

PE2202/I: Stop the Guga Hunt

Gen Cannibal written submission, 6 March 2026

I write regarding Petition PE2202, which seeks to remove the licensing provision that permits the traditional guga hunt on Sula Sgeir.

By way of introduction, my name is Dr Gen Cannibal, Managing Director of Babbity Environmental Ltd, a Scottish environmental consultancy working in ecological assessment, environmental impact assessment and natural resource management. I am a Chartered Environmentalist with more than thirty years' professional experience in environmental science and sustainability, including biodiversity management and regulatory compliance.

I am also a resident of Ness on the Isle of Lewis and, therefore, write both as an environmental professional and as someone who understands the cultural and ecological realities of the Western Isles.

Having reviewed the petition and the associated submissions, I respectfully submit that this petition should be dismissed.

The central claim of the petition is that the guga hunt is incompatible with conservation and animal welfare obligations. This assertion is simply not supported by the evidence.

The hunt has been carried out for many centuries, with written records extending back at least four hundred years. Throughout that time the Sula Sgeir gannet colony has remained one of the healthiest and most stable gannet colonies in the North Atlantic. The continued viability of the colony over such a long period is, in itself, powerful evidence that the practice has historically been sustainable.

In modern times, the hunt operates under strict licensing by NatureScot, with limits set specifically to ensure ecological sustainability. Following the recent avian influenza outbreak, the permitted take was significantly reduced to 500 birds, demonstrating that the regulatory framework is responsive to ecological conditions and focused on protecting the colony.

It is therefore incorrect to present the hunt as an uncontrolled or damaging activity. It is, in fact, one of the most tightly regulated traditional harvests in Scotland.

Equally important is the cultural and community context. The guga hunt is a central element of the identity of the Ness community, representing a living cultural tradition that has bound generations together and reinforced a deep sense of stewardship for the marine environment on which island life depends.

For Ness, the gannet is not an abstract symbol but part of a long-standing relationship between people, place and wildlife.

The hunt also represents a form of local, low-impact food production that stands in stark contrast to the industrialised meat supply chains that dominate modern food

systems. The birds are taken directly from a natural population under licence and consumed within the community. There is no mass processing, no long-distance transport and no reliance on industrial agriculture.

In a policy environment that increasingly values local food security and sustainable food systems and this model should be recognised for what it is: a small-scale, community-based source of food that aligns closely with modern sustainability principles.

By contrast, the petition itself contains a number of factual inaccuracies and ecological misunderstandings, and its tone is, frankly, dismissive of the people and traditions of the Western Isles. It also risks encouraging external activist campaigns directed at a small island community whose environmental footprint is demonstrably lower than that of the industrial food systems that critics often overlook.

Public debate about wildlife management is entirely legitimate. However, such debate must be based on sound ecological evidence and respect for local communities, rather than campaigns that misrepresent both.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that the Committee reject and dismiss Petition PE2202.

Thank you for your consideration.