



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND LAND REFORM COMMITTEE

AGENDA

9th Meeting, 2016 (Session 5)

Tuesday 1 November 2016

The Committee will meet at 10.00 am in the Robert Burns Room (CR1).

1. **Decision on taking business in private:** The Committee will decide whether to take items 4 and 5 in private.
2. **Biodiversity: Scotland's progress to 2020:** The Committee will take evidence from—

Adam Smith, Director Scotland, Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust;

Duncan Orr-Ewing, Head of Species and Land Management, The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds Scotland;

Calum Duncan, Head of Conservation Scotland, Marine Conservation Society;

Chris Ellis, Head of Cryptogamic Botany, Royal Botanical Gardens;

Catherine Lloyd, Tayside Biodiversity Co-ordinator, Tayside Biodiversity Partnership;

Bruce Wilson, Senior Policy Officer, Scottish Wildlife Trust;

William McGhee, Forest Policy Group.

3. **Petition PE1490:** The Committee will consider a petition by Patrick Krause on the control of wild goose numbers.
4. **Biodiversity: Scotland's progress to 2020 (in private):** The Committee will consider evidence heard earlier in the meeting.
5. **Scotland's greenhouse gas emissions targets and climate change adaptation (in private):** The Committee will consider its approach to evidence heard at previous meetings.

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The papers for this meeting are as follows—

Agenda item 2

Biodiversity cover note ECCLR/S5/16/9/1

PRIVATE PAPER ECCLR/S5/16/9/2
(P)

Agenda item 3

PE1490 cover note ECCLR/S5/16/9/3

Agenda item 5

PRIVATE PAPER ECCLR/S5/16/9/4
(P)

Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee**9th Meeting, 2016 (Session 5)****Tuesday 1 November 2016****Biodiversity – Scotland’s Progress to 2020****Introduction**

1. The evidence session on biodiversity will explore Scotland’s progress to 2020. This session will consider the findings of a number of recent publications: the SNH Report on the first full year reporting on the Route Map to 2020¹; Scotland’s Biodiversity Progress to 2020 Aichi Targets², the State of Nature Report 2016³ and associated State of Nature Scotland Report⁴.

2. The session will take place as a round table with: Calum Duncan, Head of Conservation Scotland, Marine Conservation Society; Chris Ellis, Head of Cryptogamic Botany, Royal Botanical Gardens; Catherine Lloyd, Tayside Biodiversity Co-ordinator, Tayside Biodiversity Partnership; William McGhee, the Forest Policy Group; Duncan Orr-Ewing, Head of Species and Land Management, RSPB Scotland; Adam Smith, Director Scotland, Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, and; Bruce Wilson, Senior Policy Officer, Scottish Wildlife Trust.

3. Written evidence received by the Committee can be found at **Annexe A**.

Background

4. The United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity set targets to halt the decline in biodiversity by 2020, the Aichi Targets. Targets to 2020 were also set for the EU, and the European Biodiversity Strategy was published in 2011. These international targets call for a step change in efforts to halt the loss of biodiversity and restore essential services provided by a healthy natural environment.

5. In response, in 2013 Scotland launched the 2020 Challenge for Scotland’s Biodiversity⁵. This complements the 2004 report - Scotland’s Biodiversity: It’s In Your Hands. Together they form the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy. In 2015, the Scottish Government published Scotland’s Biodiversity – A Route Map to 2020. In early 2017, the three-yearly Scottish Biodiversity Strategy Progress Report is expected to be laid before Parliament.

