

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee  
Wednesday 26 June 2024  
12th Meeting, 2024 (Session 6)

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

### Introduction

**Petitioner** 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>

1. [The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 20 September 2023](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Government and NatureScot.
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 new written submissions from the Scottish Government and NatureScot, which are set out in **Annexe C**.
4. [Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the petition's webpage](#).
5. [Further background information about this petition can be found in the SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
6. [The Scottish Government gave its initial response to the petition on 5 October 2022](#).
7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 1,348 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**  
**June 2024**

## **Annexe A: Summary of petition**

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

#### **Petitioner**

Scottish Gamekeepers Association

#### **Date Lodged**

7 September 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,

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avoid structural discrimination and marginalisation and contribute towards positive outcomes for biodiversity.

## **Annexe B: Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE1966 on 20 September 2023**

**The Convener:** The third new petition is PE1966, which was lodged by the Scottish Gamekeepers Association. The petition calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to formally recognise local knowledge and ensure that it is given full consideration alongside scientific knowledge throughout consultation, decision-making processes and in policy development, specifically within the conservation arena.

Members will recall that we were curious as to whether NatureScot would appoint a representative from the Scottish Gamekeepers Association to its board. NatureScot's recent submission explains that members are appointed by Scottish ministers through a regulated public appointments process and that members are appointed individually and not as representatives of organisations.

The Scottish Government's submission outlines its approach to consultations, saying that consultations seeking public opinion may prioritise local knowledge, while those specifically requesting scientific evidence will be assessed based on their scientific validity. In response to that point, the petitioner feels that scientific knowledge is recognised for its merits while local knowledge is

“given no greater credence than that of public opinion.”

On issues of internet connectivity, the Scottish Government points to alternative methods of gathering evidence such as face-to-face events and notes that only basic internet access is required to use its consultation platform.

The petitioner argues that the importance of local knowledge is recognised by the convention on biodiversity and points to NatureScot research on indirect drivers of biodiversity loss, according to which local and experiential knowledge tends to be undervalued in decision making and should be included in governance structures.

There is a bit of a stalemate in the responses that we have received so far. Given everything that the petitioner has said, we could write to the Scottish Government to ask whether it will revise or consider revising its consultation guidance to ensure that, at the very least, it is consistent with the convention on biodiversity. Is there anything else that we might suggest?

**Maurice Golden:** Is it worth following up with NatureScot, in the light of its recent report on indirect drivers of biodiversity loss? We could ask what action it intends to take on recommendations pertaining to local knowledge.

**The Convener:** That would be useful. In addition, if it is the case that all members of the NatureScot board are appointed through a public appointments process, we might ask the Scottish Government what weight is given to local knowledge in the determination of any appointment that is made. Perhaps, in fact, that does not count and, therefore, the petitioner's underlying concern about the absence of it might have some validity. Do we agree to keep the petition open and act accordingly?

**Members *indicated agreement.***

## Annexe C: Written submissions

### Scottish Government submission of 19 October 2023

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

*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*

- The Committee is keen to know, in light of the [petitioner's submission of 12 April 2023](#), whether the Scottish Government will consider revising its consultation guidance to ensure that it is consistent with the Convention on Biodiversity.

There are no plans to revise the Scottish Government best practice handbook on consultations. As stated in the response to the petitioner's previous question, we do not take a one-size-fits-all approach, and engagement methods are tailored towards the audience for each consultation. As previously stated, *For consultations that actively seek public opinion there may be greater emphasis placed on local knowledge or local opinion when considering responses to a question.*

- The Committee is keen to receive information about whether the needs of NatureScot's board includes local knowledge and if so, what weight is given to this knowledge in the determination of whether an applicant is appointed.

As NatureScot is a national agency operating across Scotland, local knowledge although valuable in some instances, is not a requirement for NatureScot Board members. This is slightly different, for example, from the National Parks which operate within a geographically specific area and appoint locally elected and nominated members to their board in addition to those Ministerially appointed.

However, NatureScot offices are spread throughout the country and the organisation employs staff from across Scotland who bring valuable local knowledge to the organisation and their job specific roles.

