

Finlay Carson
Convener
Rural Affairs and Islands
Committee

May 2023

Dear Convener,

Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Bill

Below is further information regarding general licences and wildlife crime; and muirburn licences in response to questions from Mercedes Villalba and Rachael Hamilton raised during the informal session with Scottish Government officials on 29 March 2023.

Mercedes Villalba asked for a breakdown of the approximately 5000 licences that NatureScot process annually.

- Annex A contains a breakdown of these licences.

Mercedes Villalba also asked for an estimate of how many additional licence applications we think will be submitted following the implementation of the Bill.

- These estimates can be found in detail in the financial memorandum in points 71-85: [Financial Memorandum accessible \(parliament.scot\)](#)

Rachael Hamilton asked how many muirburn licence applications will fall within the definition of peatland.

- We cannot provide an accurate answer to the question on how many muirburn licence applications will be to burn on peatland. This is because currently there is no requirement on landowners or practitioners to provide details on any muirburn being conducted within the muirburn season. We have estimated, as set out in the Financial Memorandum accompanying the bill, that there may be somewhere in the region of 500 applications for muirburn.
- Utilising satellite imagery of burn sites in Scotland, NatureScot has estimated that an average of approximately 10,000 hectares has been burnt annually over the last three years and that there is proportionally more burning in the north and west than the

south, east or central and west. This dataset has a number of limitations but provides an estimate of the amount of muirburn taking place in Scotland.

- The depth of peat deposit can vary within small areas because at a micro and local scale soils are not homogenous. The presence of peat soils are an indicator of current or past presence of a peat forming community on site (e.g. peatland and sphagnum moss). But the presence of a peatland habitats does not provide any indication on the likely depth of peat.
- At regional level and national scale, major differences due to climatic variation will impact on the dynamics of peat formation by changing the dynamics of relation between habitats and soils formation processes. As a general rule there tends to more areas covered with peat and peaty soils in the north and the west than in the south and the east. This is the area more associated with crofting and upland farming than it is with grouse moors.

Rachael Hamilton also asked if we could provide the evidence we had used to determine our proposals to ban muirburn on peatland more than 40cm thick.

- The evidence we had used to determine our proposals to ban muirburn on peatland >40cm thick can be found in the muirburn section of the Policy Memorandum accompanying the Bill: [Policy Memorandum accessible \(parliament.scot\)](#)
- The 'Concerns' section (points 152 – 161) within the wider muirburn section provides information on the evidence utilised for our proposals within the Bill. Sections 196-202 contain our justification for proposing 40cm as the threshold for the thickness of peat on which muirburn cannot take place.

Annex A – Licences Issued by NatureScot in 2022-23

Offline licences

Licence type	Number
Survey	310
Works affecting bats	302
Raptor study group bird survey	184
Raven - preventing serious damage	172
Bird health and safety	114
Badger	84
Bat Ecologist	66
Works affecting otters	62
Bats in dwelling houses exclusion	61
Multiple species	55
Brown hare closed season	54
Bird photography	39
Works affecting water vole	31
Mountain Hare	27
Pink-footed Goose	20
Bird science and research project	19
European Protected Species possession	18
Bird Survey	16
Gull Serious Damage	11
Non-native Plant Release	10
Beaver	9
Channa (fish)	9
Works affecting pine marten	9
Bird air safety	8
Falconry	7
Works affecting great crested newt	7
Feral Cat Trap Neuter Release	6
Shrew trapping	4
Works affecting Fresh Water Pearl Mussels	4
Barnacle Goose	3
Bluebell sale	3
Beaver Trap	2

Disabled bird keeping unringed	2
Pine marten non-dwelling house	2
Wildlife sale or taxidermy	2
Falconry holiday	1
Freshwater pearl mussel antique jewellery sale	1
Muirburn out of season	1
National Wildlife Crime Unit investigation	1
Plant survey	1
Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh plant survey	1
Wildcat science and research project	1
Total	1739

Online licences

Licence type	Number
Gull management	1952
Standard Forestry Operations	156
Trap Registrations	2130