

PE2202/F: Stop the Guga Hunt

Protect the Wild written submission, 23 February 2026

This submission is made in support of petition PE2202, Stop the Guga Hunt, remaining open into the next parliamentary session. It provides additional evidence and points of consideration to demonstrate why continued parliamentary scrutiny of this issue is both necessary and justified.

Conservation

We believe the conservation argument and the vulnerable status of the gannet colony has been sufficiently addressed by the petitioner, so we will not go into any depth here. But we do wish to highlight that the North Rona and Sula Sgeir Special Protection Area (SPA) is home to an array of other protected seabird species whose conservation status is already severely compromised.

As of the most recent assessments provided by NatureScot, fulmar, Leach's petrel, razorbill, great black-backed gull, guillemot, kittiwake and puffin populations are all classed as being in unfavourable condition in the SPA - the latter four of which are not merely below target but in active decline.

NatureScot's own advice states the proposed Guga hunt activities are expected to cause disturbance to a number of these species in the breeding season - their most sensitive and biologically critical period. Disturbance at this stage is highly stressful and can lead to nest abandonment and chick mortality, pushing already unfavourable populations further from recovery. We wish to emphasise that these disturbances are predicted even where mitigation measures are applied.

The SPA's conservation objectives require qualifying species to be maintained in, or restored to, favourable condition and for significant disturbance to be avoided. Where populations are already assessed as unfavourable, and where disturbance is predicted and unavoidable, continued licensing is fundamentally at odds with those objectives.

We therefore contend that the Guga hunt poses an unacceptable and unavoidable risk to a number of protected species at a time when recovery should be the overriding priority.

Welfare

Likewise, we believe the issue of the birds' welfare has been sufficiently addressed by previous submissions, but we do wish to highlight that this refers not only to their welfare at the moment of killing, but also to the stress, handling and prolonged disturbance experienced beforehand - as well as the likely distress caused to other birds in the densely packed colony.

The process takes place in remote and difficult terrain, without oversight, nor any verifiable record of training, accreditation or competency assessment for those tasked with carrying out such a consequential task. This creates a structural gap between the licence condition requiring “humane killing” and the evidence available to confirm compliance.

Public opinion

A recent survey by FindOutNow showed that, among Scots with a view, 69% support removing the legal exemption allowing the Guga hunt on Sula Sgeir.

72% do not feel the Guga hunt is of cultural importance.

To reiterate, polling shows:

- Most Scots want the Wildlife and Countryside Act to be amended, removing the exemption that allows the Guga hunt.
- Most Scots do not see the Guga hunt as culturally important.
- Support for keeping it is a minority position.

In addition, this petition is by far the most signed petition of this session of parliament, and currently the fourth most signed in Scottish history overall. The exceptional public response to this issue makes the continuation of this petition both justified and necessary. Shutting it down at this stage without further scrutiny would undermine the integrity of a process designed to ensure public will is heard and acted upon.

Scotland's international reputation

The Guga hunt is now under sustained media scrutiny. This carries reputational implications for Scotland as a whole.

Scotland promotes itself globally as a leader in conservation, biodiversity restoration and sustainable wildlife tourism. The Hebrides in particular benefit from a thriving nature-based tourism sector built on its incredible wildlife and wild landscapes. The continuation of the Guga hunt risks undermining that reputation. It creates a contradiction between Scotland’s conservation messaging and the reality of permitting the killing of protected native seabirds within an internationally important breeding site and Special Protection Area.

Many businesses operating in the wildlife and tourism sector do not support the hunt and are concerned about the long-term reputational and conservation impacts. Scotland’s natural heritage is a national asset. It should not be compromised for the sake of maintaining a narrow exemption that benefits a very small number of individuals.

We have also been in contact with residents of the Isle of Lewis who want the Guga hunt to end. They are deeply concerned that the hunt is shaping perceptions of their island in ways that do not reflect the values of many who live there. Some have told us they do not feel comfortable speaking publicly about their opposition, fearing

social repercussions within a small community, but nevertheless, their views must be considered.

This issue now extends beyond the hunt itself. It concerns how Scotland wishes to present itself to the world, and whether our laws reflect the values we claim to uphold.

Conclusion

NatureScot has acknowledged both the inherent risks associated with the Guga hunt and the scale of public opposition to it. Yet they maintain that the law obliges them to issue the licences. In light of all the evidence put before the Committee, the legal exemption allowing the Guga hunt is now clearly outdated.

Amending the Wildlife and Countryside Act would not only bring the law into alignment with modern conservation obligations, but free up an already overstretched nature agency to focus its limited resources on the urgent task of nature recovery.

Taken together, the conservation risk, welfare concerns, regulatory failures, reputational implications and clear public mandate for change present a compelling case for continued parliamentary scrutiny. We therefore respectfully urge the Committee to keep this petition open into the next parliamentary session, so that this issue can receive the full and considered examination it warrants.

Appendix

Latest assessed condition of North Rona and Sula Sgeir SPA qualifying features:
<https://sitelink.nature.scot/site/8558>