

Public Petitions Committee
Thursday 8 October 2026
4th Meeting, 2026 (Session 7)

PE2232: Ban beehives in public spaces until statutory national safety regulations are in place

Introduction

Petitioner Susan Kirkness

Petition Summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to ban beehives in public access spaces until new safety laws are introduced. The new laws should clearly regulate beehives, including mandatory safety signage when beekeepers are working in public access spaces.

Website <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2232>

1. This is a new petition that was published on 21 July 2026.
2. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 281 signatures have been received on this petition.
4. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.
5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered.
6. The Committee has received submissions from the Scottish Government and the Petitioner which are set out in **Annexe C** of this paper.

Action

7. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerks to the Committee
October 2026

Annexe A: Summary of petition

PE2232: Ban beehives in public spaces until statutory national safety regulations are in place

Petitioner:

Susan Kirkness

Date published:

21 July 2026

Petition summary:

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to ban beehives in public access spaces until new safety laws are introduced. The new laws should clearly regulate beehives, including mandatory safety signage when beekeepers are working in public access spaces.

Previous action:

Spoken to MSPs including Emma Roddick, Maree Todd and Edward Mountain, as well as MPs, environmental health, and other organisations.

Background information:

There is currently no clear Scottish legislation regulating where beehives can be placed in relation to public spaces, nor any requirement for safety signage when beekeepers are working on hives. Other activities with far lower risk require visible warnings, yet beekeeping does not.

Two family members, including a young child, were the victims of a severe bee attack in a public access area after encountering a beekeeper working on hives with no warning signs or barriers. When the bees were disturbed, they became defensive and swarmed. Both family members suffered over 150 stings each, had to be airlifted to hospital, and continue to experience ongoing trauma and anxiety.

This incident highlights a serious gap in public safety measures.

Simple, common sense regulation could prevent similar incidents and protect children, vulnerable people, and the wider public.

Annexe B: SPICe Briefing



Scottish Parliament
Information Centre
Ionad Fiosrachaidh
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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".

Alexa Morrison
Senior Researcher
7 September 2026

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

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Annexe C: Written Submissions

PE2232/A: Ban beehives in public spaces until statutory national safety regulations are in place

Scottish Government written submission, 31 August 2026

Does the Scottish Government consider the specific ask(s) of the petition to be practical or achievable?

The Scottish Government recognises the seriousness of the incident described in the petition; the impact it has had on those involved and extends its sympathies to Ms Kirkness for the distress and injury caused.

Beekeeping is undertaken across Scotland by both hobby and commercial beekeepers in a range of settings, including agricultural land, private land, community sites and, in some cases, land managed by public bodies. Honey bees make an important contribution to pollination, biodiversity and food production.

Beekeeping in Scotland as an activity is not currently specifically regulated beyond the Bees Act 1980 and the Bee Diseases and Pests Control (Scotland) Order 2007 which provide Ministers powers to manage certain diseases and pests affecting honey bees.

Nuisance caused by bees is addressed via the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982. Section 49 covers “Dangerous or Annoying Creatures” as follows:

- 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.
- 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.

These provisions give Local Authorities powers to take steps where incidents are reported to them, and Orders have been made under the Act where owned bees caused a nuisance, requiring the beekeepers to take steps to remedy the offence.

In addition to any applicable statutory requirements, beekeepers may owe a common law duty of care to members of the public. Whether such duties arise and the extent of those duties, will depend on the particular facts and circumstances of each case and would ultimately be a matter for the courts to determine.

The Petitioner asks for an initial ban on beehives in public spaces until legislation is introduced requiring mandatory signage to be used when working with bees.

The incident suffered by the petitioner's family is thankfully rare in Scotland. A ban on beehives in public spaces would require legislative change, and due to the scarcity of such events, there is no evidence gathered to determine that this is a necessary and proportionate step requiring legislation, even if it was feasible to do so.

A national ban on beehives in all public access spaces would raise several practical questions, including:

- which legislative mechanism could be utilised to effect such a ban;
- how public access spaces would be defined, particularly in rural areas where public Right to Roam prevails;
- how any prohibition would be enforced: currently there is no requirement for beekeepers to be registered or to inform authorities where they are siting apiaries. Consequently, tracking the removal of thousands of hives belonging to thousands of beekeepers to ensure compliance would be impossible;
- the impact on existing apiaries located on publicly owned land;
- the impact on local authorities, community groups and public bodies that host hives; and
- any wider implications for pollination and environmental objectives.

