

PE1383/T

Scottish Natural Heritage Letter of 27 September 2013

FAO: Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee

cc: Helen McDade

PE1383: JMT Petition on Better protection for wild land

You will be aware that SNH wrote to the Convenor in May, clarifying two issues relating to the Committee's consideration of PE1383. We indicated at that time that we intended publishing a revised *N3 Visual influence of built development indicator*, based on 2012 data, by this November. This is to confirm that we published the indicator today on our website <http://www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/our-changing-environment/scotlands-indicators/natural-heritage-indicators/>.

We understand that the petition is now closed, but should you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Simon Brooks

SNH Policy and Advice Manager – Landscape

David Stewart MSP
Convenor of the Public Petitions Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

10 May 2013

By email to petitions@scottish.parliament.uk

Dear Mr Stewart

Petition PE1383: Better protection for wild land

I am grateful to the Committee for providing us with the opportunity to discuss our work on mapping wildness and wild land on 16th April. I am writing to clarify two matters on which the Committee requested further information.

Wildness and wild land maps provided to Ministers by SNH

Since we attended your Committee, events have of course moved on. On 30th April, Ministers released for consultation the draft Scottish Planning Policy and main issues report for National Planning Framework 3. These documents refer to a map of 'Core areas of wild land in Scotland 2013', which we published on our website (<http://www.snh.gov.uk/protecting-scotlands-nature/looking-after-landscapes/landscape-policy-and-guidance/wild-land/mapping/>) at the time of the announcement. The Government is proposing that this map provides the basis for the identification and safeguarding of areas of wild land character in development plans and, specific to onshore wind farms, that our mapping work is used to identify more clearly those areas which need protection in spatial frameworks. The consultation runs until 23rd July, and we understand that SPP will be finalised in 2013, and NPF3 in 2014.

Now that Ministers have published a map of wild land and are consulting on its use, we are able to publish maps SNH has provided to Government to inform their consideration of our work. Given their number and size of document these will be uploaded to the website page set out above. I expect that they will appear next week and we will notify you when this happens.

N3 Visual influence of built development indicator

As explained at the Committee, the N3 indicator work is separate from, and different to, our wildness/wild land mapping. The indicator measures the change in the theoretical visibility of development, using GIS analysis to calculate whether structures such as roads, bridges, buildings, railways, masts, overhead lines and wind farms can be seen from any part of Scotland (taking into account their height and screening by topography, but not vegetation). Although a similar analysis has been undertaken to calculate the 'Absence of Modern

Artefacts' layer as part of our wildness mapping work, this is only one of four attributes analysed to inform the preparation of our map of wild land. To illustrate the difference between the two pieces of work, not all areas from which no built development is visible are wild land, and not all areas of wild land have no visibility of built development.

We will publish the 2010 update to the N3 indicator on Monday 13th May and I will also forward this to the Clerk . I understand the Committee and petitioner's concerns with the delays in publishing the indicator, and recognise that releasing a 2010 statistic in 2013 is far from satisfactory. However we needed to be confident that the analysis is accurate. For the record, as confirmation was specifically sought (Official Report column 1246 -1247), I confirm that no political pressure of any sort has influenced either the analysis or publication of this indicator.

I offered to provide further technical detail explaining why updating the N3 indicator and its publication has been delayed.

The indicator is based on an analysis of Ordnance Survey's OS MasterMap Topography Layer data, Britain's most detailed geographic dataset. Ordnance Survey updates OS MasterMap continually and then provides regular updates for their customers, SNH included, to upload to their own databases. Due to the volume of data involved these updates can be very complicated and time consuming to process, especially when dealing with a holding of data at a national level.

In 2009 SNH upgraded our desktop GIS software (the tools used to analyse geographic data) and at this point we discovered some compatibility issues between the data translation tools we use to process OS MasterMap, our underlying database software and the new desktop GIS tools. This resulted in a protracted process to upgrade these different software tiers to ensure full compatibility. Subsequent quality assurance checks also highlighted issues when it came to extracting data from the SNH database to analyse for the N3 indicator.

Each of these issues has occurred sequentially and taken significant time to investigate, resolve and then test. As a stop gap we established a new and separate test environment which allowed us to upload the 2010 OS MasterMap data and prepare the analysis for the N3 indicator. We are now nearing the completion of a project to fully refresh our corporate GIS infrastructure and bringing the indicator up to date (i.e. analysing 2012 data) is dependent on the completion of this project. The indicator based on 2012 data will be published before 30th November of this year.

I hope this provides the Committee with the necessary information. If anything is not clear or you require further details I would of course be happy to provide this.

Yours sincerely

Ian Jardine