

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.

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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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