

# How to... Lobby Your MSPs

## Friends of the Earth Scotland supporter guide

“Lobbying” just means talking to a politician to try to get them to take action on an issue. It’s easy and probably a lot less scary than you imagine, but it’s one of the most powerful things you can do to achieve policies and laws that protect our future.

You don’t have to be expert to make a big difference by lobbying your local Members of the Scottish Parliament. To help you make the most of a meeting with your MSP, this guide sets out:

- How to decide who to lobby
- How to arrange a meeting
- How to prepare for your meeting
- What to do during your meeting
- What to do after your meeting

## 5 top tips for lobbying your MSP

1. If you’re nervous, find a friend or others in your group to join your MSP meeting
2. Prepare three key points you want to get across, and one thing you want your MSP to do
3. Find out about what motivates your MSP to work out how best to engage with them
4. Follow up after the meeting with an email or letter
5. Remember it’s their job to listen to you and they want your vote in the next election!

## Who to lobby

Each person in Scotland is represented by *eight* MSPs – one for your local constituency and seven covering your wider region. You can find out who your MSPs are by entering your postcode at [bit.ly/MSPFinder](https://bit.ly/MSPFinder).

You’re entitled to lobby any or all of your MSPs. Assuming you don’t have time to arrange meetings with them all, your first task is to decide which of your MSP (or MSPs) will be most useful for your campaign.

To help you make that decision, learn a little about each of your MSPs using some of the tips in the *Researching your MSP* section below. You might choose to meet:

- An MSP who you think is likely to be **enthusiastic**, if you need a champion to take your issue forward in Parliament;
- Or an MSP who you think is **undecided or persuadable**, especially if there’s a decision coming up and you might be able to influence their vote;
- Or an MSP who has **particular influence** on your campaign issue: for example, a party spokesperson on the topic, a government minister, or a member of the relevant Scottish Parliament committee.

## Arranging your meeting

To arrange your meeting, you can contact the MSP by email, post, or phone – you'll find all of these details on the Scottish Parliament website ([bit.ly/CurrentMSPs](https://bit.ly/CurrentMSPs)).

When you ask for a meeting, it's best to give as much information as you can, so: say what the meeting is about, say how many people will be attending (if you're bringing anyone else with you), and tell them in advance if you will want them to take part in photograph or other publicity. If you are lobbying on behalf of a local Friends of the Earth Scotland group, let them know that too.

If you can, give your MSP some options of times and dates that would be convenient for you (but bear in mind you may need to work around their diary).

Include your contact details, and especially your address – your MSP will want to check that you do live in their constituency.

### Where and when?

Most MSPs will be happy to meet you either in their constituency – at their local office or at a public place like a library – or at the Scottish Parliament, so choose which is most convenient for you. When Parliament is in session, MSPs are usually in Edinburgh from Tuesday to Thursday, and working in their own area on Mondays and Fridays.

It's not uncommon for MSPs to take meetings at the weekend if necessary, and it's usually at the weekend that they hold public surgeries. Check your MSP's website for any upcoming surgeries in your area, as this could be a good time to make your appointment.

### What if they say no?

Most MSPs will be happy to meet you – it's an important part of their job!

If they do say no, it might be because they are opposed to your campaign (in which case meeting them probably wouldn't have been very useful anyway), but much more likely it's because their diary is too full – especially if they are a party leader or government minister.

If you can't arrange a meeting right away:

- Ask if there's a better time in the future, when their diary will be less busy.
- Ask if you can brief them in writing instead – most of the tips below apply equally to a written briefing. Contact Friends of the Earth Scotland for resources or help writing your briefing.
- Ask if there's another MSP they would recommend meeting instead.
- Make a note in your diary to go back and ask for a meeting again in a few weeks.

## Preparing for your meeting

You don't need to be an expert to lobby your MSP, but you will feel more confident if you've got your head around the main points of the issue.

If your MSP wants detailed technical information, you can always send them sources for that after the meeting. The most important thing is that you decide on **three main points** you want to make, and at least **one thing** you want your MSP to actually do.

## Researching your MSP

Learning as much as you can about the MSP you're meeting will help you work out what aspects of your campaign will be most persuasive, and what they might be able to do to help you win.

There's a huge amount of publicly-available information about your MSP, including a record of everything they've said and done in Parliament. Some of the best sources of information are the Scottish Parliament website ([bit.ly/CurrentMSPs](http://bit.ly/CurrentMSPs)), They Work For You ([theyworkforyou.com/msps](http://theyworkforyou.com/msps)), and the MSP's article on Wikipedia.

