



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

PUBLIC PETITION NO.

PE01663

Name of petitioner

Leslie Wallace

Petition title

Driven grouse shooting study

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to sponsor a comprehensive and independent study into the full economic impacts of driven grouse shooting.

Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition

I have contacted my local MSP, Angus MacDonald.

Petition background information

I have looked extensively for any impartial studies of the true economic value of grouse shooting without success. There is a need for a proper study which takes into account the latest research regarding grouse moor management and new factors, such as the role of potential natural flood alleviation work in the uplands and fully developed eco tourism initiatives. Given the importance, or perhaps impact, that it has on a very large proportion of Scotland (over ten percent) this is an incredible and alarming anomaly.

Grouse shooting estates cover 12 to 15% of Scotland's land area (Source: Onekind). The intensive management required to raise red grouse numbers to the unnatural level needed for driven shooting in particular has been implicated in the loss of protected wildlife, potentially higher flood risk and water treatment costs. It also excludes other economic activities, established and emerging, which may provide more advantageous employment opportunities for local communities.

Given its dominance over large areas of rural Scotland, there is an urgent need for a comprehensive and independent analysis of the full economic impact of driven grouse shooting, whether overall it is positive or negative and to what degree. This includes the role of public subsidies in underpinning driven grouse shooting, quantifying external costs to society in general and identifying the possible displacement of other potentially more productive and less ecologically damaging business activities. We call upon the Scottish Parliament to commission such a study to ensure a better, more informed platform upon which to determine the best future direction for Scotland's land, wildlife and people.

CORE SUBJECTS

Water Quality

Under growing public and scientific scrutiny, driven grouse shooting has become increasingly contentious. Leeds University's EMBER report studied the effects burning heather to create grouse habitat (muirburn) has on watercourses. It found increased sedimentation, acidification and reductions in aquatic life. All of this is detrimental for fish and almost certainly the contribution angling makes to the rural economy, yet there appears to have been no recognition of this from field sports and rural business organisations. There are indications water treatment charges increase with the heavy metals and particulates released from extensive muirburn, and lowering the water table within the soil profile has implications re higher flood risk.

Wildlife and Eco-tourism

Scotland's highly successful eco tourism sector is restricted by the near absence of hen harriers, red kites and golden eagles and general lack of fauna over large swathes of the country. Grouse shooting estates curtail the development of the proper habitat mosaic that benefits wildlife, particularly in the way of tree or scrub cover, which means species like the whinchat and nightjar rarely live on grouse moors and are largely relegated to their edges. Biodiversity is seriously suppressed. A very few species, such as some waders, can benefit from grouse moor management, but it is incidental, not necessarily universal and alternatively they can be supported by genuine, direct conservation work that does not seriously compromise ecological or environmental health.

Unsupported by any scientific evidence, many estates are killing mountain hares believing that they transmit the louping ill virus to red grouse. As well as animal welfare concerns attached to the use of traps and snares to kill species such as foxes, crows and stoats, they also catch rare non-target species, such as capercaillie, red squirrel and ring ouzel. Muirburn itself directly kills many species including the important juniper and native reptiles. This does not enhance Scotland's reputation or attractiveness internationally as a progressive 'green' destination.

Flood Alleviation

Likewise, promising initiatives to reduce flooding, which incorporate tree planting and insertion of woody debris in and along watercourses to slow the flow as at Pontbren, Pickering, Belford, Holnicote and tributaries of the Tweed and where topography permits could be enhanced by widespread re-establishment of beaver populations are not compatible with traditional grouse moor management, which dislikes any tree cover believing it to be cover for 'vermin' such as crows and foxes. This is not helpful for the many communities in Scotland whose homes, businesses and farmland lie downstream of extensive shooting estates where large-scale, natural flood alleviation work, including projects, such as peat bog restoration, may well be more economically beneficial and have far greater social benefit. Given the distress and severe economic impact caused by flooding this subject should receive urgent attention on its own account and be a core element of the proposed study.

Reducing the recreational value of the countryside for the general public and foreign visitors

The bulldozing of tracks through grouse moors essentially to transport estate clients has been seriously criticised due to direct physical damage incurred by the land, and highly conspicuous scarring of the landscape. Not an asset for those who are there to visit and enjoy the countryside without shooting grouse, it is a relevant point worth noting that in general sporting estates did not welcome right to roam legislation. Culturally they have not emphasised broadening their appeal to or accommodating a wider public.

The nature of driven grouse shooting will always mean that only an exceedingly select few will be able to participate and it is certainly not a spectator sport. The opportunity to develop a better quality, more meaningful and permanent relationship with Scotland for many, many more domestic and foreign visitors is seriously compromised through the prevalence of driven grouse shooting.

