is skewed in favour of the scientific method. Many rural practitioners are pragmatists; their work revolves around practical skills, observation and direct application. Whilst experts in their own field, they are not necessarily experts in articulating a comprehensive written or oral response to what are often hypothetical or irrelevant questions.

Scotland's heritage and traditions are an embodiment of local knowledge. It is imperative that this vital resource is formally recognised. Scottish Government targets to achieve net zero by 2045 and stop biodiversity loss by 2030 rely on local knowledge. It is relevant to a Just Transition, where no-one is left out and the National Outcomes: Human Rights, Environment, Communities and Economy as outlined in the National Performance Framework.

Petitioner submission of 21 October 2022

PE1966/C: Formally recognise and incorporate local knowledge in Scottish Government policy

Underpinning the rationale for Petition PE1966 is the anger and mistrust felt when decisions are taken that ignore local knowledge contributions and always default to the scientific method. In their recent white paper

addressing Red List assessments, the IUCN advise indigenous and local knowledge, (ILK) has an equal value to other knowledge systems ¹. Within the academic terrain, the consequences of ignoring local knowledge are wide-reaching; a power imbalance results, positive outcomes for biodiversity are compromised, inequity in the decision-making process is created, the lack of recognition and injustice results in harm and ill health ^{1,2,3,4,5}. These consequences are familiar to the Scottish Gamekeepers Association (SGA).

The Understanding Predation Project demonstrated the benefits of collaborative working; however, it also revealed a power imbalance, it created harm to individuals and negative outcomes for red-listed wader species.

On the recommendation of NatureScot, Strathbraan community applied for a licence to control ravens as previous findings indicated predation was contributing to wader decline. The licence was granted, however it was opposed by powerful NGOs who filed for Judicial Review. NatureScot then requested their own Scientific Advisory Committee to effectively review and mark its own work and they found fault in the trial design. Consequently, NatureScot advised the community to withdraw the raven licence which avoided NatureScot having to contest a judicial review. Despite the promise by NatureScot of a revised application the following year, no licence was forthcoming. During this time, the community were subjected to months of online abuse and still ravens continue to predate rare wading birds in a locally important area, these consequences resulting from lack of egalitarianism in the conservation sector.

NatureScot relies on Government funding. The board and leadership structure reflect academic, business and conservation interests with few individuals in key positions experienced in day-to-day land or water management. As such, they are distanced both physically and conceptually from local practitioners and their expertise.

A dominant power structure exists with NatureScot and leading conservation NGOs who benefit from funding. These organisations can claim superiority and exert control; their dominance in the conservation arena contributes to inequity where it is easy to reject the contribution of local knowledge which is considered inferior. The same observation can be applied to key leaders within National Parks.

There are many examples where groups of individuals hand-picked by Government to review a certain subject have minimal experience of the subject matter.

One example, which the SGA wrote to the then Environment Minister, Roseanna Cunningham, about, was the composition of the Deer Working Group panel. No one on the selected panel was an experienced deer manager. This struck the SGA as a peculiar omission.

Despite this omission, the Scottish Government has said it will carry forward virtually all recommendations of the Deer Working Group report. Such decisions, in our view, increase the marginalisation of rural workers.

In 2019, the SGA invited all MSPs to see a professional fox control foot pack in operation in Highland Perthshire. This was relevant to the key subject of Hunting with Dogs, which is now going through the Parliamentary process as the Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Bill.

Such visits and demonstrations are very important to those whose knowledge is obtained and expressed not through academic language but through practical working experience. They provide opportunity to decision makers to witness activities about which they will be making decisions upon.

One MSP turned up for the foot pack visit, Murdo Fraser MSP.

In contrast, rural workers are expected to respond to time-consuming consultations which are themselves a discriminating process. The language adopted, frequently loaded with technical 'policy speak' reveals a lack of consideration or awareness of different conceptions of knowledge and interpretation. Subsequently this reveals bias and serves to block alternative narratives. Accessibility issues connected to remoteness such as poor broadband which limits access to this type of engagement, increases marginalisation.

The rural workforce, experts in their own right, are often ignored in favour of the observations of citizen science. Citizen science is embraced by many within the conservation elite in Scotland. Many bird populations trends for example are collated by 'observers' from organisations. The results will influence policy and the allocation of conservation funds.

In contrast, rural practitioners often find important decisions such as wildlife management licensing applications refused because their evidence is not considered sufficiently robust, despite providing photographic evidence and their own species counts. This inequity is tangible and results in poor outcomes for individuals and biodiversity.

The SGA reiterate that in the interests of social justice, local knowledge be formally recognised and incorporated within Scottish Government policy.

‘... if we are serious about the commitment for conservation to be equitable, engaging with issues of recognition is a necessary step to take’³

Reference:

1. IUCN. 2022. Application of Indigenous & Local Knowledge (ILK) in IUCN Red List assessments: White paper. Version 1. Adopted by the IUCN SSC Red List Committee and IUCN CEESP-SSC Sustainable Use & Livelihoods Specialist Group Steering Committee. Downloadable from: <https://www.iucnredlist.org/resources/ilk>.
2. Kogan M. (2007) Modes of Knowledge and Patterns of Power. In: Sörlin S., Vessuri H. (eds) Knowledge Society vs. Knowledge Economy. Issues in Higher Education. Palgrave Macmillan, New York
3. Martin, Adrian & Coolsaet, Brendan & Corbera, Esteve & Dawson, Neil & Fraser, James & Lehmann, Ina & Rodríguez, Iokiñe. (2016). Justice and Conservation: the need to incorporate recognition. Biological Conservation. 197. 254-261. 10.1016/j.biocon.2016.03.021.
4. Vessuri H. (2007) The Hybridization of Knowledge: Science and Local Knowledge in Support of Sustainable Development. In: Sörlin S., Vessuri H. (eds) Knowledge Society vs. Knowledge Economy. Issues in Higher Education. Palgrave Macmillan, New York
5. Wheeler, Helen & Root-Bernstein, Meredith. (2020). Informing decision-making with Indigenous and local knowledge and science. Journal of Applied Ecology. 10.1111/1365-2664.13734.