



**PUBLIC PETITION NO.**

**PE01490**

### **Name of petitioner**

Patrick Krause on behalf of Scottish Crofting Federation

### **Petition title**

Control of wild goose numbers

### **Petition summary**

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to address the problems created by increasing populations of wild geese in the crofting areas as a matter of priority; reassess its decision to stop funding existing goose management programmes, and assign additional resources to Crop Protection and Adaptive Management programmes to ensure this threat to the future of crofting is averted.

### **Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition**

The Scottish Crofting Federation has asked the Scottish Government to act on numerous occasions through direct contact over many years and through attending the National Goose Management Review Group. Little or no action has been taken by Scottish Government - as evidenced by the low budget for goose control and the escalating goose numbers - so we are asking Scottish Parliament for support.

Jamie McGrigor MSP, Jean Urquhart MSP and Rhoda Grant MSP have backed the decision to petition the Parliament.

### **Petition background information**

The Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF) is the only member-led organisation dedicated to promoting crofting and is the largest association of small-scale food producers in the UK. Its mission is to safeguard and promote the rights, livelihoods and culture of crofters and their communities.

The National Goose Management Review Group (NGMRG) was set up in May 2000 to implement the national policy framework and to advise Scottish Ministers on goose management in Scotland. Since then the wild goose populations have increased unchecked and are out of control.

Ask any crofter in the inner or outer Hebrides what the bane of their lives is and they will say "geese". Many believe geese to be the biggest single threat to the continuation of island crofting.

Crofters' complaints about the goose problem are not new but it is now reaching devastating proportions in Tiree, Islay and the Uists, and is fast becoming the same in the rest of the Western Isles, the Northern Isles and parts of the mainland – a

significant proportion of the crofting counties.

The 1986 report of an independent evaluation of the Integrated Development Programme (IDP) said that, as a breeding bird the Greylag goose could be considered rare in British terms; it was estimated that there were around 700-800 breeding pairs in the UK, of which around 150 were breeding in the Outer Hebrides. At that time, North Uist crofters were seeking to control the spread of Greylag geese, an annual visitor, which they claimed were causing them substantial agricultural losses. Now the Uists are year-round home to more than 10,000 greylag geese and that population is growing. This is the same in Orkney; other areas don't have accurate numbers.

Yet despite these vast numbers, geese are still protected by law. Crofters are told they can shoot marauding deer on their crofts but not geese, except at certain times of the year and at the will of the landlord who has the shooting rights and dictates whether crofters can shoot or not. Crofters can't even sell wild goose meat. With the robust annual counts and the cooperation of all parties on the islands in supplying shot figures, there seems no reason to not change the law so that geese can be controlled year-round, decoys can be used in August and wild goose meat and products can be sold.

Crofting agriculture is very important to the Uists, much of which is designated 'High Nature Value'. But crops of cereal and grass are being ruined by the grazing and fouling of geese.

SNH have an 'Adaptive Management' 4 year trial that controls goose numbers in the Uists but this alone will not reduce the population to manageable levels as it needs to work alongside a crop protection scheme. But cuts are likely to halt the good work. There was a review of existing goose management schemes in 2011 (most of the effected areas have no management schemes) which concluded that against the background of pressure on public expenditure, there would have to be substantive savings in the costs of goose management in Scotland. The report also concluded that control schemes for greylag geese were a lower priority than those for other species.

It is clear that if the Scottish Government do not provide more funding for effective initiatives it will not be possible to keep the flood at bay. We cannot afford to lose a year as we are not even keeping the population stable now. If we lose a year of the joint crop protection and adaptive management work, greylags will definitely threaten the growing of corn and, therefore, the raising of cattle on the Uists. And the picture is similar elsewhere in the crofting counties.

Biodiversity is of course important, but the key to this is to safeguard the livelihoods of the people who live in the crofting areas; without them working the land the protection of biodiversity cannot happen. We need to continue protecting crops and we need to change the law regarding geese control and meat sales. There is a catastrophe unfolding and officialdom appears to have failed to recognise this and to take action. Crofters and their families are now the endangered ones.

#### Unique web address

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/GettingInvolved/Petitions/controlgoosenumbers>

#### Related information for petition

**Do you wish your petition to be hosted on the Parliament's website to collect signatures online?**

**YES**

**How many signatures have you collected so far?**

1

**Closing date for collecting signatures online**

01 / 09 / 2013

**Comments to stimulate online discussion**

Wild goose numbers are out of control in Scotland and pose, what many believe to be, the greatest threat to island crofting. For example, in 1986 it was estimated that there were 150 breeding pairs of greylags in the Western Isles. Today accurate counting puts the number in the Uists above 10,000; and the situation is similar in other parts of the crofting areas. Yet despite these vast numbers geese are protected by law and the Scottish Government is cutting back on goose control programmes. Crofters and their families are now the endangered ones.