



PUBLIC PETITION NO.

PE01564

Name of petitioner

James Treasurer on behalf of the Friends of the Great Glen

Petition title

Save Loch Ness and the Great Glen

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to take steps to designate the Loch Ness and Great Glen as a National Scenic Area; to recommend a priority application is made to UNESCO for the area to be afforded World Heritage protection; and to take appropriate steps to discourage further wind turbine developments and support the restoration of sites damaged by wind turbines.

Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition

1. Letters of comment and opposition on an individual basis by Friends of the Great Glen on planning applications in the Great Glen through the Highland Council planning system, for example on Beinn Mhor, Invermoriston, Bhlaraidh, Stronelaig, and the extension to the Millenium Wind Farm. These applications have been recommended for approval, despite considerable public objections, for example over 1200 in the case of Beinn Mhor.
2. Correspondence with local MSP on wind farm developments in the Great Glen.
3. A complaint was lodged with the Highland Council on the visual impact of the Millenium Wind Farm and this was later referred to the planning process (the planning application is still active).
4. Letter to the SNH Chair asking for more active defence of wild land and internationally acclaimed landscape sites in the Great Glen and specifically Stronelaig.

Petition background information

Introduction

Wind farms have a part in renewable energy developments but degradation and transformation of the World's most famous loch and glen from a natural to an artificial landscape is environmentally damaging to the World's most beautiful landscapes and sensitive and unique highland ecosystems.

Loch Ness is the world's most famous lake. Loch Ness is 23 miles long, has a surface

area of 22 square miles and the deepest point is 230 metres. It contains the largest volume of freshwater in the UK at 7.8 Km³. The Loch has 10 species of native freshwater fish with, as yet, no invasive species and so represents a healthy assemblage of fish in an oligotrophic loch.

The Great Glen is the most famous valley system in Europe and is a unique geological feature stretching over 60 miles from Fort William to Inverness. There is a hydroelectric scheme at Glendoe owned by SSE, which closed for 3 years due to a rock fall soon after opening in the main tunnel. The route is also used by small aircraft and helicopter traffic and by RAF planes on exercise. In addition to the outstanding landscape qualities and vast scale of the Great Glen and grandeur of Loch Ness, the engineering masterpiece of the Caledonian Canal would enhance the case for protected status.

Threats to Loch Ness and the Great Glen

Loch Ness and the Great Glen together are part of the World's most beautiful and inspiring landscapes. Despite this, SNH and Highland Council report that more than 500 wind turbines have been consented to, or are in the planning stage, within a 22 mile radius of the Loch. As such, within a short period, the Loch will soon be effectively surrounded by wind farms and wind turbines will be visible from all hill viewing points:

<http://www.snh.gov.uk/planning-and-development/renewable-energy/research-data-and-trends/trendsandstats/windfarm-footprint-maps/>.

The Highland Council produce a wind farm activity map, available via:
http://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/download/170/renewable_energy

The wind farm south of Fort Augustus is an open sore on the hills above the A82 and was recently suggested as suitable for the "Carbuncle of the Year Award", reflecting the inadequacies of the planning system.

Loch Ness and the Great Glen area are prime assets of Scotland of national importance and are under threat from the attention of wind farm companies. The prime question being asked is: "Why should these outstanding and unique highland ecosystems and landscapes be damaged?" These are the world's most beautiful landscapes and contain some of Europe's last remaining wild land.

The Highland Council has generally condoned these developments and, supported by national policy, have been negligent in preserving Scotland's highland heritage. Loch Ness is under desperate threat from over 500 wind turbines, thousands of tonnes of concrete, and hundreds of miles of bulldozed access track approved and in the planning stage within 22 miles radius of Loch Ness (Daily Mail 28/1/2015; and SNH map attached).

Time is, therefore, running out and it is crucial to save these assets for the Nation. Loch Ness and the Great Glen are now prime targets for windfarm developers. Loch Ness and the Great Glen are of World heritage standard status although not, as yet, allocated that honour. They are of international value, recognition and regard, and are Scotland's second most popular tourist draw (Scotland was voted the most beautiful country in the World in 2014 by the Rough Guides, the travel books):

<http://www.roughguides.com/gallery/most-beautiful-country-in-the-world/#/20>

Unfortunately, the scale of proposed developments indicates that the planning process has failed to protect Loch Ness and the Great Glen, as there have been several approved developments, such as: Bhlairaidh, Invermoriston, Millenium.

Specifically, in the case of Stronelairg, this wind farm development has been approved against the expert advice of SNH that this would cause environmental damage to wild land and sensitive upland ecosystems. The John Muir Trust, the Mountaineering

Council of Scotland and the National Trust for Scotland (who speak for the countryside) have objected to the Stronelairg development. The evidence indicates that the planning process has, therefore, failed to safeguard these ecosystems and habitats.

The planning process does not take cognisance of the broader importance and international standard and value of these highland landscapes. The area is being transformed from a natural landscape to an artificial landscape with high negative impact on the quality of the area and the quality of life for those that live in the Highlands. The defining criterion should be: do these changes enhance the area? But the evidence of high cumulative impact is that they will degrade a national asset.

A call for action

Our Petition therefore calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government:

1. To afford protection to the Loch Ness and Great Glen by designating it as a National Scenic Area*;
2. To recommend that a priority application is made to UNESCO for designation of Loch Ness and the Great Glen as a World Heritage Site;
3. To take appropriate steps to discourage further wind turbine developments in the area and support the restoration of all sites therein damaged by wind turbines.

*The 5 main qualities of a National Scenic Area are: "setting and physical grandeur, glacial landforms, natural beauty and tranquillity, cultural heritage and man-made resources" (Countryside Commission for Scotland, 1987) and this area arguably meets these criteria.

A map of wind farm proposals near Loch Ness and more information can be accessed at: www.savelochness.com.

Unique web address

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/GettingInvolved/Petitions/PE01564>

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

23 / 04 / 2015

Comments to stimulate online discussion

Do you think that Loch Ness and the Great Glen are sites of international importance

and are icons of the highlands and of Scotland?

Loch Ness is the second most popular tourist draw in Scotland. Do visitors and locals want to visit the area to see wind turbines?

Do you think that the existing planning system is capable of protecting the world's most beautiful landscapes, such as Loch Ness and the Great Glen, given the prospect of 500 wind turbines within a 22 mile radius and more to follow?

The Stronelairg development near Loch Ness, according to SNH, will cause enormous environmental damage. Do you think that sensitive upland and wild land areas in the Scottish Highlands are being adequately conserved using the current planning system?