

Ref: 20231114RAI

14 November 2023



Finlay Carson MSP
Convenor of the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Dear Convenor,

DECISION TO IMPOSE A FULL BAN SNARES AND CABLE RESTRAINTS – LETTER TO THE MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

On 09 November 2023, Scottish Land & Estates wrote to the Minister for the Environment, Gillian Martin MSP, to express our profound disappointment in the decision to bring forward an outright ban on the use of snares and cable restraints with no licensing scheme for any purpose.

I have appended the letter to this correspondence for the reference of the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee. In particular, I'd like to draw the committee's attention to the speed with which the decision to ban snares and cable restraints was made following the evidence session with stakeholders of 08 November.

As noted in our letter to the Minister, we do not think it unreasonable to suggest that any meaningful consideration of the evidence we and others gave to your committee, particularly at the Ministerial level, would take longer than 24 hours. Perhaps this is something you could explore with the Minister at her next appearance before the committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to give oral evidence to the committee last week.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'RE' followed by a flourish.

Ross Ewing
Director of Moorland
Scottish Land & Estates

09 November 2023

Gillian Martin MSP
Minister for Energy and the Environment
St Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG



Dear Minister,

DECISION TO IMPOSE A FULL BAN SNARES AND CABLE RESTRAINTS

I write in response to your letter of 09 November, in which you state that you have considered our proposal to retain humane cable restraints (HCRs) under licence and have decided to impose a full ban with no licensing scheme for any purpose.

Today is a dark day for biodiversity, wildlife and rural livelihoods. It is difficult for me to articulate the anger and disappointment that will reverberate through Scotland's land management community on the back of this decision. In less than a year, this government has taken steps to systematically decimate the toolkit for fox control – first by curtailing the ability to use dogs to flush foxes; and now bringing forward an outright ban on the use of snares and HCRs. To do so at a time where biodiversity is hanging in the balance is unconscionable, and it is Scotland's most threatened, iconic species that will suffer as a result.

Meanwhile the red fox range continues to increase with woodland expansion, and with-it predation pressure which – as successive scientific studies have demonstrated – poses an existential threat to species including lapwing, capercaillie, golden plover, curlew, meadow pipit, merlin, snipe and hen harrier.

Perhaps what is most exasperating, however, is the timing of this decision – which comes just 24 hours after representatives of Scotland's land management community gave evidence to the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee on the subject. It is not unreasonable to suggest that any meaningful consideration of that evidence at the Ministerial level would take longer, and it rather feels like yesterday's evidence session was a meaningless exercise. It is especially frustrating given the time, effort and preparation that goes into engaging with the democratic process.

On the evening before yesterday's evidence session, you stated the following on behalf of the Scottish Government during Finlay Carson's members' debate on the contribution of rural estates to Scotland's wellbeing economy:

"I'll continue to work with Scottish Land & Estates as a key delivery for the Scottish Government, ensuring that we'll work together, improve the outcomes of the people and communities of rural Scotland, and drive forward this government's vision for the wellbeing economy." – Gillian Martin MSP, 07 November 2023

The way in which this decision has been made does not make us feel like "a key delivery partner", nor will it deliver better outcomes for "the people and communities of rural Scotland". On the contrary, this decision will do precisely the opposite, with irreparable implications for wildlife and biodiversity. Our members are at the forefront of efforts to tackle the nature emergency – how do you expect them to manage predation by foxes where shooting is not possible?

Our confidence in this government's ability to make decisions that serve the interests of rural Scotland is depleting. We sincerely hope that, as the Bill approaches stage 2, you will be minded to listen to representations grounded in evidence, rather than those driven by ideology. I am sharing a copy of this correspondence with the Convenor of the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'RE' followed by a flourish.

Ross Ewing
Director of Moorland
Scottish Land & Estates