



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

PUBLIC PETITION NO.

PE01826

Name of petitioner

Catherine Cooper

Petition title

Introduce a new national emblem of Scotland

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to facilitate a national conversation to identify, and adopt, an additional official emblem for Scotland.

Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition

The petition brief was submitted to Mid Scotland and Fife representative MSP's (Keith Brown, Liz Smith, Murdo Fraser, Claire Baker, Dean Lockhart, Mark Ruskell, Alexander Stewart and Alex Rowley) for feedback and/or comment.

Replies were received from Murdo Fraser, Alex Rowley and Keith Brown - none of which raised objections.

Petition background information

The new emblem will ideally complement the existing use of the unicorn and thistle (both of which have historical significance); be synonymous with the values engraved on the Scottish Parliamentary mace (wisdom, justice, compassion and integrity) and be representative of present (and future) Scottish society. This activity will provide an opportunity for ordinary people to shape the society they wish to reside in and promote wider engagement in policy making across the country.

The Thistle and The Unicorn

The two most widely recognised emblems of Scotland are the thistle and the unicorn which were introduced in the 13th and 15th century respectively by the reigning monarchs at the time (Alexander III and James I). They are both associated with protection during battle and, although the reason for the choice of the unicorn as our national animal seems to have been lost over time, have been a source of pride ever since. Interestingly, although Scotland is not the only country to have adopted a mythical creature as its national animal, we are one of the few countries that has not vet

added a second living creature into the mix – one that is more representative of the society we live in today.

Whilst the primary symbolism of the unicorn - that of purity and power - is still relevant today there is no doubt that it is a symbol of a bygone age. Adopted as an emblem at a time when Scotland was operating as a monarchy and steeped in myth and folklore. A situation far different from today where the crown plays a much smaller role in society and stories of mythical beasts, witches and faeries are treated with scepticism and a distinct lack of respect.

As one local historian said to me recently

“150 years ago you would have been considered strange in Scotland if you didn’t believe in mythical beasts and faeries; now the opposite is definitely true”.

The sad fact is that common creatures of Scottish folklore – the unicorns, kelpies, faeries and leprechauns that entertained myself and many like me as a child (Robert Louis Stevenson included) – have been consigned to fantasy by all but the most imaginative individuals. We need a new emblem for our modern age.

But why bother and why now?

Scotland’s society is at a turning point. During the tragic first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic we learnt valuable lessons about the importance of community but also about how fragile the bonds between neighbours can be. Consequently, it is vital that we kickstart a campaign to unite us.

We cannot neglect the underlying social issues that are currently consuming so many of our resources. The level of homelessness in the country is rising; child neglect and poverty are reaching crisis point; drug misuse is on the increase and mental well-being is at an all-time low. The view from the street is not good. Although everyone is keen to point fingers and assign blame, we need to recognise that we have all had a part to play in letting this situation develop and take personal responsibility for turning it around. We need to take ownership. Now. Before our services fail.

Ordinary people are the strength in nations.

The Scottish parliament can only do so much to change this without the support of the people. We need to ask the people of Scotland to pull together to turn our society around. The level of debate stimulated at the time of the 2014 referendum in Scotland demonstrated that the people are extremely passionate about the state of the nation when activated but, unfortunately, events that have occurred since then have led many to once again become passive. The sad fact is that, whilst the constitutional debate continues in parliamentary circles, most people in Scotland have moved on – becoming disinterested at a crucial point in our society’s development.

Consequently, this is an ideal time for us to come together and discuss, as a nation, the sort of society we want to live in going forward and, in doing so, identify solutions to our current issues. A debate about a new national emblem will allow us to do this.

“National symbols deserve respect not because they are static representations of unchanging ideals, but because they offer a focal point for diverse societies to express and navigate what it is that unites and represents them. It is precisely because they carry meaning, values and ideals that national symbols are important spaces for debate and transformation.”

The Emotional Attachment of National Symbols, Cynthia Miller-Idriss writing in the New York Times, September 2016

Unique web address

<https://www.parliament.scot/GettingInvolved/Petitions/NewEmblemOfScotland>

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?

0

Closing date for collecting signatures online

21 / 10 / 2020

Comments to stimulate online discussion

Call for new emblem of Scotland

Nations around the world choose emblems to represent such things. Scotland's emblems include the unicorn and the thistle but both of these reflect back to the past rather than looking to the future. I think it is time to add another, living, creature to the mix. What would you choose and why?