

# **PE1859/WW: Retain falconers' rights to practise upland falconry in Scotland**

## **Petitioner written submission, 7 February 2026**

When I sat to write my petition for consideration on February the 5th 2021, I did it from a campervan that we had borrowed from my wife's parents. Our work premises had been hit by a flood and with two huge pumps running and the indoor buildings being ripped apart for repair and rebuild, it was the only workspace we had. Little did I realise that the turmoil of the flood would be long forgotten soon after when on February the 21st 2021 my petition was accepted by the committee and published on February the 25th, titled PE1859 Retain Falconers Rights to Practice Upland Falconry in Scotland.

I am NOT a political animal and I spent the next 5 years wading blindly through the journey that followed, not just out of my depth, but seemingly doggy paddling to stay afloat and moving forward in an ocean of treacle (and I hate sweet food).

There are a few things I think I need to say before the Committee does as is expected and closes PE1859.

The fact that the Scottish Parliament has a system where, fire-walled by committees made up of members that on balance match the Scottish Parliament split of party representation, a humble citizen like me can take the government to task on things they need to do, or correct things they got wrong, is a wonderful part of the constitution. Its existence is what allowed me to correct the wrong done to falconers. Scotland should be proud of this system.

When the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee accepted PE1859, I had no idea what would happen next, nor could I have ever imagined the direction and positions it would put me in. Having the Committee write to Government to question it, indeed challenge it on the topic of PE1859 was massive for me and my community, and to then have them call ministers and representatives to answer questions in person was humbling. To also be called myself to give oral evidence was huge and a million miles from where I thought this was going.

The skills and wisdom of the Convener and Committee members was clear to see, and once they understood my position, the crushing blow to the quality of life of my magnificent eagles and those of my fellow falconers, they realised that government really had got this issue very wrong. The Committee was not going to let them off the hook as they threw half truths, obfuscation and clear misinterpretation of the world of falconry back at Committee. Where the ministers did NOT understand the topic, the Committee did. Where Government tried to justify and bury the error they had made, justify the retention of the status quo, and deny anything needed to change, the Committee who had understood the reality, would not allow them to.

When Government took the direction down a side road hoping to run the Committee and I to a dead end, the Committee, via submission information, saw the intentional misdirection and dragged them back to the clear and correct highway.

The Committee not only took Government to task on the error made in legislation that threatened to cripple a niche part of the UNESCO recognised heritage art of falconry, they also demanded they were held to account about both the poor process that was allowed to prevail and got us into a mess at the start, and also the discrimination it displayed to falconers in doing so.

When the Committee got to meet Stanley, my male Golden Eagle, any doubts remaining with Committee members were evaporated.

The journey has often been infuriating when Government said the most inane things proving their ignorance of the topic, and frustrating when progress and action were slow. Even contents of SPICe briefings were frustrating when they missed the facts of upland falconry and had clearly sought information from shall we say, not always the most reliable sources.

The Falconry community can be an apathetic bunch, and the public or private groans of 'He has no chance' or 'He's wasting his time, they won't ever see sense' may well have proved right if the Committee's tenacity had not matched my own.

When the minister, Jim Fairlie MSP, came to his position bringing a mind more open to doing right than digging stubborn heels in and towing the party line, we suddenly had communication on a balanced level. Still guided by Committee input and their pressure on Government, I set off on another round of meetings and even secured a one off licence with his and the wildlife management unit input and their Head of Licensing at NatureScot. The door had opened a crack.

Again, following guidance and a direction confirmed when your Convener questioned the First Minister during a Convener's meeting, a suitable parliamentary vehicle was found to carry us to the end of the road.

Murdo Fraser's Stage 2 amendment to the Natural Environment Bill failed (I was perhaps being greedy and too broad in my scope for the amendment), but its failure also gave me laser focus on where we needed to be, and in fact, that I needed to change the catalyst for a Stage 3 amendment. I found that part of the process a little disconcerting and made me a little uncomfortable having to tell Murdo Fraser that I would need to seek assistance from an MSP from another party to present my Stage 3 amendment. However, he was very pragmatic and very helpful, and the presenting of the Stage 3 amendment was wonderfully presented by Willie Rennie, to whom I owe an enormous debt of gratitude.

The Stage 3 amendment was debated on January the 27th and voted on in the chamber on January the 28th (I was as ever, in the room), and the ultimate landslide win of 99 to 8 felt akin to Atlas finally being forgiven for his roll in the Titanomachy and being allowed by Zeus to unburden himself of the weight of the sky on his shoulders.

I would like to directly acknowledge the work of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on behalf of me, my wife, my business and my amazing staff team, and indeed, the entire falconry community, and most of all on behalf of my magnificent birds of prey to whom you have allowed me to return a quality of life and a meaning for existence to, and indeed, for mountain hares to whom you have returned a value which will be a massive boost to the work on the ground for their long term conservation.

To corrupt a Fergus Ewing quote, you gave David a slingshot, you showed him how to use it, and where Goliath got it wrong, the Committee gave me a good eye and aim, and we got them to put it right.