¹ SNH Report on the first full year reporting on the Route Map to 2020
<http://www.snh.gov.uk/docs/A2109026.pdf>

² Report measuring progress against Scotland’s international obligations (the Aichi Targets)
<http://www.snh.gov.uk/docs/A2101704.pdf>

³ State of Nature Report 2016
<http://www.rspb.org.uk/forprofessionals/science/research/details.aspx?id=363867>

⁴ State of Nature Scotland Report
<https://www.bto.org/sites/default/files/publications/state-of-nature-report-2016-scotland.pdf>

⁵ Scottish Government, *2020 Challenge for Scotland’s Biodiversity*. Available at:
<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0042/00425276.pdf>

Parliamentary consideration in session 4

6. In Session 4 the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee (RACCE Committee) considered Scotland's Biodiversity Strategy. In 2013 Parliament debated Scotland's approach and the RACCE Committee heard evidence on the Scottish Government's draft Biodiversity Strategy. The Committee subsequently wrote⁶ to the Minister for Environment setting out its views, to inform the final strategy. A link to the response⁷ from the Minister is provided below. In 2015 the RACCE Committee took evidence on the implementation of the Scottish Government's Biodiversity Strategy and wrote⁸ to the Minister in March 2015. A link to the response⁹ from the Minister is provided below.

Clerks

Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee

⁶ RACCE Committee letter to the Minister for Environment and Climate Change 2013.
http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_RuralAffairsClimateChangeandEnvironmentCommittee/General%20Documents/2013.03.18_RACCE_Convener_to_Minister_on_Biodiversity.pdf

⁷ Letter from Minister for Environment and Climate Change to the RACCE Committee, 2013
http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_RuralAffairsClimateChangeandEnvironmentCommittee/General%20Documents/letter_to_rob_gibson.pdf

⁸ RACCE Committee letter to the Minister for Environment and Climate Change, 2015
http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_RuralAffairsClimateChangeandEnvironmentCommittee/General%20Documents/20150507_-_Convener_to_Minister_Biodiversity.pdf

⁹ Letter to the RACCE Committee from the Minister for Environment and Climate Change, 2015
http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_RuralAffairsClimateChangeandEnvironmentCommittee/General%20Documents/2014.08.05_-_Minister_SBS_Report.pdf

Written submission from RPSB Scotland**Call for Evidence – Scotland’s Biodiversity and 2020 Aichi Targets****Summary**

A wide range of species and habitats in Scotland are already in significant decline. The recent State of Nature¹⁰ report illustrated the extent to which this is occurring across Scotland’s biodiversity.

The Scottish Government has an international commitment to halt this decline under the Aichi targets¹¹ (agreed under the Convention on the Conservation of Biological Diversity). In order to deliver these targets, the Scottish Government published *Scotland’s Biodiversity: a route map to 2020*¹². While the roadmap was a significant step forward and laid out how Government can deliver on the targets, there remains a considerable amount still to do and questions over how these targets will be reached in 3-4 years time.

In order to meet these targets Government needs to:

- Embed the principles and objectives of the Land Use Strategy in all relevant land use policy, especially agriculture;
- Guarantee continued funding for environmental initiatives and agri-environment schemes, if Scotland leaves the EU;
- Secure and implement effective protected area management;
- Take decisive action on invasive non-native species;
- Take decisive action on reintroductions;
- Look to 2030 and set ambitious and action-based targets for biodiversity.

Introduction

RSPB Scotland welcomes the Committee’s call for evidence on Scotland’s biodiversity and reaching the 2020 Aichi Targets, and is pleased to offer this evidence.

Biodiversity is an important cultural, health and economic driver in Scotland. It underpins a healthy environment; is the foundation of many jobs and industries; is an inspiration to Scotland’s great cultural figures; provides recreation for many, and is

¹⁰ http://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/State%20of%20Nature%20UK%20report_%2020%20Sept_tcm9-424984.pdf

¹¹ <https://www.cbd.int/sp/targets/>

¹² <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0048/00480289.pdf>

one of the main features for our thriving tourism industry (the visitor economy being worth at least £11.6 billion¹³).

Our failure to halt the decline in biodiversity by 2010 has made it evident that we must not do so again. While there have been impressive conservation success stories since then, there remains significant challenges to delivering on the 2020 Aichi targets.

