

**PE1383/G**

**Scottish Parliament Petition PE1383**

**John Muir Trust response to comments sent to  
Petitions Committee**



Comments on PE 1383 were submitted to the Petitions Committee by the Scottish Government (SG); Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH); Visit Scotland (VS); National Trust for Scotland (NTS); RSPB; Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT)

### **John Muir Trust response**

The John Muir Trust (JMT) very much welcomes the common ground demonstrated across the responses. All respondents agree that important issues are raised.

Two of the organisations, RSPB and SWT, in line with their remit, restricted their comments to the issue of nature conservation and its overlap with wild land. RSPB identified, as an essential tool, the importance of areas being protected or designated, in their experience of nature conservation. The RSPB view is that some areas protected for nature (e.g. Natura 2000 sites) - if they are in a wild land area - can have the effect of protecting wild land. Whilst JMT agrees that this can be the case, visual and landscape interests are not automatically protected. For instance, a large development could go ahead in a special protected area (SPA) for eagles if it didn't impact adversely on that species.

SWT identified the need for wild land of high biodiversity value to have greater protection than currently exists. The John Muir Trust absolutely agrees with the need to consider both the ecological quality of a wild land area as well as the qualities which lead to its special value to individuals (generally, but not always, visual and landscape qualities). This Petition concentrates on protection of the landscape qualities by designation because of the limitations of the current landscape designations. European Directives have led to significant ecological designations in Scotland in recent years (SPA, SACs i.e. Natura 2000 sites).

NTS agrees with JMT that the present system to protect landscapes is not working and wishes to see more wild land protected and conserved, although it believes that this might be achieved by strengthening National Scenic Areas and National Parks.

Visit Scotland notes that scenery and natural environment have become the two most important factors for visitors in recent years and stresses the significance of this to the Scottish economy.

JMT very much welcomes the Scottish Government and SNH responses which identify a lot of common ground with the petitioners' aims. There is recognition by the Scottish Government that the issues raised are important and timely and that there is evidence of increasing impacts visually on wild land areas. SNH agrees that the issue deserves serious, and urgent, attention and notes the economic benefit from wilder landscapes. JMT agree that the excellent work by SNH on mapping, alongside the Scottish Government commissioned report on wild land, give a sound research basis for discussion about strengthening protection of this vital asset. Several references were made to whether National Scenic Areas and National Parks can be expanded and strengthened to protect the wild land. JMT believe that this would be difficult because much of the wild land is not within the current areas.

This is not an “anti-windfarm” petition, and indeed past and current threats include forestry (now widely recognised as inappropriately subsidised and having had a profound impact on Scotland’s environment) and hilltracks. This is a pro-wild land petition. Economically, socially, environmentally and spiritually, the evidence is that people want and need wild areas. SNH’s most recent information (an update from the data referenced in our original submission) is that “the area without visual influence of built development has decreased from 31% in January 2008 to 28% in December 2009. We would stress that this further decline emphasises the urgency of the issues raised in our petition. Indeed, SNH note in their response that “given the intensity of current pressures, the time available for existing approaches to prove their efficacy must be regarded as limited”.

In the light of the responses from the Scottish Government and SNH, we request that the petition be continued and reconsidered in the autumn after the Scottish Government has had an opportunity to consider the SNH mapping and the wildness report and the Scottish Government can then report back to the Petitions Committee.