

Women suffer divorce inequality over land

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A petition has been lodged with the European Parliament demanding equal rights to land for women in divorce cases.

The petitioner, Yorkshire farmer Patricia Mallaby has taken action following her experiences of England's divorce laws. At present the law is prejudiced against female partners in land-based business break-ups that result from divorce proceedings.

When normal businesses are dissolved commercial law gives equal rights to all partners in land-based assets. But the petition argues that courts habitually use discretionary powers to deprive the female partner of such rights. In divorce cases the law treats the parties as matrimonial partners first and business partners second. Matrimonial and family law says the man gets to keep land.

Mallaby recently launched the Scottish-based organisation ***Women's Land Reform Group***.

"It was through fighting our cases to retain ownership of our farms that we discovered a covert, sexist land policy in the UK," Mallaby reveals, adding: *"Women cannot find legal advice or representation to safeguard their business assets. Courts routinely, but unlawfully, intervene in business partnership dissolutions and dispossess women."*

Mallaby's petition is supported by her Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Neil MacCormack, who said: *"My understanding of the case is that the law of England at the moment effectively discriminates against women in their role as economic actors and participants in enterprise."* He believes this is an example of gender discrimination prohibited by European Treaties.

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