

PE2131/D: Grant Scottish rivers, including the River Clyde, the legal right to personhood

Petitioners written submission, 15 October 2025

We welcome the considered response to our petition from Glasgow City Region (GCR) on the action called for in the petition to preserve and protect the Clyde.

We share GCR and Clyde Mission's overarching ambitions for the Clyde Region and spatial strategy, with their aim to "*stimulate investment in sites along the Clyde to build a wellbeing economy and achieve a step-change in the quality of the environment for communities.*"

We can also see the improvements and proposed plans for the Clyde via City Deal coming into fruition in many ways which include new bridge connections, development opportunities and decarbonisation plans. We are also encouraged to see a Strategic Masterplan moving forward in due course and appreciate the impact this might have.

The response from GCR notes that 'to preserve and protect the Clyde' is not within its remit. Our question in return to the Committee and Parliament is, therefore, whose responsibility is it to preserve and protect the Clyde?

GCR also notes that the Glasgow and Clyde Valley Cabinet (which oversees City Deal) was established in 2015 as a Joint Committee. They are responsible for 'strategic economic development priorities'. Again, our question to the Committee is, why do these priorities not encompass the preservation and protection of the Clyde?

Our research indicates that socio-economic interests and environmental concerns do not have to sit in opposition with one another.

Indeed, harnessing natural capital can drive positive social, economic and environmental change in the interest of citizens and ecosystems. Examples include the work undertaken in the Ruhr Valley in Germany where authorities have leveraged the area's natural capital to transform it from a heavy industrial heartland into a green, sustainable region. This transition of structural change has converted the area into a revitalised network of green spaces, parks, and waterways that provide ecological, social, and economic benefits which have boosted sustainable tourism, new development, the green economy and renaturation projects.

Given the vast amounts of the River Clyde and associated land in the control of private interests and demands, we are not persuaded that there are sufficient mechanisms in place to effectively steward the ecological health, environmental opportunities and heritage of the River Clyde. We therefore ask the Petitions Committee to consider where – and how – the rights and health of the River Clyde might be balanced against other private rights and interests.

GCR note in their response that there are emerging plans to establish a Clyde Mission Partnership Board. They also note that the role, remit and membership of the Board will evolve in parallel with development of the forthcoming Strategic Masterplan. We perceive there to be an opportunity to embed the interests of the

river itself within this and for these to be balanced with wider representation on the Board.

At present we are not convinced that our civic representatives have sufficient powers to persuade major actors and private stakeholders with large areas of control along the Clyde to meet necessary social and ecological requirements. In short, at present, despite the convincing plans and policy in place, our legal and civic representatives lack 'teeth' in relation to the stewardship and governance of the Clyde and its health.

To close, the right to legal personhood and the rights of natural assets within governance and the law are not abstract notions. Examples of organisations holding the right of personhood include major corporations such as Peel Holdings, Glasgow City Council, our own employers and the Scottish Government itself. Nature rights and guardianship for rivers also hold robust legal precedent. Examples in other countries include England (River Ouse), Columbia (River Atrato) and Netherlands (River Meuse).

In her 2025 book 'A Barrister for the Earth', lawyer Monica Feria-Tinta notes that rivers do have rights. It's whether we choose to recognise them or not. It is how we appoint representatives to protect natural resources that determines the ongoing health of these vital resources to both humans and wider ecosystems.

River Guardians from Columbia, visiting Glasgow via the University of Glasgow and the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund (SCIAF) in June 2025, on hearing how much of our river is in private control, stated that 'the River Clyde is in jail'.

With this in mind, we ask the Petitions Committee and the Scottish Parliament to help ensure robust representation of the River Clyde itself on the forthcoming Clyde Mission Partnership Board, or any alternative governance mechanism that might be considered in its place.

Let the Clyde flourish!