1. Agriculture and Land Use

The way in which we use and manage our land has significant impacts on biodiversity with agriculture having a major influence on the fate of many widely dispersed species. Achieving sustainable farming and other land use e.g. forestry and forest management, will be central to halting the loss of biodiversity in the wider countryside. Scotland remains a stronghold for many birds and other wildlife associated with farmland and upland habitats but there is growing evidence about population declines and changes in distribution. Of 62 bird species for which Scotland specific trends can be calculated using Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data, ten declined significantly between 1995 and 2014 including: kestrel (-62%); curlew (-57%); lapwing (-57%); oystercatcher (-33%); rook (-37%); skylark (-26%) and meadow pipit (-14%). Some species including grey partridge, tree sparrow and corn bunting are now too scarce in Scotland to measure reliably through the BBS. Such declines are not confined to birds as demonstrated by the recent State of Nature report; a wide range of other taxa are also affected by land use change and land management practices. For example, the diversity of flowering plants in Scotland has declined mirroring trends across the UK.

Achieving sustainable farming and other land uses is key to halting the loss of biodiversity in the wider countryside. Progress has been slow and greater effort is needed to ensure major land uses of agriculture, forestry and land managed for sport shooting (grouse and deer) do more to integrate action for biodiversity in their activities. The need for such integration is explicitly recognised in the objectives and principles of Scotland's Land Use Strategy, as well as other key strategies and policy statement. More needs to be done to embed the principles and objectives of the LUS in all relevant land use policy.

2. Environmental Funding Initiatives

Scotland currently receives substantial amounts of funding for environmental initiatives from the EU in order to conserve, enhance and protect our natural environment. These include significant sums through Pillar II of the Common Agricultural Policy for the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP), which includes the Agri-Environment-Climate Scheme and LEADER, and also through other funding measures such as LIFE+ Programme and Green Infrastructure Strategic Intervention.

The value and importance of this funding can be illustrated by reference to *Scotland's biodiversity: a route map to 2020*. The route map describes six "big steps for nature", each with a number of priority projects. Most, if not all, of these priority

¹³ Nature-based tourism is estimated to generate at least £1.4 billion, with c.39,000 full-time equivalent jobs.

projects were envisaged to be delivered with funding from *inter alia* the SRDP, LIFE+ and/or with or by partners supported by such funding.

In the absence of such funding in the event of leaving the EU, it is unlikely that many of these projects will be delivered – and, thus, it becomes unlikely that the Scottish Government will meet its international commitments to biodiversity conservation. The Scottish Government should be asked to acknowledge this challenge and give assurances that it is pressing the UK Government to ensure that the level of funding provided through these mechanisms or their successors will not be reduced below existing levels. If such assurances are obtained, the Scottish Government must also commit to ‘passing on’ such funding to these objectives in Scotland.

3. Protected Area Management

A suite of 1,868 protected areas have been designated under national, European and international legislation. These protect the very best of Scotland’s natural heritage and deliver multiple ecosystem services. However, despite the vital role that protected areas play in species and habitat conservation, progress towards improving condition of designated natural features has stalled in recent years. Between 2007 and 2015, the number of features reported as favourable under the National Indicator (NI) increased but only from 76% to 79.3%; this leaves one fifth of our best sites for nature in unfavourable condition.

Securing the appropriate management of designated sites is now largely dependent on funding through the SRDP and the Agri-Environment-Climate scheme in particular. The budget for this scheme, which must also contribute to meeting water quality targets under the Water Framework Directive and climate change targets as well as those for biodiversity, is underfunded at £48 million per annum.

The key pressures on sites which funding must address are: invasive species, impacting 19% of designated features on sites, followed by over-grazing (17%); recreation and disturbance (8%); water management (8%); under-grazing (6%); agricultural operations (5%); natural events (4%); burning (4%); forestry operations (3%) and trampling (3%)¹⁴.

