

**PE1751/H**

Petitioner submission of 20 August 2020

## **Dirty Camping and the North of Scotland**

**Topline:** Uncontrolled “car camping” is having a significant impact on the economy, environment and people of the North Highlands. Existing legislation is not being enforced or followed. Whilst this paper centres specifically on the North Highlands, the problem exists throughout Scotland.

My initial petition used the term “wild camping”, this caused considerable controversy. It was not the intention of the petition to impact on hillwalkers or mountaineers who camp in the wild.

Over the last two months the North Highlands have seen an exponential increase in campers, having a significant negative effect on the environment and the people and in some places, on the economy. These visitors are, to use a north American term, “car camping”. Parking close to a road or in a layby or passing place and staying for the night. This is causing problems, in terms of the public health implications of poor hygiene practises during a pandemic and to the environment.

This paper is to update the committee on the issues, compounded by the Covid19 pandemic and to emphasise the point that current legislation is not effective.

I summarise below the main issues that are being experienced. I note that I have used bullet points and am unable to explain each as fully as I would like.

### **Economy**

- Universal benefit from tourism in the Highlands is a myth
- No independent, all encompassing, economic study done – in contrast to other European countries who’ve used it basis for visitor management plans
- Volunteers are cleaning up the majority of the mess at present
- Loss of income to companies as it has now become the “fashion” to camp outwith regulated sites.
- Some facilities are closed this season - unable to cope with demand and keep visitors safe.

The creation of enforceable camping zones, with quality infrastructure and services for visitors and locals has been a net benefit to remote rural economies throughout Europe.

### **Environment**

#### **Local**

- Increased general rubbish and recycling is a significant problem
- Refuse teams drive hundreds of miles a day to collect and dispose

- Poor hygiene at existing bin sites - spread of covid-19.

Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC) is clear on litter and rubbish. Legislation is not being followed and Police do not have the resources to enforce.

### **Damage to SSSI / Machair / Protected Species / Historic Sites**

- Plant and tree life being burned, chopped down, driven over or defecated on.
- Includes SSSIs and nature reserves.
- Camping at historic sites common

SOAC and other legislation prohibits camping in the locations named. Legislation is not being followed or enforced.

### **Macro**

- The Scottish Government declared a climate emergency in 2019 – why encourage motorised tourism?

The purpose of this petition is not to stop people from traveling to visit destinations in Scotland, but to control uncontrolled camping.

### **People**

#### **Public Health**

- Covid19 spread by body fluid, outside toileting / bathing happening in public places.
- Grey water being discharged in water courses or in villages.
- Impossible to track and trace
- Private water supplies polluted by human waste
- Public sector workers and private contractors working outside where there is human waste

SOAC and other legislation exists to prohibit the pollution of water courses. It is not being followed by all and is not enforced.

#### **Infrastructure**

- Adequate infrastructure doesn't exist to cater for visitors in large numbers in remote rural Scotland.
- Roads, gates, paths and bridges are seeing increased wear and tear; no opportunity to raise the additional revenue required to keep it in good order.

Solution to the issue of dirty camping must include income generation to ensure benefit from visitors - lifeline roads need to be maintained to a quality standard.

#### **Law Enforcement**

- Police do not have the resources to enforce legislation.
- Suggestion that PF is unwilling to prosecute
- Policing by consent not working

It is hard to believe that people genuinely don't know that putting a hot disposable barbeque in a plastic bin will start a fire, or that urinating in a driveway of a home is acceptable, or that leaving used sanitary towels lying in a carpark is a responsible thing to do.

### **Impact on agriculture / aquaculture**

- Land and animals affected by pollution and fire damage.
- Pest control impossible if campers on land.
- Biosecurity impossible to control.
- Access to land for harvesting or other works difficult.

Creating zones and enforcing legislation would ensure that communities could create zones around the land which they use to make a livelihood, ensuring the safety of their animals or crops.

SOAC does give rules about camping near or on agricultural sites. It is neither followed by some or enforced.

### **Community Services**

- Graveyard camping common including defecating there. Playparks, carparks (which hosts the mobile bank) and war memorials used as campsites.
- Recreation is being severely negatively impacted

### **Link to Academic Paper:**

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341757985 Case Study 3 Overtourism on Scotland's North Coast 500 Issues and Potential Solutions](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341757985_Case_Study_3_Overtourism_on_Scotland's_North_Coast_500_Issues_and_Potential_Solutions)

### **Research Project gathering evidence of environmental destruction:**

Facebook Group: "NC500 The Land Weeps"