A Business Model Not Being Replicated

Driven grouse shooting and its associated land management are unique to the UK, they

Driven grouse shooting and its associated land management are unique to the UK, they occur nowhere else in the world in spite of the fact the near identical willow grouse exists in many countries across northern Europe, Asia and America. If its proponents are correct in that it is a great asset for conservation and rural economies then the question must be asked why are other countries not helping their wildlife and non-urban populations by adopting driven grouse shooting as fast as they feasibly can? As many of these countries, for instance Norway, seem to have considerably more wildlife with more economically diverse and healthier rural communities than Scotland, we urgently need to carry out a proper, comprehensive and independent review of what driven grouse shooting truly does and does not do for our people, land and wildlife.

Unique web address

<http://www.parliament.scot/GettingInvolved/Petitions/PE01663>

Related information for petition

ECONOMICS OF SHOOTING

Report on economic value in general -

<https://www.league.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=633863b8-4a59-41b0-91d2-31195de24d87>

INTENSIFICATION

Intensification of Grouse Moor Management -

[https://www.league.org.uk/~media/Files/LACS/Publications/1384-LACSS-A4-Land-Reform-Report-AW-LR-\(3\).pdf](https://www.league.org.uk/~media/Files/LACS/Publications/1384-LACSS-A4-Land-Reform-Report-AW-LR-(3).pdf)

WATER QUALITY

EMBER full

report http://www.wateratleeds.org/fileadmin/documents/water_at_leeds/Ember_report.pdf

EMBER executive

summary http://www.wateratleeds.org/fileadmin/documents/water_at_leeds/EMBER_2_page

BIRD OF PREY ECOTOURISM

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/about-the-rspb/about-us/media-centre/releases/435866-tourists-spend-82m-in-dumfries-and-galloway-after-travelling-to-see-red-kites>

https://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/watchedlikeneverbefore_tcm9-133081.pdf

http://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/wildlifeatwork_tcm9-282134.pdf

<http://www.surfbirds.com/community-blogs/blog/2015/06/03/rspb-report-highlights-importance-of-wildlife-to-skye-economy-while-the-rspb-reports-enthusiastic-visitor-response-to-new-sea-eagle-project-at-kylerhea/>

BIRD OF PREY PERSECUTION

https://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/illegal-killing_tcm9-411686.pdf

<https://www.snhpresscentre.com/news/report-finds-slow-growth-for-red-kites-in-northern-scotland>

NATURAL FLOOD ALLEVIATION

<http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/mediafile/100263187/rr-wt-71014-pontbren-project-2014.pdf>

<http://www.parliament.uk/documents/post/quinnpost.pdf>

<https://www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/slowingtheflow>

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/living-with-change---managing-water-and-flooding>

http://tweedforum.org/publications/pdf/nfm_non-tech_whitehope8.pdf

Do you wish your petition to be hosted on the Parliament's website to collect signatures online?

YES

How many signatures have you collected so far?

0

Closing date for collecting signatures online

18 / 07 / 2017

Comments to stimulate online discussion

As the edit for this petition was being finished, news came in that the European Commission is considering taking the UK government to the Court of Justice for the EU regarding its failure under the habitats directive to protect blanket bog. We have 10 - 15 percent of the world total - due to the level of burning carried out, which to a very large degree is for the purpose of enhancing driven grouse shooting. The case for economic support in regards to conservation value of grouse moors is increasingly weak.

The growth of ecotourism, which in spite of the obstacles it faces in Scotland is becoming an increasingly important industry here and one in which we could be a world leader, and especially that involving birds of prey (ospreys at Loch Garten, the red kite trail in Dumfries, sea eagles on Mull and Skye etc.) has received little attention or promotion from bodies, such as Scottish Land and Estates, which have extensive grouse shooting interests where there is a perceived conflict with having natural raptor populations.

Chris Townsend's article "The Devastation of the Eastern Highlands" on his online blog provides an excellent insight into why driven grouse shooting is not conducive to other forms of recreation in which far more people could be involved. There's a growing body of evidence that natural flood alleviation - and there is a lengthening list of promising projects which are supporting the findings of previous ones - strategic tree planting, especially along water courses, the creation of natural dams through the insertion of large woody debris, and even reintroduction of beavers in suitable areas (the forestry commission is proposing a trial beaver reintroduction in the Forest of Dean to reduce flooding of homes and businesses!). Our uplands are not especially mountainous and large scale eco restoration with beavers should be feasible in large sections of our watersheds where current economic productivity is very low and flood prevention should be considerably more valuable. It is better that grouse bags are compromised rather than keeping peoples' homes dry.

There is a wonderful opportunity for Scotland to have an ecologically, economically and culturally diverse rural community. Driven grouse shooting has died out entirely in Wales and is almost extinct in Northern Ireland, but its management has intensified in Scotland further reducing wildlife value, the environmental problems associated with muirburn and marginalising other, quite possibly better economic activities, such as true ecotourism and forestry to produce wood fuel for local people - absence of mains gas means high fuel costs for many in rural areas. The future should not be jeopardised by basing policy and attitudes upon complacency, wishful thinking and the claims of a vested industry, driven grouse shooting is not a cultural asset, but an unhealthy obsession when it suppresses both wildlife and rural economies.

