

PE1720/I

Petitioner submission of 17 September 2019

It seems that people in Scotland at risk of having their farms, businesses and homes flooded will be dependent upon the use of JCBs to reduce it rather than trees and beavers. That's really the conclusion to be made from the various responses made to petition PE1720 which called for a full on Natural Flood Alleviation Strategy for Scotland - principally wide scale landscape restoration involving tree planting, addition to woody debris in rivers and eventual translocation of beavers. The majority of this would occur in upland areas with poor agricultural productivity which often receive public subsidy - the greatest potential to reduce flooding with naturalistic methods happily occurs in areas of least conflict with genuinely economic activities. In fact at present taxpayers subsidize having their properties being at higher flood risk! This is why the petition was set up to encourage the full and desperately needed restoration of ecological processes in upland watersheds which at the moment is only happening very slowly and in a piecemeal fashion if at all. That means that purely for political reasons future flood damage and human misery associated with it, up to and including mortality, will be higher than they had to be. This is why the initial sentence made a reference to JCBs, the Eddlestone project used them as part of its work in reducing flood risk.

In a similar fashion the flood prevention work in Belford, Northumbria and Hardcastle Crags, Yorkshire have experimented with the creation of man made 'leaky' dams to replicate those created by beavers. These projects have all shown promise, but depend upon a level of effort and expense that would take a very long time and public money to replicate (and maintain) across the full watersheds where they are needed. SLE and NFU Scotland need to furnish us with figures on how much more will it cost, how much longer it will take to deliver effective natural flood alleviation without proper ecological restoration including the return of a healthy beaver population. There are thousands of miles of stream and river bank where they are needed. Not only did both of these organisations show a contemptible indifference to the public interest, the massive financial and human cost of flooding to people who contribute the subsidies their members receive, they've shown straight forward economic incompetence too. Higher quality low lying agricultural land is susceptible to flooding as are villages, towns and cities. I have been a farm worker and witnessed the inundation of extensive areas of farmland, livestock at risk from drowning and the disruption and soil loss caused - beavers certainly weren't responsible for that, but in Scotland their presence mainly in higher areas would mean less of it downstream. The hyped up damage beavers supposedly cause to agricultural land is probably only a fraction of the money saved by their actions upstream - IF WE ALLOW ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION OF WATERSHEDS. SLE and NFU Scotland not only showed a morally contemptible lack of concern for those who have been and will be affected by floods, they've demonstrated logical incompetence too. They aren't even serving their own members interests well.

It was also interesting to note that the possibility of tree planting and beaver dams to create fire breaks in our increasingly fire prone uplands was avoided. The same can be said for the point that pulling back from farming right to the water's edge would not only significantly reduce supposed conflict with beavers it would also reduce the speed of water run off from fields and thereby flood risk, cut the amount of

soil/sediment entering waterways which is especially important for protecting fish stocks, and act as a buffer for farm chemicals getting into the water supply. Is the application of this going to be left to the voluntary participation of the farming community, or be pushed officially up to and including mandatory creation of 'rewilded' strips between farms and watercourses? I believe the second option is the required one given the public interest especially since we are subsidizing the farming community and currently throw away a third of our food. Only selfish and ignorant farming would ignore the need to return riparian areas to nature and that should not dominate this debate - we need to see farming organisations show concern for others - in this case for people whose homes (not fields!) get flooded.

Similarly the Scottish Government's statement that a separate natural flood alleviation strategy would conflict with a 'holistic' one involving engineered features is idiotic. It wouldn't, it would allow the full development of naturalistic methods over the full area in which they could be used on grouse moors, deer stalking estates and upland sheep farms - economically and morally a step forward. For instance what are the plans for identifying areas of grouse moor where tree planting and eventual translocation of beavers would help reduce flooding of good farmland, homes and businesses downstream? If this is not already being considered then it shows the need for a Natural Flood Alleviation Strategy. Any grouse moor owners who feel that maintaining high grouse bags is more important than reducing the number of families who lose their homes to flooding should have public subsidy withheld, these subsidies should be getting used to cut flooding and human misery.

In a country where people die because they run an unnecessarily high risk of serious and fatal road accidents involving collision with a grossly inflated red deer population thanks to 'sporting' estates it's no great surprise that yet again the seriously flawed arguments of vested interests seem to be given preferential treatment over the public interest. However, this time it's a matter of record and any further delay in implementing the full naturally based anti flood strategy this country needs due to political rather than legitimate concerns will mean accounting to the public why the next flood caused more damage and human misery than it had to.