In practice, decisions about whether hives are appropriate in a particular location are often made by the relevant landowner or land manager. Local authorities and other public bodies already have responsibilities for managing risks on land under their control and may apply site-specific conditions where considered necessary.

The Bee Farmers Association, to which most commercial beekeepers are affiliated, offers specialist insurance and guidance to their members on the siting of apiaries.

Many private beekeepers in Scotland are members of the Scottish Beekeeping Association (SBA) which offers insurance to beekeepers with up to 40 hives to mitigate against a range of risks, including injury caused by their bees. The SBA insurance states that in order to comply with the terms of the policy:

3.2 SBA members covered by this policy shall:

- i) take reasonable precautions to prevent any circumstances or cease any activity which may give rise to liability under the policy;
- ii) as soon as reasonably possible after discovery, cause any defect or danger to be made good or remedied and, in the meantime, shall cause such reasonable additional precautions to be taken as the circumstances may require.

3.3 Should a member covered by the policy knowingly fail to comply with any of the above conditions she or he will be deemed to have forfeited any right to make a claim under the terms of the insurance policy.

The Petitioner asks that legislation be introduced to require mandatory signage to be put in place when a beekeeper is working at their apiaries.

Again, we consider that this is not proportionate or practical. Per above, beekeepers are encouraged to site their hives responsibly and Local Authorities can take action under the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1942 if the bees cause a nuisance.

It is also worth noting that there is a hesitancy amongst some beekeepers to signpost their hives due to increasing incidences of vandalism and destruction.

What, if any, action is the Scottish Government currently taking to address the issues raised by this petition, and is any further action being considered that will achieve the ask(s) of this petition?

The Scottish Government is responsible for honey bee health policy in Scotland and delivers a programme of work aimed at maintaining healthy and sustainable honey bee populations by preventing the incursion and spread of notifiable pests and diseases. This work is guided by the Honey Bee Health Strategy 2022-2032 and delivered in partnership with stakeholders through the Bee Health Improvement Partnership (BHIP).

Through that stakeholder work we encourage the promotion of good husbandry and responsible beekeeping, including being aware of responsibilities around public safety.

We fund an education and outreach post in Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) to promote bee health and responsible beekeeping, and the SRUC have developed a [website](#), education modules for the SBA, and a range of other educational products which address honey bee health and good bee husbandry. We will work with SRUC to consider what more can be done to promote good bee husbandry and public safety as part of our responsible beekeeping education. education.

The SBA, one of the stakeholders on the aforementioned BHIP, provides a range of education for beekeepers including their responsibilities to public safety, as well as offering a Public and Products Liability Insurance Policy for members and affiliated members.

The SBA are aware of the incident in Poolewe and they have already produced a range of guidance materials in response to issues around responsible beekeeping which has been published both in the organisation's magazine and on its website. These include documents prepared with input from their insurance advisers, covering topics such as:

- Responsible beekeeping practices.
- Beekeepers' responsibilities.
- How to avoid becoming a nuisance to neighbours or the wider public.
- Guidance on urban beekeeping, where nuisance issues can be more likely to arise.

The SBA have agreed to run a more visible awareness campaign, particularly during the summer months, to remind their members of the necessity to undertake due diligence around siting of apiaries and when working with the bees in order to minimise the risk to the public.

We will also engage with the Bee Farmers Association and recommend that they implement similar measures with their members.

Is there any further information the Scottish Government wish to bring to the Committee's attention, which would assist it in considering this petition?

There is no regulatory framework around signage requirements for beekeeping practices in any of the other UK administrations.

The Scottish Government has no further information to add beyond the points set out above. The Committee may wish to note that consideration of any national regulatory response would require a clear evidence base demonstrating the scale and nature of the issue and an assessment of the effectiveness and proportionality of any proposal.

Animal Health and Welfare Division

PE2232/B: Ban beehives in public spaces until statutory national safety regulations are in place

Petitioner written submission, 23 September 2026

Introduction

This written evidence is submitted in support of Petition PE2232, which seeks two regulatory measures: (a) a prohibition on the placement of beehives in public-access areas; and (b) mandatory safety signage when beekeepers are working on or inspecting hives.

The petition arises from a serious incident in which two members of my family were attacked by bees in a public-access area, sustaining extensive stings and requiring emergency medical intervention. No signage or warnings were present. This submission responds to the Scottish Government's evidence and demonstrates that current legislation does not adequately protect the public from similar incidents.

