

PE2151/I: Grant protected status to primitive goat species in the Scottish Borders

Scottish Government written submission, 24 October 2025

I refer to your email of 11 September 2025 regarding Petition PE2151 – Grant Protected Status To Primitive Goat Species In The Scottish Borders, lodged by Kenneth Erik Moffatt, seeking the Scottish Government's views on the action called for in the petition, namely calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to grant full legal protected status to primitive goat species in the Scottish Borders.

As set out previously, the Scottish Government currently has no plans to provide full legal protected status or increase regulatory protection for primitive goats, or feral goats as they are more commonly known. In terms of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, feral goats are considered to be outwith their native range in Scotland, which means it is an offence to release goats into the wild without a licence from NatureScot.

We must also consider the twin biodiversity and climate crises, which mean that our actions to mitigate and prevent damage by herbivores on our environment are now more important than ever.

Whilst we have acknowledged that feral goats can bring some benefits to local communities, ultimately they are an invasive non-native species that can cause damage to the natural environment and forestry. NatureScot's experience advice is that feral goats, particularly if not controlled, are likely to lead to negative impacts which outweigh any potential positive effects. For example of these negative impacts, browsing and trampling by feral goats has been recorded as a negative pressure on almost 30 Sites of Special Scientific Interests. While this has typically been a result of the presence of feral goats alongside other large herbivores, we must be clear that feral goats can, and do, contribute to significant damage to our environment as a result of their presence in the wild.

The Scottish Government empathises with the strength of feeling from the public around this issue and fully understands that feral goats are considered to be of local cultural and historical significance, not just in the Scottish Borders, but in various parts of Scotland. However, feral goat populations are likely to require managing as part of a sustainable grazing management, and NatureScot will continue to work with land owners on this.

With regard to the Committee's concerns about ensuring the survival of primitive goat species, as I have set out above, they are ultimately an invasive non-native species, so population gathering exercises are not undertaken. We do however encourage people to report any sightings of feral goats, or any other non-native species, in the wild to NatureScot. While population gathering isn't undertaken, neither the Scottish Government nor NatureScot are concerned about feral goat populations being at risk of eradication.

We also understand that there are a wide range of views on whether and how animals in the wild should be managed. In providing advice and taking forward

action, NatureScot attempts to take on board the wide range of knowledge and experience made available to it. Ultimately NatureScot seeks to ensure that biodiversity gain is given the best chance while assuring wildlife welfare.

For the reasons I have set out above, granting protected status to feral goats would not be in line with Scottish Government policies to protect our environment from herbivore grazing pressure, nor would it be in line with our policies on managing non-native species.

I hope this reaffirms out the Scottish Government's position on this issue.

Wildlife Management

Environment and Forestry Directorate

Nature Division