Finlay Carson MSP

Convenor

Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee

By email: rural.committee@parliament.scot

30 June 2022



Dear Finlay,

Thank you for inviting OneKind to give evidence to the committee on 15 June, on the Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Bill, and also for the opportunity to provide this further written information. We hope it will be helpful to give some more details on how the principles for ethical wildlife control could be applied to the Bill.

Applying the principles for ethical wildlife control to the Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Bill



In both our written and oral evidence, we recommended applying the International Consensus Principles for Ethical Wildlife Control¹ to all wildlife management in Scotland, including the Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Bill. Here, we provide more detail on how the principles could be applied to the Bill.

The principles could be written into the conditions applied to each exception, and into the licensing application requirements. (As previously stated, we would prefer to see no exceptions to the Bill and find the exceptions for the management of foxes and mink below ground, and for falconry, game shooting and deer stalking, particularly worrying.)

¹ The Society for Conservation Biology (wiley.com)

Principle 1 First, modify human behaviour

This begins with a shift in mindset to a culture of coexistence with wild animals. Robbie Kernahan, NatureScot Director of Green Economy, spoke of incentivising people to live alongside wildlife and that aligns with this principle.

This principle then calls for those managing wildlife to "focus on how human behavior has affected the ecosystem and to address the root causes of conflict rather than only the problematic outcome."

For this Bill, it would mean attempting all possible mitigation measures before resorting to control measures. This includes, for example, protecting farmed animals. A Scottish Government report² found that, of farmers employing mitigation measures to prevent predation on sheep by foxes, 56% found moving sheep to be effective, 49% found deterrence to be effective, and 52% found additional fencing/barriers to be effective.

Importantly, mitigation measures other than those currently employed in this country should be considered, including those used in the past (e.g. closer shepherding), those used in other countries (e.g. livestock guardian animals), and novel methods and technologies resulting from ongoing research and innovation.

Principle 2 Justify control with evidence that substantial harm is being caused

In the case of conditions for the exceptions to the Bill, demonstration of this evidence would be required only at the request of authorities or if the legality of control actions came into question. For licensing, such evidence would be required as part of the application requirements.

The questions of what constitutes sufficient evidence, how it should be collected, and who is responsible for that, are important and should be determined by the licensing authority in consultation with those carrying out wildlife management and those with relevant expertise, including in animal welfare. For the latter, the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission, Wild Animal Welfare Committee, and the authors of the ethical principles provide a wealth of expertise and could advise.

This principle states that: "an objective evaluation of the effects of no control actions being undertaken should be conducted." Lethal control of various species, including foxes, has been routine and continuous for so long in Scotland, that undertaking such an evaluation is usually difficult and makes justifying the need for control more complicated. Landowners already employing less lethal control and different methods, and/or collecting data could help with such an evaluation. Although the circumstances may not be directly comparable, information could be drawn from them until a comprehensive evidence base is built up.

Principle 3 Set clear and achievable outcome-based objectives

The objectives should relate to the desired reduction of harm rather than simply reducing the number of a certain species. If using the exception in the Bill for "wildlife management"

² 2. Introduction and background - Sheep attacks and harassment: research - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

above ground", objectives should relate to a reduction in crop damage or lamb losses, for example, and there should be "sound evidence that the proposed methods can achieve the objectives." Currently, this does not always seem to be the case.

The results of any action taken should be monitored and adapted according to lessons learnt. So, if somebody has been killing foxes using dogs to flush to guns, without seeing any long-term reduction in the harm being caused, they would be required to try different approaches.

Principle 4 Prioritise animal welfare

Control methods should cause the least harm to the least number of animals. Anybody wishing to use dogs under one of the exceptions in the Bill would be required to demonstrate that no method with a lower animal welfare impact would be viable.

This requires a way to assess the relative welfare impacts of different methods. Such models exist³ and have recently been applied to rat control in the UK⁴, for example. We recommend that the Scottish Government explore the possibility for applying such assessment models to any wildlife management methods being used.

In the shorter term, the available evidence and advice from experts should be consulted to determine the relative animal welfare impacts of different methods.

As we said in oral evidence, if there are not enough ways to protect human interests that are both effective and humane, that is a problem that should be urgently addressed; it should not lead to continuation of the status quo.

The British Veterinary Association and British Veterinary Zoological Society recently wrote that: "It is paramount that additional research is carried out into the development of alternative methods for the exclusion and deterrence of wildlife, and more humane methods of killing."⁵

Principle 5 Assess the social acceptability

The authors of the ethical principles suggest a process of community engagement informed by the relevant science to help inform decision making. They also write that: "An ethical review process with proper governance and resources, similar to that used by animal ethics committees when assessing the acceptability of scientific research involving animals and people, could be a way to include scientific and technical expertise while ensuring community values inform decisions."

Following this suggestion for all wildlife management would improve transparency and communication and aid in the stated aim of the NatureScot Shared Approach to "help

³ humaneness-pest-animals.pdf (awe.gov.au)

⁴ An assessment of animal welfare impacts in wild Norway rat (Rattu...: Ingenta Connect

⁵ bva-and-bvzs-position-on-the-use-and-sale-of-snares.pdf

encourage people to understand the decisions, sometimes difficult, that need to be made in wildlife management."

More immediately, for this Bill, embedding these principles would provide some reassurance and clarity around the decision-making process and should therefore increase social acceptability.

Principle 6 Long term systematic planning

"Decisions to control wildlife should be integrated into a program of long-term systematic management. If control actions are used on an ad hoc basis without being integrated into a systematic, long-term management program, any benefit is likely to be short lived and control actions may be used repeatedly without achieving a sustainable solution. This is particularly problematic if control actions carry substantial animal welfare or other costs. For example, low-level culling of abundant or prolific animals can amount to senseless killing if populations rebound quickly."

This is the opening paragraph for the sixth principle, and unfortunately it seems that it could have been written specifically about predator control in Scotland.

Any licensing scheme for the use of more than two dogs must provide for such long-term planning, and guidance should be provided on how to do so for those using two dogs under the exceptions. This is likely to require information sharing and collaboration, to allow actions to be taken at a larger scale than individual landowners, which should be government led.

Principle 7 Avoid the use of labels

"Decisions to control wildlife should be based on the specifics of the situation, not negative labels applied to the target species." The use of terms such as "pest" makes it likely that those animals receive less welfare consideration, and broader approaches are often taken.

This principle provides a check that decisions are based on thorough analysis of the concerns and outcomes. "Wildlife control should not be undertaken just because a negatively labeled species is present."

We reiterate our recommendation to avoid the use of the word pest in discussions around this Bill.

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Yours sincerely,

Kirsty Jenkins

Policy Officer, OneKind

⁶ Wildlife Management: A Shared Approach - Concordat | NatureScot