

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 29 May 2024
10th Meeting, 2024 (Session 6)

PE2034: Stop the current proposals for Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs) in Scotland

Introduction

Petitioner Stuart Chrinside

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to halt their current proposals for Highly Protected Marine Areas and bring forward new proposals that take account of sustainable fishing methods.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2034>

1. [The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 4 October 2024.](#) At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Government.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received a new written submission from the Scottish Government, which is set out in **Annexe C**.
4. [The Committee has received one written submissions prior to its last consideration of the petition.](#)
5. [Further background information about this petition can be found in the SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
6. [The Scottish Government gave its initial position on this petition on 8 September 2023.](#)
7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 70 signatures have been received on this petition.

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

PE2034: Stop the current proposals for Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs) in Scotland

Petitioner

Stuart Chirnside

Date Lodged

20 June 2023

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to halt their current proposals for Highly Protected Marine Areas and bring forward new proposals that take account of sustainable fishing methods.

Previous action

I have contacted my constituency MSP and regional MSPs, as well as my local MP.

I have also contacted the First Minister and the Minister in charge of the proposals.

MSPs who have spoken on this subject in Parliament have also been contacted to discuss their support and views.

Background information

The current proposals do not consider sustainable fishing methods, which if managed correctly can provide Scotland with a financially viable fishing industry and will help ensure we continue to have vibrant communities in our coastal areas where life must go on.

Blanket bans are not the way forward.

Annexe B: Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE2034 on 4 October 2023

The Convener: PE2034, on stopping the current proposals for highly protected marine areas in Scotland, has been lodged by Stuart Chirnside and calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to halt its current proposals for highly protected marine areas and to bring forward new proposals that take account of sustainable fishing methods.

Events have slightly overtaken the petition, as we know. It was lodged on 20 June, and as members will be aware, the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition gave a statement to Parliament on 29 June, confirming that the Scottish Government would not be progressing with the proposals. As noted in both the SPICe briefing and the Scottish Government response, the cabinet secretary has committed to providing the Parliament with an update on the Government's next steps on the issue.

Fergus Ewing: I note the cabinet secretary's response, which is brief. What it does not say is that, although the statement was made to the Scottish Parliament on 29 June that the proposals would not be going ahead, one of the Green MSPs said shortly afterwards that the Scottish Government was

“committed to bringing forward these proposals”,

so what was in the statement was immediately contradicted in the press. Since then, the cabinet secretary has said that she will bring forward other measures.

The industry itself is highly sceptical. The Scottish Fishermen's Federation has talked about the measures being brought back in by the back door, and when I speak to fishing representatives in Clyde, Shetland, the Western Isles and elsewhere, as well as the SFF, I hear grave concern. Instead of closing the petition now—the issues have not really gone away, which is the point that I am making—could we write to the Scottish Government to seek an update on its alternative plans to enhance the protection of the marine environment and whether they will include HPMA's? That appears to be the case, even though such a move appears to have been ruled out.

In addition, could we specifically request the Scottish Government to tell us what engagement it is having with Duncan Macinnes and the Western Isles Fishermen's Association, with Elaine Whyte and her colleagues in Clyde and with all the bodies that represent inshore fisheries? They have tremendous knowledge and are doing tremendous things, but they have just been completely skated over.

Finally, 37 per cent of our seas are already designated as marine protected areas, but there has been no mention by the Scottish Government whether there should be a review of the existing designations of MPAs. It has always seemed to me—as a logician, I would hope—that before you embark on a series of brand-new measures, you should work out how effective or otherwise the existing measures have been as well as the economic impacts. As a former fisheries minister, I know that the impacts issue is highly controversial, because the fishermen feel that they have never been

properly assessed and are repeatedly underestimated. We need look only at the number of vessels closing—we are losing vessels all over Scotland. It is a dire situation.

I am sorry—perhaps I have gone on too long, but I feel that we should keep the petition open and ask in writing for a lot of detail. Indeed, I am pretty sure that that is what the petitioner and many others would want us to do.

Foyso! Choudhury: We should certainly ask for a breakdown of what other actions are planned.

The Convener: We might even commend to the Government the evidence—or, I should say, the discussion—at this morning's SPICe briefing, where we heard from Dr Andy Williamson, who said that this policy area might very well benefit from the input of an informed citizens panel made up of those who would be affected. The work of such a panel would underpin any ministerial consideration of how to proceed with an issue on which there is generally public understanding—though not for the approach that had been previously advocated—and as a result, there might be much more informed community buy-in to any proposals that might be brought forward.

Are we content to proceed on that basis?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Annexe C: Written submission

Scottish Government submission of 23 January 2024

PE2034/B: Stop the current proposals for Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs) in Scotland

Thank you for the chance to comment on PE2034 titled “Stop the current proposals for Highly Protected Marine Areas (HMPAs) in Scotland”.

I note this petition was published on 20 June 2023. I would like to draw the committee’s attention to a [statement made to Parliament on 29 June 2023 by the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition](#) at which she stated that the proposals for HPMAs would not be progressed.

Additionally, on 7 November 2023, we published [our response to the public consultation on our HPMA proposals](#) which confirmed they would not be progressed and that we would no longer be looking to designate 10% of Scotland’s seas as HPMAs by 2026.

I hope you find this response helpful.

Marine Directorate