Existing Legislation Regulates Bee Health, Not Public Safety

The Scottish Government's submission references several legislative instruments, including the Bees Act 1980, the Bee Diseases and Pests Control (Scotland) Order 2007, and subsequent amendments relating to Varroa and importation controls.

These instruments regulate disease surveillance, pest management, movement and importation of bees, and compliance with animal-health obligations. Their purpose is to protect bee health.

None of these instruments regulate hive placement in public-access areas, proximity of hives to paths or shared spaces, safety signage during hive inspections, or duties on beekeepers to warn or protect the public.

The Scottish Government's Honey Bee Health Strategy similarly focuses on disease management, education, and communication within the beekeeping sector. Public safety is not included within its scope.

Nuisance Legislation Is Reactive and Insufficient

The Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 contains provisions relating to animals causing injury or alarm. However, this legislation is reactive and does not impose preventative duties on beekeepers.

The Act does not regulate hive placement or signage. It requires proof that an individual "allowed" the danger to occur, a threshold difficult to meet given the unpredictable nature of bee behaviour, particularly during hive inspections.

In the incident involving my family, the beekeeper was actively working on hives in an area fully accessible to the public. No signage was present. Existing legislation provided no preventative safeguard.

SPICe Briefing Confirms a Regulatory Gap

The SPICe briefing on honey bee legislation outlines the scope of current regulatory activity, including disease surveillance, pest control, and compliance with EU Animal Health Law.

It confirms that Scotland's regulatory framework is designed around animal health, not public safety.

There is no statutory guidance on safe hive placement, risk assessment for public-access areas, public-facing safety measures during hive manipulation, or signage requirements.

The Scottish Government's evidence similarly focuses on disease-related regulation and enforcement. It does not address the risks posed by hive placement in areas where the public cannot reasonably avoid proximity to beekeeping activity.

Public-Access Hive Placement Creates an Unregulated Safety Risk

Bees are generally non-aggressive, but hive inspections, honey extraction, and disturbance can trigger defensive behaviour. Factors such as weather conditions, hive manipulation, queen disturbance, and environmental stimuli can cause sudden aggression.

Public-access areas are unpredictable environments. Children may run ahead of adults, dogs may be off-lead, cyclists may pass quickly, and visitors may be unfamiliar with the area.

Individuals with allergies may not recognise danger. When hives are placed in such areas, the public is exposed to risks they cannot reasonably anticipate or avoid.

The incident involving my family demonstrates the consequences of this regulatory gap. The beekeeper was working on hives without signage, and the area was fully accessible. Members of the public had no means of avoiding the danger.

Mandatory Safety Signage Is a Proportionate Preventative Measure

Many activities with significantly lower risk require mandatory signage, including construction work, tree maintenance, agricultural spraying, and roadworks.

Beekeeping, particularly hive inspection, carries a recognised risk of sudden bee agitation. Despite this, there is no requirement for beekeepers to display signage when working on hives.

Mandatory signage would alert the public to avoid the immediate area, allow parents to protect children, reduce accidental disturbance of hives, minimise risk to individuals with allergies, reduce emergency service burden, and provide clarity regarding liability.

Signage is a low-cost, easily implemented measure that would significantly enhance public safety.

Prohibiting Hives in Public-Access Areas Is Necessary and Proportionate

A prohibition on hive placement in public-access areas would not affect beekeeping on private land, agricultural land, allotments, controlled-access community gardens, designated apiary sites, or educational facilities with restricted entry.

It would only prevent hive placement in areas where the public cannot reasonably avoid proximity to beekeeping activity.

Given the unpredictability of public-access areas and the potential for sudden bee aggression, hive placement in such areas presents an unacceptable risk.

A prohibition would be a proportionate measure to prevent incidents similar to the one experienced by my family.

The Scottish Government's Current Position Does Not Address Public-Facing Risk

The Scottish Government's evidence focuses exclusively on bee-health regulation.

It does not address public-safety considerations, risk mitigation in public-access areas, duties on beekeepers to warn or protect the public, or preventative measures to avoid incidents.

The absence of public-safety regulation leaves a significant gap that exposes the public to avoidable harm.

Conclusion

The current legislative framework governing beekeeping in Scotland is focused on bee health and disease control. It does not address public-facing risks associated with hive placement or beekeeping activity in public-access areas.

Existing nuisance legislation is reactive and insufficient. There is no statutory requirement for signage, no guidance on safe hive placement, and no mechanism to prevent incidents such as the one experienced by my family.

This petition seeks to close a clear regulatory gap by introducing targeted, proportionate measures that will protect the public from avoidable harm.

I respectfully urge the Committee to support these proposals.