

Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee on PE2232: Ban beehives in public spaces until statutory national safety regulations are in place

The petitioner is calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to ban beehives in public access spaces until new safety laws are introduced. The petitioner argues that new laws are required to clearly regulate beehives, including mandatory safety signage when beekeepers are working in public access spaces. The background to the petition is [an incident in Wester Ross in 2025](#) where an adult and their child were stung a large number of times by swarming bees in a public area. A beekeeper was reportedly working on hives nearby.

Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

The [Scottish Government stated in its 2022 Honey Bee Health Strategy](#):

“the number of registered beekeepers and hives continues to increase year on year. Registration of beekeepers in Scotland is not compulsory, however, as of June 2022 there are over 3,000 beekeepers registered on BeeBase looking after just over 40,000 colonies in 4400 apiaries.”

There are no specific regulations in Scotland governing the siting of beehives or the related use of signage.

The incident in question was raised at the October 2025 meeting of [the Bee Health Improvement Partnership \(BHIP\)](#), a group of Government, agencies, researchers and stakeholders set up to support delivery of the 2022-2032 [Honey Bee Health Strategy](#). Whilst the BHIP's focus is bee health, its [terms of reference set out](#) that it is a “forum to allow Scottish Government officials and stakeholders to discuss, consult and interact on challenges, policies and strategies affecting honey bees and the Scottish beekeeping sector, both from a hobby and commercial perspective”. Stakeholder members are the Scottish Beekeepers Association (SBA), Bee Farmers Association (BFA), and Scottish Native Honey Bee Society (SNHBS). The [minutes of the meeting](#) state:

“The SG Bee Health Policy team received correspondence on 8 July from a member of the public. She advised that her daughter and grandson were stung over a 100 times each by a swarm of bees which required them to be airlifted to hospital. She noted that no signage was in place to advise bees were being actively managed and asked that we consider legislation requiring the use of signage when bees are being actively managed. A response was provided to her advising that the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982, Section 49 may be relevant in cases where bees cause alarm, injury, or annoyance to the public. This legislation allows for action to be taken if a creature, including bees, causes a nuisance or danger in a public place. We have received further correspondence relating to this matter via MSPs writing to the Cabinet Secretary. This included an update that the lady's grandson now requires the

use of an EpiPen along with dealing with the psychological trauma the incident caused.

She has also been in touch as recently as yesterday and she remains frustrated as she feels that due to a lack of what she believes to be specific legislation, either at a Scottish Government or local government level, there is no means of preventing the placement of bees in certain areas. The incident is being raised with BHIP members to ask that consideration be given to a communications campaign on responsible hive placement and management of bees, noting that although outwith the remit of bee health, we do have regular interaction with the appropriate stakeholders. SBA is aware of the incident as it was an SBA member that has been involved. Following the incident, an article was published in the SBA magazine on the placement of hives and acting responsibly. It was noted by the BFA that signage is not recommended as it accepts liability.”

[Section 49 of the Civic Government \(Scotland\) Act 1982](#) – raised in the above quote - sets out that:

- Any person who suffers or permits any creature in his charge to cause danger or injury to any other person who is in a public place or to give such person reasonable cause for alarm or annoyance shall be guilty of an offence and liable, on summary conviction, to a fine not exceeding level 2 on the standard scale. (section 49(1))
- A district court may, if satisfied that any creature kept in the vicinity of any place where a person resides is giving that person, while in that place, reasonable cause for annoyance, make an order requiring the person keeping the creature to take, within such period as may be specified in the order, such steps (short of destruction of the creature) to prevent the continuance of the annoyance as may be so specified. (section 49(2))

Guidance from beekeeping groups

Beekeeping groups may provide guidance to their members about safety risks to the public. For example, [Scottish Beekeepers' Association guidance on risk assessment](#) advises beekeepers to “Site apiaries well away from areas where people and animals will be in close proximity” and to “Avoid working on hives when there is a risk of members of the public being in the vicinity”.

Relevance of other areas of law e.g. nuisance

As set out above, there are no specific regulations in Scotland governing the siting of beehives or use of signage. Some potentially relevant areas of law are discussed below (in addition to the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 raised above), although these are generally more focused on dealing with incidents after they have occurred.

- It may be relevant to consider whether the law on nuisance could be applicable. The Environmental Protection Act 1990 ("EPA") (as amended)

defines a range of nuisances and gives local authorities enforcement powers. [Section 79\(1\)\(f\) for example provides that](#) “any animal kept in such a place or manner as to be prejudicial to health or a nuisance” constitutes a statutory nuisance. This includes the power to serve an ["abatement notice"](#) requiring the nuisance to stop or certain steps to avoid recurrence. Contacting a local authority's environmental health team can be one potential way of remedying a local issue or concern.

- The [law on negligence may be relevant](#) in terms of what beekeepers may need to take into account. The [Scottish Beekeepers Association states](#) (in guidance on urban beekeeping) that “Legal accountability under Scottish common law emphasises the duty of care that beekeepers owe to others”.
- Tenancy or contractual agreements could be relevant e.g. where they include explicit limits on keeping bees on a site.
- Byelaw making powers may also be relevant at a local level (although it is unclear if any local authorities have considered making byelaws in this area). [Section 201 of the Local Government \(Scotland\) Act 1973](#) empowers local authorities (subject to approval by Scottish Ministers) to make byelaws for the good rule and government of their area, “and for the prevention and suppression of nuisances therein”.

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