

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 15 May 2024
9th Meeting, 2024 (Session 6)

PE2084: Allow alkaline hydrolysis

Introduction

Petitioner Randall Graeme Kilgour Froggie

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to amend the Burial and Cremation (Scotland) Act 2016 to allow alkaline hydrolysis, accelerated composting and other more eco-friendly methods of disposal of human cadavers.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2084>

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 20 February 2024.
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. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 11 signatures have been received on this petition.
5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered.
6. The Committee has received a submission from the Scottish Government which is set out in **Annexe C** of this paper.
7. [The Scottish Government consulted on Alkaline Hydrolysis and published its consultation analysis on 26 April 2024](#). The report states that 84% of respondents support the introduction of regulation to allow alkaline hydrolysis and that the Scottish Government will now consider the proposals for regulating alkaline hydrolysis in its development of draft regulations under the Burial and Cremation (Scotland) Act 2016.

Action

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

Clerks to the Committee
May 2024

Annexe A: Summary of petition

PE2084: Allow alkaline hydrolysis

Petitioner

Randall Graeme Kilgour Foggie

Date Lodged

20 February 2024

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to amend the Burial and Cremation (Scotland) Act 2016 to allow alkaline hydrolysis, accelerated composting and other more eco-friendly methods of disposal of human cadavers.

Previous action

I wrote to my MSP, David Torrance MSP, who then wrote to the Scottish Government. The Scottish Government replied stating that they were going to consult on this in 2023. Then nothing happened.

Background information

Graveyards are filling up, more will be needed. Good quality land is being "sterilised" from productive use.

Cremation uses energy and produces toxic fumes, ash and CO₂.

Alkaline hydrolysis and accelerated composting both produce inert by-product and allow for the recovery of medical implants and the safe disposal of mercury amalgam filled teeth.

Annexe B: SPICe briefing on PE2084



Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

Alkaline hydrolysis

Alkaline hydrolysis (also known as 'water cremation') is a method of disposal of human remains using hot water with the addition of potassium hydroxide, or sodium hydroxide, or a mix of both. The body is wrapped in a silk or woollen shroud, or other biodegradable material, before being placed into a pressurised chamber and heated to up to 150 °C.

Burial and Cremation (Scotland) Act 2016

The [Burial and Cremation \(Scotland\) Act 2016](#) ('the 2016 Act') provides the current legislative framework for burial and cremation in Scotland.

[When the Scottish Government were consulting on what became the 2016 Act](#), it was aware that new methods of the disposal of human remains (including alkaline hydrolysis) were at varying stages of development around the world. Consequently, it asked in that consultation whether respondents agreed the 2016 Act should include a provision for Scottish Ministers to regulate new techniques in the same way as burial and cremation when they became viable. [This proposal attracted strong majority support](#).

The Scottish Government ultimately included a provision in what became the 2016 Act to allow for regulation of any new methods of body disposal in the same way that burial and cremation is currently regulated. Specifically, section 99 of the 2016 Act says that Scottish Ministers may, by regulations, provide that specified provisions of the 2016 Act may apply, subject to any specified modifications, to ways of disposing of human remains specified in those regulations.

The Scottish Government's 2023 consultation on alkaline hydrolysis

Between **25 August** and **17 November 2023**, [the Scottish Government consulted on the regulation of alkaline hydrolysis as a method of body disposal in Scotland](#). The consultation was part of [a wider suite of four consultations](#) on parts of the 2016 Act which have not yet been implemented.

Individual responses to the consultation relevant to this petition, and an analysis of those responses, do not yet appear to be published online. The Committee could seek an update from the Scottish Government as to the progress of this consultation.

Draft Funeral Expense Assistance (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2024

On 19 March 2024, [a draft of the Funeral Expense Assistance \(Scotland\) Amendment Regulations 2024 was published.](#)

The draft regulations have been referred by the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice to [the Social Commission on Social Security](#) ('the Commission') for the Commission to prepare and submit a report on, in accordance with their function under [the Social Security \(Scotland\) Act 2018](#).

These draft regulations would make several changes to introduce improvements to the [Funeral Support Payment](#). This is a devolved social security benefit which enables people on low incomes to get help with funeral costs. The accompanying letter from the Cabinet Secretary on the draft regulations notes they contain, "an element of future proofing." To this end, they propose extending the definition of 'funeral' to include alkaline hydrolysis.

Sarah Harvie-Clark

Senior Researcher

22/03/24

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: Written submission

Scottish Government submission of 7 March 2024

PE2084/A: Allow alkaline hydrolysis

Thank you for your email of 20 February 2024 to the Committee liaison officer, seeking views on Petition PE2084 “Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to amend the Burial and Cremation (Scotland) Act 2016 to allow alkaline hydrolysis, accelerated composting and other more eco-friendly methods of disposal of human cadavers”.

I am responding as Deputy Director for the Public Health Capabilities Division, with responsibility for the overarching policy governing the Burial and Cremation (Scotland) Act 2016 (‘the 2016 Act’). Section 99 of the 2016 Act allows Scottish Ministers to extend the provisions of the Act to alternative methods of body disposal and therefore does not need to be amended to allow for the kinds of methods noted in the petition.

On 25 August 2023, the Scottish Government issued a consultation on proposals to regulate alkaline hydrolysis (water cremation) as an alternative method of disposal of human remains in Scotland. The consultation closed on 17 November 2023 and the responses are currently being analysed, and will inform the Scottish Government’s next steps for regulation. The analysis of the responses will be published on the Scottish Government website as soon as practicably possible.

Population Health Directorate