3.1 Protected Areas at Sea

Protected areas at sea are vital to safeguard the internationally important populations of breeding, foraging and wintering seabirds (currently largely through SPAs) and other marine habitats and animals (SACs and nature conservation MPAs) in Scotland. An ecologically coherent network of protected areas is a fundamental component to Scotland’s marine nature conservation strategy and critical to a sustainable future for our coasts and seas.

Equally important is the development and implementation of appropriate management plans for these areas. Management plans must set out the necessary mechanisms by which these protected areas will deliver strong and ambitious conservation objectives. The conservation objectives must not allow damage to

¹⁴

https://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/Pressures%20affecting%20conservation%20status%20of%20designated%20natural%20features%20in%20Scotland_tcm9-419296.pdf

occur to sites or features and management measures need to be capable of recovering declining populations as opposed to merely maintaining depleted ones.

3.2 Landscape Scale Conservation

By adopting the principle of landscape scale conservation, larger areas of land can be managed with expanded aspirations for biodiversity outcomes. By taking larger areas and integrating biodiversity conservation across sectors and organisations, the ability to protect and enhance more species is achievable. Examples of this can be seen with the RSPB led Futurescapes initiative¹⁵¹⁶. There is an opportunity to develop a National Ecological Network in Scotland to provide coherence and a large-scale integrated approach to conservation.

4. Decisive Action on Invasive Non-Native Species

Non-native invasive species represent a threat to Scotland's biodiversity on par with the predicted negative impacts of climate change. Furthermore, a warming climate is expected to accelerate the rate of biological invasions, and the establishment of new arrivals is likely to be helped by milder winters. Evidence indicates that invasive non-native species often outcompete or interbreed with native species, spread novel pathogens, and extirpate native fauna and flora through predation, particularly in fragile island ecosystems.

4.1 Scottish Islands

Islands are often subject to less intense pressures from land use change and development, major factors driving species declines on mainland UK. Conversely, island ecosystems face a disproportionate threat from the arrival of new, non-native species, particularly mammalian predators.

Scotland's islands, many of which are at present free of non-native invasive species, are arguably the UK's most significant contribution to global biodiversity. These islands harbour globally significant populations of breeding seabirds, and host a rich assembly of breeding and wintering avifauna of European importance. Many of these islands also have endemic subspecies of birds and small mammals, found nowhere else on earth.

Robust biosecurity is by far the most cost-effective option for securing the long-term conservation value of islands. Recent advances have been made in developing cross-border and regional legislative framework to tackle the threat of invasive non-native species (e.g. the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011, and the EU Regulation 1143/2014 on the prevention and management of the introduction and spread of invasive alien species). Further, progress has been made in raising biosecurity awareness for the terrestrial and marine environments. However, domestic efforts to protect islands from biological invasions are lagging behind, and decisive action is urgently needed to address this.

¹⁵ http://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/scotland_tcm9-369350.pdf

¹⁶ http://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/futurescapessummary_tcm9-407124.pdf

Further, there is an opportunity in the creation of an Islands Bill to promote the conservation of island biodiversity locally. Local governments should have a responsibility to protect their unique species and habitats as part of this Bill in order to ensure that the preservation of Scotland's island biodiversity is integrated into local government aims.

4.2 National Rhododendron Strategy

The Scottish National Rhododendron Strategy was drafted by Forestry Commission Scotland, and is ready to be put into action. The benefits of this strategy are not only for biodiversity, but also for industry. Forest Enterprise invest a significant amount of public money in rhododendron control currently to protect the national forest estate from the commercial impacts of the Phytophthora disease.

Furthermore, over 70% of the Western Atlantic Woodland SACs (sites protected under EU Habitats Directive) are classed as unfavourable. Rhododendron and grazing are the key issues. There has been good progress on deer control but for this to deliver the full potential for biodiversity there needs to be an informed and well resourced move on rhododendron control too. It is part of the biodiversity route map.

