

**CONSIDERATION OF PETITION PE1383**

*Petition by Helen McDade on behalf of the John Muir Trust, calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to improve the protection for the best areas of wild land by introducing a new national environmental designation.*

VisitScotland welcomes the opportunity to comment on the above petition. While the petition proposes a number of potential questions to be asked of industry bodies, this response will focus on that question specifically directed toward VisitScotland, and concerning tourism in Scotland, as below:

What would be the social, economic, cultural and environmental impacts of creating a statutory designation for core wild land? [SNH; Scottish Government; Scottish Enterprise; Highland & Islands Enterprise, trade & industry bodies e.g. Visit Scotland, CBI, Community Development Trusts]

**VisitScotland's response****Background**

VisitScotland, as Scotland's National Tourism Organisation, has a strategic role to develop Scottish tourism in order to get the maximum economic benefit for the country. It exists to support the development of the tourism industry in Scotland and to market Scotland as a quality destination.

Tourism is crucial to Scotland's economic and cultural well-being. It sustains a great diversity of businesses throughout the country, and according to a recent independent report from Deloitte, generating over £11.1 billion for the economy - £4.2bn from overnight stays and £6.8bn from day visits. Employing 270,000 – 9% of the Scottish workforce - tourism provides jobs in the private sector and stimulates the regeneration of urban and rural areas.

One of the Scottish Government and VisitScotland's key ambitions is to grow tourism revenues and make Scotland one of the world's foremost tourist destinations. This ambition is now common currency in both public and private sectors in Scotland, and the expectations of businesses on the ground have been raised as to how they might contribute to and benefit from such growth.

**Importance of scenery to tourism**

Scenery and the natural environment have become the two most important factors for visitors in recent years when choosing a holiday location.

The importance of this element to tourism in Scotland cannot be underestimated. The character and visual amenity value of Scotland's landscapes is a key driver of our tourism product: a large majority of visitors to Scotland come because of the landscape, scenery and the wider environment, which supports important visitor activities such as walking, cycling, wildlife watching and visiting historic sites.

The VisitScotland Visitor Experience Survey (2008) confirms the basis of this argument with its ranking of the key factors influencing visitors when choosing Scotland as a holiday location. In this study, scenery and the natural environment are not only highly rated but the most important factors for visitors when choosing Scotland as a holiday location, with 90% of visitors citing it as either 'very important' or 'important'. Full details of the Visitor Experience Survey can be found at:

[http://www.visitscotland.org/pdf/visitor\\_experience\\_2008-excutive-summary.pdf](http://www.visitscotland.org/pdf/visitor_experience_2008-excutive-summary.pdf)

### Petition PE1383

Given the importance of scenery to tourism, VisitScotland encourages the production of a Tourist Impact Statement as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment of any development with the potential to affect the local environment, ensuring careful consideration of the potential positive and negative impacts on tourism.

Further to this, VisitScotland also encourages that consideration is made of the following:

- The number of tourists travelling past en route to elsewhere
- The views from accommodation in the area
- The relative scale of tourism impact i.e. local and national
- The potential positives associated with the development
- The views of tourist organisations i.e. local businesses or VisitScotland

With the above in mind, VisitScotland welcomes the petition's assertion that:

The Trust is not opposed to development in remote areas where it provides socio-economic benefits, particularly for remote communities, provided it does not diminish our best wild land resource and its ability to provide ecosystem services

While scenery is important to visitors to Scotland, it is also important to note that development may be required in remote areas in order to improve tourism product, and that a balance needs to be struck between conserving areas of wild land and maximising the economic benefit of tourism to the Scottish economy.

VisitScotland therefore also welcomes the proposal that the ongoing activity aimed at mapping areas of wild land 'could be used to inform a new designation aimed at protecting landscapes from inappropriate development, without negatively affecting their use for other activities, such as tourism and recreation'.

## Conclusion

Given the aforementioned importance of tourism to Scotland's economy, and the importance of the natural environment to visitors, it is VisitScotland's view that the creation of a new national environmental designation for wild land, and the mapping of the areas to be included within this designation, needs to take into account any possible positive and negative drawbacks on tourism.

VisitScotland also believes there needs to be a reasonable balance struck between any conservation efforts - particularly in rural areas - and the necessary economic or social development of that area, including - but not limited to - developments in tourism product.

VisitScotland would be happy to discuss further the creation of the new designation, and any methods through which it can enhance the visitor experience.

Yours sincerely,

Iain McDonald  
Corporate Affairs Assistant  
VisitScotland