As set out in [NatureScot's response to the petitioner on 3 February 2023](#),

*The board has demonstrable practical experience of land management, as well as members who come from policy development, scientific and academic backgrounds in relation to this area. This includes members who are land managers, farmers, rural business owners and members who have represented or worked alongside communities across Scotland to deliver sustainable nature-based projects. The same applies to water management, with a range of knowledge represented across the board, including with respect to fresh water ecology and the sustainable management of water systems. This broad range of professional and personal experience provides the Board with a variety of expertise and the means by which to ensure that both scientific and local knowledge is applied to our work.*

## NatureScot submission of 23 May 2024

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

Thank you for your correspondence in relation to the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions committee's consideration of petition PE1966: Formally recognise and incorporate local knowledge in Scottish Government policy.

The correspondence asks for details of the action NatureScot is undertaking with respect to the points pertaining to local knowledge outlined in the report, *Understanding the Indirect Drivers of Biodiversity Loss in Scotland – A Summary*.

As the referenced reports states “*interlinking local knowledge with technical and scientific knowledge will better protect and restore biodiversity and other resources.*” NatureScot recognises that local knowledge is a vital component of tackling Scotland's twin nature and climate crises.

In relation to the point highlighted about reflecting local knowledge in governance structures, we would draw attention to our submission to this petition from 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2023. The submission sets out, amongst other relevant information, the following with respect to the composition of NatureScot's Board:

*The Board has demonstrable practical experience of land management, as well as members who come from policy development, scientific and academic backgrounds in relation to this area. This includes members who are land managers, farmers, rural business owners and members who have represented or worked alongside communities across Scotland to deliver sustainable nature-based projects. The same applies to water management, with a range of knowledge represented across the board, including with respect to freshwater ecology and the sustainable management of water systems. This broad range of professional and personal experience provides the Board with a variety of expertise and the means by which to ensure that both scientific and local knowledge is applied to our work.”*

At an organisational level, NatureScot offices are located throughout Scotland, and we employ staff from a variety of areas and backgrounds who bring local knowledge to their roles. We also have dedicated National Operations teams based around five geographic areas. National Operations teams work closely with people and communities in several ways, including by responding to a wide range of casework consultations and enquires, and more generally work to foster positive relationships across the areas in which they operate.

We also seek to incorporate local knowledge and engage communities in our work and decision-making through several means, including by:

- listening to the needs of communities and a wide variety of stakeholders, and recognising the skills, knowledge, energy, and ideas they can add.
- encouraging a wider range of communities to get involved – particularly those for young people or people who are excluded in some way.

- informing communities and stakeholders that we work directly with how their input has informed our thinking and decision-making.
- learning from and sharing good practice.
- finding ways to help more people to get involved in shaping the decisions that affect nature and landscapes.
- involving people and communities more in how we design and deliver some of our services.

To use one example, the Species on the Edge is a partnership programme of NatureScot and seven nature conservation charities, all dedicated to improving the fortunes of 37 priority species found along Scotland's coast and islands. Primarily funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the programme is working to tackle the impacts of environmental change on wildlife, to benefit both nature and people.

The programme is engaging with people in some of Scotland's most remote areas to establish projects that provide a vital lifeline for our most nationally and internationally vulnerable coastal and island wildlife. Working with communities, local initiatives, and land managers, Species on the Edge seeks to create opportunities for people to get involved in efforts to save these species for future generations. Through workshops, volunteering, and training opportunities, the programme is working with communities to identify barriers to participation, equality, or inclusion.

More generally, we meet with stakeholders from a broad range of sectors to discuss pertinent issues and to collaborate across a range of projects and initiatives, offering opportunities for both formal and informal consultations and, more generally, seeking their views and knowledge.

It is important, in the context of this petition, to reference the engagement that has taken place in relation to the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy (SBS). The SBS sets out a vision to deliver the transformational changes needed to protect and restore terrestrial, freshwater, and marine biodiversity in Scotland. A co-design approach has been taken throughout the development of the SBS. This includes a significant programme of engagement aimed at incorporating the knowledge and advice of a broad range of stakeholders and a wide-ranging public consultation. We will continue to engage in a collaborative manner in relation to the SBS.

I hope that the information provided is of use to the committee's consideration of this petition. If any further information from NatureScot would be beneficial in relation to your continued scrutiny of the matters set out, then please do not hesitate to ask.