5. Decisive Action on Reintroductions

The widely-reported trial beaver reintroduction in Knapdale, Argyll, run by the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland and the Scottish Wildlife Trust under the oversight of Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), comprised a scientifically monitored, trial reintroduction that resulted in a comprehensive range of reports covering all aspects of beavers and their behaviour. The scientific literature on both Eurasian and the very similar North American beaver demonstrates that, overall, beavers have an overwhelmingly positive influence on biodiversity¹⁷ and provide valuable ecosystem services¹⁸.

The beavers released by the trial remain in place, pending the long-awaited decision by the Scottish Government as to their future. There are also other established beaver populations in Scotland, notably in the river Tay catchment, that originate from various escapes and unauthorised releases. All these animals currently exist out with any legal framework. Such a framework would provide protection whilst at the same time regulating any control measures that were necessary to mitigate conflicts with human interests. The published outputs from the Knapdale Trial have provided the Scottish Government with all necessary information to inform their decision on the long-term future of the beaver in Scotland.

6. Ambitious targets for 2030

The 2020 Aichi targets are only 3-4 years away, and so it is time to look towards what we want to achieve for Scotland's biodiversity by 2030. RSPB Scotland recommends that the Government looks to set ambitious and action-based targets for 2030. We must ensure Scotland's biodiversity is restored and enhanced, to

¹⁷ Stringer, A. & Gaywood, M., 2016 The impacts of beavers *Castor* spp. on biodiversity and the ecological basis for their reintroduction to Scotland, UK. *Mammal Review* DOI: 10.1111/mam.12068

¹⁸ Law, A., McClean, F., Wilby, N.J., 2016. Habitat engineering by beaver benefits aquatic biodiversity and ecosystem processes in agricultural streams. *Freshwater Biology* **61**(4), 486–499

protect our globally important sites and species, and guarantee that the quality of our biodiversity continues to be a cultural, economic and health driver for our industries and our society.

Written submission from Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust

Stakeholder evidence on the 2015-16 Interim Review of “Scotland’s Biodiversity: A Route Map to 2020”

About Us:

The Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) is a charity that conducts research into Britain’s game and wildlife. We use the 1,122 scientific papers we have published in peer-reviewed journals to provide advice to statutory bodies including; SNH, SGRPD, Defra, and Natural England.

We also turn our science, conducted in collaboration with other institutions including; the James Hutton Institute, SRUC, the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology and the RSPB, into practical guides that help farmers and landowners improve the biodiversity on their land.

To help disseminate this knowledge we manage a 500ha demonstration farm in Aberdeenshire and sit on over 100 external committees including; the PAW Executive, CAP Stakeholder Group, Scotland’s Moorland Forum and the UK Birds of Conservation Concern Panel.

Why we are submitting evidence:

After 75 years of research into what makes and drives effective wildlife and habitat conservation we feel that that Scottish Biodiversity Strategy (SBS):

1. Contains appropriate Big Steps and Priority Project aims which if delivered effectively could improve Scottish Biodiversity.
2. The SBS could be made more effective by attending to three issues:
 - Increasing policy support for trials of new approaches to conservation using adaptive management (*addressing Priority Project 9: Conservation of priority species Langholm Moor Demonstration Project; Priority Project 9 – Developing a suite of species focussed projects - Curlew*)

Please note that the text below has been amended from ‘Increasing support for ‘top-down’ rather than ‘bottom-up’ approaches to the corrected version of ‘Increasing support for ‘bottom-up’ rather than ‘top-down’ approaches.

- Increasing support for ‘bottom-up’ rather than ‘top-down’ approaches which use land managers to best effect (*addressing Priority Project 9 – Developing a suite of species focussed projects – Curlew; Priority Project 10: Improving ecological connection – National Ecological Network*)

- Improving co-ordination between Government strategies and agencies interacting with land managers (*addressing Priority Projects 1 & 2: Restoration of peatlands and native woodlands; Priority Project 11: Sustainable Land Management – Demonstration Farms*)

1. SBS Big Steps and Priority Projects (PPs)

- a. The SBS has had some valuable successes, and we particularly welcome the attention paid to PP9: Conservation of Priority Species and PP11: Sustainable Land Management.
- b. We draw attention to other landscape scale projects such as ECAF (Environmental Co-operation Action Fund), the work of the CNPA (Cairngorms National Park Authority), the support of the MacRobert Trust and European Union in developing farmer-clusters with GWCT in Aberdeenshire, Fife and Mid-Lothian which will complement numbers of priority projects.
- c. The work of Scotland's Moorland Forum with its 'Understanding Predation' and 'Principles of Moorland Management' will also contribute to the PP9: Conservation of Priority Species and PP11: Sustainable Land Management goals.