Useful things to look out for include:

- Are they a government minister, or an opposition spokesperson for a particular issue?
- Are they a member of a Parliamentary Committee that has influence over your issue?
- What are their political interests – what issues do they focus on?
- Have they said or done anything on your issue before?
- What's their position, or their party's position, on your issue?

See the annex at the end of this guide for tips on how to search and use all the information about your MSP that you can find on the Scottish Parliament website.

## Researching the issue and planning your strategy

If your meeting is part of a Friends of the Earth Scotland campaign, there will often be a briefing specially designed for lobbying your MSP. Even if it's not, there's a good chance you'll find information about your issue on our website – check our Resources library at [foe.scot/resource](http://foe.scot/resource), or contact us for help.

Knowing which points you want to get across in your meeting is much more important than having a huge collection of facts and figures. Have a think in advance about:

- What exactly are you asking your MSP to do?
- What will the MSP need to know to understand what you're asking for?
- What points will be most persuasive?
- What are the most likely questions they might ask?

MSPs can help advance your campaign in lots of ways, including (but not limited to!) asking Parliamentary Questions, proposing a Motion, signing a Motion another MSP has proposed, making a speech in a debate, writing to a Minister, writing to a government agency or local council, or taking part in publicity. Think about which of these would be most useful for your campaign.

Your research will help you decide which of your points will be most persuasive – think about the MSP's party, their political interests, and the priorities of their constituency or region.

Your MSP will certainly ask you questions about the campaign, so prepare if you can for the most predictable ones. But remember you are meeting them as a constituent, not as an expert, so it's not a problem if you can't answer any of their questions straight away – you can always get back to them with an answer after the meeting.

Before your meeting, make a note for yourself of the **three main points** you want to make and the **one thing** you want your MSP to do. Even if that's all you get across in your meeting, you'll have done a great job!

## During your meeting

If you've prepared well, your meeting should be easy!

A meeting with your MSP isn't a Parliamentary debate – the vast majority of MSPs will be welcoming, friendly and will genuinely listen (even if they don't end up agreeing with you). You should do the same – be honest about your disagreements, but it's rarely helpful to be aggressive or confrontational.

Your MSP will normally start by giving you time to explain what you've come to talk about. You can use this time to give a little background (your research will help you judge how much understanding the MSP already has), set out the problem and the solutions you want, and tell the MSP how they can help.

Remember your **three main points** and the **one thing** you want your MSP to do, and try and cover all three in your opening explanation.

In the rest of the conversation, the MSP is likely to want to:

- Tell you what they or their party thinks and/or has already done on the issue;
- Ask questions about the issue, and/or about the parliamentary business and government policies that relate to it;
- Ask what they can do to help, or make their own suggestions of what they could do;
- Sometimes, make suggestions of other things you could do, or other people to talk to.

Don't be afraid to ask your own questions of your MSP. For example, they might be able to tell you:

- What their own party and other parties think about your issue;
- What opportunities are coming up in Parliament for you to influence debate or policy;
- Who the most influential people on your issue are, and the best way to approach them.

Take notes during your meeting! Make a note of your MSP's views and any helpful information they give you. It's especially important to write down anything they promise to do for you, and anything you say you'll do (for example, looking up the answers to any questions you can't answer straight away).

If you want to do any publicity about your meeting, ask your MSP for a photo with you (and your group, if you've brought them), and for a supportive quote from them that you can use in a press release.

Before you finish the meeting, make sure to repeat your **three main points** and the **one thing** you want your MSP to do, and recap anything else the MSP agreed to do during the meeting.

## After your meeting

Go over your notes, and identify any questions you offered to answer, information you offered to provide, or ideas that came up for other actions you could take. Also, make a list of any actions the MSP promised to take.

If you can, please share your notes with the Friends of the Earth Scotland Parliamentary Officer Gary Dunion ([gdunion@foe.scot](mailto:gdunion@foe.scot)) and your local FoES group (if you have one) – your information will help other people who are working on the same campaign lobby their MSPs more effectively.

If you have the time, and feel confident, you can research any unanswered questions your MSP had. But don't be afraid to ask the Friends of the Earth Scotland office for help – we can provide answers to most questions, and can either write to the MSP on your behalf or send the answers to you to pass on, whichever you prefer.

If you choose to do any publicity, let your MSP's office have a copy of any photographs, blog posts, social media posts or press releases as soon as possible – they may be able to extend your reach by putting these on their own website or social media, or issuing their own press release.

It's always a good idea to email or write to your MSP after your meeting – this will help make sure any actions you agreed actually happen, and will help build your relationship with your MSP for the next time you need to speak to them.

