

**PE1383/A**



Public Petitions Committee  
TG.01  
The Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP

31 January 2011

Dear Clerk,

### **CONSIDERATION OF PETITION PE1383**

I am writing to respond to the issues raised in Petition 1383 as requested by the Public Petitions Committee.

RSPB Scotland recognises the importance attached by many to landscape and visual amenity, not only in its own right, but also adding value to Scotland's economy through tourism and brand image. Overlap between nature conservation and landscape protection may be considerable, but it is not complete – and we should stress that our experience and expertise is in the former. Thus, while there is a legitimate debate to be had about the preservation of landscape and the protection of wild land, this may fall largely outside RSPB Scotland's area of expertise, in spite of coincidental areas in common.

It is certainly our view, based on experience in nature conservation, that protected areas (or designations) are an essential tool in protecting natural heritage interest for the public. In nature conservation, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and European wildlife sites (Special Protection Areas – SPAs for birds, and Special Areas for Conservation – SACs for other species and habitats, collectively also known as Natura 2000 sites) play a critical role in delivering protection for habitats and species of international and national importance. Their ability to do so depends both on the completeness of site networks and on site condition: failure to designate the best sites, or to ensure that they are properly managed to protect the features they are designated for, can potentially render individual designations useless.

The SSSI and Natura nature conservation site networks encompass a significant extent of wild land. For most individual sites where this is the case, such as new SPAs classified in 2010 for golden eagle, the wild land within the wildlife sites is in effect protected by proxy from detrimental land-use change. Thus, protecting land for certain types of nature conservation interest (for example for species such as golden eagle, or habitats such as blanket bog) can also help preserve its wildness.

Some land is also designated for its national landscape interest, in the form of National Parks and National Scenic Areas (NSAs). Not all of the land within these sites is wild, and the statutory purpose of National Parks is broader than landscape alone. However, these two categories of site encompass large areas of wild land and in theory both types of designation ought to offer some means of protecting the wild land interest found within them. Applying our knowledge of nature conservation sites to the question of NSA and National Parks' capacity to protect Scotland's wild land, we would be inclined to ask: firstly, whether an adequate proportion of the wild land resource is included within the NSA and National Park network; secondly, whether wild land within the NSA and National Park network is in good condition and/or under threat; and finally whether NSA and National Parks mechanisms are able to restore condition and deal with threats.

However, as landscape and wild land for its own sake fall outside our area of expertise, we are not able to provide detailed answers to these questions and thus remain undecided on whether Scotland's wild land resource would be most effectively protected by using existing mechanisms (adapting them if necessary), or by introducing and implementing a brand new designation targeted solely at wild land and wilderness values. From our position, we can see merit in both approaches.

If the Committee wish any further information on this issue please let me know.

Yours sincerely,

Julia Harrison  
Parliamentary Officer