2. Improving action in SBS

- a. These (1b, c) projects highlight that most of Scotland is not designated for conservation, and that the wider landscape is critical for delivery of Scottish biodiversity. Species conservation has no correct single approach but typically can be improved by improving survival and breeding success locally and improving connectivity widely. Species and habitat management thus work together to complete conservation management. Productive land management (farming, shooting, fishing) should be supported as a driver of conservation management and thus biodiversity. Land and Conservation management should be adaptive, changing as climate, species, habitats and socio-economic drivers alter. Policy should enable and incentivise adaptive management, making best use of current legislation, conservation easements, biodiversity offsets and paying for ecosystem services.
- b. We believe 6 of the Priority Project Actions that have not made satisfactory progress could be addressed bearing these principles in mind. We lay these out below:

Priority Project 9: Conservation of priority species Langholm Moor Demonstration Project; Priority Project 9: Developing a suite of species focussed projects - Curlew

- c. These priority project actions need increased policy support for trials of new approaches to conservation using adaptive management principles.
- d. Adaptive management approaches, where management is undertaken, the effects are related to target population changes and then further adapted to achieve stated goals, have been used by SNH with success to address goose impacts. Some of the potential for such approaches in addressing predation pressure have been identified by Scotland's Moorland Forum's 'Understanding Predation' project.
- e. The Langholm Moor Demonstration Project has been unable to reduce the number of grouse deaths and increase the number of grouse chicks sufficiently to allow driven grouse shooting, which appears to be the only sensible economic driver for ongoing moorland and grouse management. One reason for this is that 78% of adult grouse deaths are attributable to raptors. It appears likely that adaptive management, beyond diversionary feeding, may be required to address this predation impact. Policy support for driven shooting as a driver of biodiversity management and policy support for management which may require licensing could be necessary.
- f. Curlew numbers and range are in sharp decline. One apparent constraint on new projects starting to manage for wading birds is the concern that there may be uncontrollable predation pressure from currently protected species. The policy issue is therefore like the LMDP in that policy support may be needed for licensed management.

3. *Priority Project 9: Developing a suite of species focussed projects – Curlew*

Priority Project 10: Improving ecological connection – National Ecological Network

Priority Project 11: Sustainable land management – targeted support

- a. These priority project actions need to focus on what farmers, keepers, foresters and fishers are willing to do and require support to achieve.
- b. We and RSPB believe targeted support through the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (PP11) for an approach which supports targeted seasonal predator control in suitable habitat areas would make a significant difference to conserving the curlew (PP9). The work of Scotland's Moorland Forum with its 'Understanding Predation' project has identified that supporting groups of land managers to deliver best practice habitat and predation control could benefit curlew and a number of other ground nesting birds.
- c. Landscape scale projects such as the National Ecological Network (PP10) also rely on bringing together and facilitating the discussions and work of groups of land managers. Projects such as ECAF

(Environmental Co-operation Action Fund), the work of the CNPA (Cairngorms National Park Authority) with Moorland managers, the support of the MacRobert Trust and European Union in developing farmer-clusters with GWCT in Aberdeenshire, Fife and Mid-Lothian rely on this approach which will complement numbers of priority projects.