In your letter:

- Thank them for the meeting
- Recap your main points
- Answer any questions that you said you'd get back to them about (or tell them that FoES will be in touch with an answer)
- Provide any documents or other information that you discussed (or links to them if they're online)
- Let them know the outcome of your publicity (if you chose to do any) – send them links or cuttings of any local media stories about the meeting, links to blog posts, and copies of photographs.
- Remind them of any actions they agreed to take, and ask them to contact you to tell you what the outcome was once they're done

## Ask for help!

Lobbying your local representative isn't hard, but it can be daunting – especially if you've never done it before. So don't be afraid to ask for help!

If you have any questions at all, or just want some general advice, please contact our Parliamentary Officer, Gary Dunion, on 0131 243 2700 or at [gdunion@foe.scot](mailto:gdunion@foe.scot).

## Annex – Researching your MSPs

Learning as much as you can about your MSPs before your meeting will help you choose which MSPs to lobby, work out how sympathetic they might be, and decide which of your arguments are likely to be most persuasive.

Some of the most useful things to find out are:

- Are they a government minister, or an opposition spokesperson for a particular issue?
- Are they a member of a Parliamentary Committee that has influence over your issue?
- What are their political interests – what issues do they focus on?
- Have they said or done anything on your issue before?
- What's their position, or their party's position on the issue?
- What do you know about their life outside politics? What did they do before they were a politician?
- What's the local angle? What are the big issues in their constituency or region?

You can get most of this information from your MSPs' pages on the Scottish Parliament website ([bit.ly/CurrentMSPs](https://bit.ly/CurrentMSPs)), their Wikipedia entry, or their record on They Work For You ([theyworkforyou.com/msps](https://theyworkforyou.com/msps)).

### Minister, Spokesperson and Committee roles

The 'Political Activities' section on an MSP's page on the Scottish Parliament website will tell you if they are a government minister, a Parliamentary Liaison Officer (an assistant to a Minister), or an opposition party spokesperson for a particular issue, as will the Scottish Parliament factsheet *Ministers, Law Officers and Parliamentary Liaison Officers* ([bit.ly/SPICeMSPs](https://bit.ly/SPICeMSPs)).

Ministers tend to have fuller diaries and might be trickier to get a meeting with, but they are still ordinary MSPs and have a duty to represent their constituents – so don't assume they won't meet you – and of course a minister or opposition spokesperson for a relevant issue can be particularly influential.

Every MSP (except Ministers and party leaders) is a member of one or more Parliamentary Committees. These are a powerful part of the Holyrood system, tasked with scrutinising important issues and Government actions, and making detailed amendments to legislation. Meeting an MSP who is a member of a relevant committee could be particularly helpful, especially if your issue is part of that Committee's upcoming business.

Committee membership is listed on each MSP's page on the Parliament website, and you can see each Committee's full membership, current business and upcoming work programme at [bit.ly/SPCttees](https://bit.ly/SPCttees).

### Your MSP's activity in Parliament

Two Scottish Parliament search facilities can help you find out what your MSP has been working on:

- The **Official Report search** ([bit.ly/ORSearch](https://bit.ly/ORSearch)) will show you your MSP's speeches in the Parliament Chamber and in Committee meetings. You can search by keywords to see whether they have spoken on your issue before.

- The **Motions, Questions and Answers search** ([bit.ly/MQASearch](https://bit.ly/MQASearch)) will show you whether your MSP tabled any motions on your issue, or asked any formal Parliamentary Questions (or, if they are a Minister, answered any) about it.

Your MSP's own website and social media accounts are also good sources of information on their political views and priorities. You'll find links for these on the MSP's page on the Parliament website.

As well as Committees, your MSP is likely to be a member of several Cross-Party Groups. These are semi-formal groups for MSPs to meet regularly with stakeholders and experts on a particular subject. An MSP who is a member of a CPG is likely to have at least some interest in that subject, especially if they are the Convenor of the group. You'll find CPG memberships listed on each MSP's page on the Parliament website, and a full list of CPGs at [bit.ly/ScotParlCPGs](https://bit.ly/ScotParlCPGs).

If your MSP hasn't given their view on an issue before, it's worth finding out if their party has a policy on it. Use the Official Report search to find any recent debates on the issue and see what the party's spokespeople had to say.

## Outside Parliament

Looking up your MSP's biography on the Scottish Parliament website, on Wikipedia, or on their own website can often give you an insight into their areas of expertise and interest.

It's also worth considering the area they represent – think about what the big issues facing your constituency or region are, and how the issue you are lobbying on affects the area directly or indirectly.