

Ministear airson na h-Àrainneachd agus Atharrachadh Aimsir
Minister for Environment and Climate Change
Paul Wheelhouse BPA/MSP

F/T: 0845 774 1741
E: scottish.ministers@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

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



5 February 2013

Dear David

PETITION PE1383: John Muir Trust petition seeking a new environmental designation to protect the best areas of wild land

I am writing to update the Committee on the Scottish Government's response to Petition PE1383. I am aware the Committee has deferred further consideration of the Petition pending the completion of SNH's work on mapping areas of wild land character. I also understand that the clerks to the Committee have been in touch with SNH about its work and have been advised that SNH are in discussion with Scottish Government officials about next steps.

I am therefore writing now to let you know my views on both the petition's request for a new designation for wild land and on SNH's wild land mapping work.

First, I am not persuaded that there is a case for a new statutory designation for 'wild land' for a number of reasons:

- There are already two types of protected areas with a specific landscape focus – National Scenic Areas and National Parks. These cover almost 20% of Scotland's land area.
- The Scottish Government agrees that there is a need to protect sensitive areas valued for their wild land character. Scottish Planning Policy states that planning authorities should safeguard the character of such areas in development plans, and that they should prepare spatial frameworks for onshore wind which identify both areas of search for wind farms and areas requiring significant protection.
- The National Planning Framework Monitoring Report published in March 2012 concluded that onshore wind farm development "has not physically impinged on habitats or landscapes safeguarded by designations to any significant extent."

The Scottish Government is committed to facilitating the transition to a low carbon economy and we are aware that much of the debate about landscape and wild land relates to wind energy. The deployment of onshore wind farms is an important part of our strategy for achieving long-term energy security and protecting Scotland's environment. Planning authorities have a key role to play in this.

In September 2012, the Minister for Local Government and Planning announced to Parliament reviews of the National Planning Framework (NPF) and Scottish Planning Policy (SPP).

The protection of landscapes and wild land is clearly one of the key issues to be addressed and SNH's mapping work will be very useful in these reviews. SNH's work in measuring and mapping the attributes of wildness, and producing and consulting earlier in 2012 on a map of relative wildness across all of Scotland, will inform our approach.

We intend to consult upon both a draft Scottish Planning Policy and Main Issues Report for the Third National Planning Framework in March this year. The question of the appropriate policy approach to wild land is one on which we will be very keen to hear views as part of this consultation.

I hope that this update is helpful to the Committee. I am copying this letter to Andrew Thin, chair SNH.

PAUL WHEELHOUSE