4. Priority Project 2: Restoration of native woodlands

Priority Project 11: Sustainable Land Management – Demonstration Farms

- a. These priority project actions would benefit from better co-ordination between Government strategies and agencies interacting with land managers
- b. Many parts of the SBS require land manager's adoption and support but it is reported to us that this is being suppressed by the perceived poor linkage between national strategies including the SBS, the National Peatland Plan, the Land Use Strategy, Forestry Strategy, National Park Plans and possible Moorland Vision. Clarifying the interactions of these plans and the goals and objectives of the agencies acting through them would encourage land managers to take further action for biodiversity, particularly perhaps under PP2: restoration of native woodlands which is commonly perceived as conflicting with our national goal of enhancing moorlands.
- c. GWCT Scotland, as do the James Hutton Institute and SRUC, runs a demonstration farm – ours is on Deeside. The GWCT also runs the Allerton Project farm in England. This has become a centre for excellence in combining farm production with nature conservation and hosted 40,000 visitors in 2015. We have been disappointed that funding for a Scottish demonstration farm network has not been available, so it has not been possible to progress this action (PP11) beyond joint co-ordination of biodiversity monitoring between GWCT, JHI and SRUC. Such a network is highly desirable as it is a deliverable aim under PP11 because it would also demonstrate how to achieve PP2-4, 8-10 and would help deliver PP5-6.

5. Conclusion

- a. The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy is a challenge to meet by 2020.
- b. To meet some of the remaining targets increased focus now needs to be placed on supporting land managers, to facilitate their own initiatives and advise on how to improve best practice.
- c. This support will be partly financial but much can be achieved through policy support.

Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee

9th Meeting, 2016 (Session 5)

Tuesday 1 November 2016

PE1490: Control of wild goose numbers

Background

1. Petition [PE1490](#) from Patrick Krause, on behalf of the Scottish Crofting Federation, was lodged on 1 September 2013. It calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to address the problems created by increasing populations of wild geese in crofting areas as a matter of priority; reassess its decision to stop funding existing goose management programmes, and assign additional resources to Crop Protection and Adaptive Management programmes to ensure this threat to the future of crofting is averted.

Previous consideration

2. The petition was previously considered by the Session 4 Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Land Reform (RACCE) Committee. In its [legacy paper](#), the RACCE Committee recommended that its successor committee continue to scrutinise this petition by examining the outcomes of the review of wild goose management by Scottish Natural Heritage and continuing to press the Scottish Government to ensure that Scottish Natural Heritage has the required levels of funding for goose management schemes.

3. In an [earlier letter to the then Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform](#), the RACCE Committee said that it was:

“...strongly of the view that the steps outlined so far by the Scottish Government and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) fail to adequately address the issues raised in the petition. Furthermore, the Committee understands that the area of Scotland impacted by the problem of residential flocks of grazing geese continues to increase, affecting both crofters and farmers alike. This makes action on this problem all the more urgent.”

Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee consideration

4. At its meeting on 13 September 2016, the Committee agreed to [write to the Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform](#) to seek an update on Scottish Government and SNH work in managing wild goose numbers before considering any subsequent course of action.

5. In responding to the letter (please see the annexe), the Cabinet Secretary confirmed that Scottish Natural Heritage’s review of goose management policy will be submitted to the Scottish Government by the end of this year and will be “published in due course.” The letter also provides updates on:

- developments since the last goose management review in 2010;
- local goose management schemes in on Islay, Kintyre, South Walls, Solway and Loch of Strathbeg;
- the Adaptive Management pilot projects in Orkney, Uist, Tiree and Coll, and Lewis and Harris;
- the Islay Sustainable Goose Management Strategy;
- emerging casework on damage to agriculture by geese; and
- the current goose management budget.

For decision

6. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take in relation to the petition. Options include:

- to await the publication of SNH's review of goose management policy and consider its strategy for controlling goose numbers;
- to take evidence from SNH on its current work in managing goose numbers; and
- to invite a further update from the petitioner on the populations of wild geese in crofting areas.

Clerks

Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee

Annexe

Response from the Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform on petition PE1490 on the control of wild goose numbers

Thank you for your letter of 22 September 2016 regarding the above petition from Patrick Krause on behalf of the Scottish Crofting Federation, seeking an update on Scottish Government (SG) and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) work in managing wild goose numbers.

Policy review

SNH are currently taking forward the review of goose management policy. The RACCE Committee and the then Minister, Dr McLeod agreed that there would be an external Quality Assurance of that work. Arrangements for this process are being put in place. The review will be submitted to the Scottish Government by the end of this year and will be published in due course.

Developments since 2010 Review

Since the previous review in 2010 there has been significant progress in delivering the national goose management policy objectives on a number of key issues. These are:

- The addition of invasive non-native Canada geese to the general licence, which allows shooting of Canada geese throughout the year for the prevention of agricultural damage.
- The introduction of adaptive management approaches in 4 greylag adaptive management pilots and the Islay Sustainable Goose Management Strategy. These projects have, in most cases, reduced the greylag population significantly.
- Improved data collection across a number of goose species.
- Research into the effects on Greenland white-fronted geese of scaring barnacle geese on Islay, and setting up of a wider ringing programme for Greenland white-fronted and barnacle geese.
- Introduction of limited licensed sale of greylag meat to ensure carcasses generated by adaptive management pilots are used and not wasted.
- The work to measure levels of damage caused by geese to agricultural land (as part of the delivery of the Islay Strategy and the adaptive management pilots).
- Improved the delivery and governance structure of schemes.

Goose Schemes

SNH administers 5 local goose management schemes on Islay, Kintyre, South Walls, Solway and Loch of Strathbeg which address conflicts between agriculture and wintering geese (barnacle geese, white-fronted geese and pink-footed geese). These schemes have been in operation since early 2000s and the current plan is to extend them for another 4 years. Offer letters have been sent out to local groups setting out the arrangements for this winter.

SNH have submitted an application to the EC for State Aid clearance for these schemes. The application is currently with the Commission.

Adaptive Management Pilot Projects

There are 4 adaptive management pilot projects on Orkney, Uist, Tiree and Coll, and Lewis and Harris, to address conflicts between agriculture and populations of resident greylag geese. These projects provide support to co-ordinate shooting to reduce greylag goose numbers. They also permit the licensed sale of goose meat. The adaptive management pilot projects are due to end in spring 2017. At that point the data collected will be analysed and decisions will be made on how to take forward sustainable approaches to greylag goose management.

Early indications are that 3 of the projects have managed to reduce the size of resident greylag goose populations to agreed population ranges. For Orkney, this task has been more challenging and the project appears to have stopped population growth but has not managed to reduce the size of the resident greylag goose population.

The Islay Sustainable Goose Management Strategy

The Islay Sustainable Goose Management Strategy aims to reduce to damage to agriculture on the island. The project is entering its third year of operation. Following data collection to measure baseline levels of damage in the first year, work to begin reducing damage by reducing the barnacle goose population began last winter. The bag limits are set using population modelling techniques and in 2015-16 a total of 2160 barnacle geese were shot under licence. The work to reduce damage will take place over a 10 year period and annual bag limits will be confirmed once autumn goose count data is available.

Emerging casework

SNH have provided advice on emerging conflicts between barnacle geese and agriculture in some locations out-with scheme areas. To date 3 licences with very limited bag limits have been issued to prevent serious agricultural damage on North Uist and the Solway.

On Islay, increasing damage by greylag geese on the malting barley harvest has resulted in farmers and a distillery taking forward a co-ordinated management programme. SNH have supported this by issuing licences out of season, where required to prevent damage to the barley crop.

Budget

The current overall cost of goose management is around £1.3 m per annum. Goose Schemes account for the majority of this budget, with adaptive management pilot projects costing £100k per annum (and these projects are due to end in spring 2017). Scheme costs are made up of payments to farmers for income foregone because of losses from goose grazing, and payments for management such as scaring and shooting. This allocation is currently ring-fenced within SNH's overall budget.

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