



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

PUBLIC PETITION NO.

PE01615

Name of petitioner

Logan Steele on behalf of Scottish Raptor Study Group

Petition title

State regulated licensing system for gamebird hunting in Scotland

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to implement urgent action to introduce a state regulated system of licensing of gamebird hunting, that addresses the potentially adverse environmental impact of gamebird hunting, provides for the revocation or amendment of licences where a licence-holder fails to comply with their terms and conditions, and to implement the recommendations of the Review of Wildlife Crime Penalties in Scotland.

Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition

Since the advent of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, the SRSG has met with various Environment Ministers, as well as less frequently with the Chair of SNH, to highlight the impacts of wildlife crime on protected raptor populations in Scotland. Many individual SRSG members have also met with their local MSPs to highlight this problem. During these discussions, the SRSG, and its members, have repeatedly pressed the case for the effective licensing of "driven" grouse shooting in particular. Whilst we have received a "sympathetic hearing" in these meetings, and indeed some significant improvements to the legislation protecting birds of prey has followed (notably in the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011), the impacts on some raptor populations from illegal killing remains a significant issue. During this period, the Scottish Government has also commissioned various reviews related to wildlife crime (including the latest one from SNH to look at gamebird hunting licensing systems in other parts of Europe). However this SNH review, as a good example, will apparently make no recommendations for further action, and therefore will likely result in no meaningful progress towards eliminating the illegal killing of birds of prey in Scotland.

Petition background information

Self-regulation by the game bird shooting sector in Scotland has patently failed. There is no evidence of any decline in the criminal targeting of protected raptors on "driven" grouse moors and large scale commercial pheasant shoots in particular, whilst there is increasing evidence emerging of the detrimental environmental impacts arising from some of the management practices occurring in such areas (SNH SAC, 2015). We maintain that a step change in the state licensing or regulation of gamebird hunting in Scotland is now required to deliver the public interest in the way land for gamebird hunting is managed and to protect vulnerable species, including the Golden Eagle.

hunting is managed and to protect vulnerable species, including the Golden Eagle, Hen Harrier, Peregrine, Goshawk and Red Kite. Such regulation applies in other areas of natural resource management in Scotland; for example, in relation to the management of wild salmonid and deer populations (Aquaculture and Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2013 and Deer (Scotland) Act 1996).

The issue of wildlife crime involving our native and iconic birds of prey has attracted widespread public attention and condemnation from successive Scottish Government Ministers concerned about our international conservation commitments; the impacts on rural diversification and tourism; as well the country's international reputation as a place that should be respecting its important natural heritage. Scotland's soon-to-be first First Minister, Donald Dewar MSP rightly called the killing of birds of prey "a national disgrace" in 1998. Successive Environment Ministers in Scotland have condemned the illegal killing of birds of prey and called for firm action to tackle this persistent problem. Stronger measures are now clearly required to stop these crimes from happening.

The long-established Partnership Against Wildlife Crime has worked hard over many years to raise awareness of wildlife crime amongst the public and land management sector; however, despite this good work, serious crimes still occur with some frequency and across a wide geographical area (RSPB Scotland, 2015). In the Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary Natural Justice Report (2008), a series of recommendations were made for improvements to the enforcement of wildlife legislation and the prosecution of offenders. Some improvements to the system have been delivered following the publication of this report, however much remains to be done.

Good wildlife laws are now in place in Scotland to protect birds of prey (Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended), however there are parts of this country where these laws are still routinely flouted and it has become an entrenched part of the "business model" of certain sporting estates to kill birds of prey. A number of these same estates are now intensifying their land management practices, notably to promote "driven" grouse shooting with higher grouse bags for sporting clients (SNH SAC Review of Sustainable Moorland Management, 2015. The Intensification of Grouse Moor Management in Scotland. Wightman A., Tingay, R. League Against Cruel Sports, 2015).

Whilst wildlife crime has been identified by successive Environment Ministers as a high priority issue, enforcement of wildlife protection laws has historically been inadequately resourced by the police and is compounded by the fact that many of these crimes take place in remote areas where they are easily concealed by the perpetrators. It is therefore hard to gather sufficient evidence to bring cases to court, and when prosecutions are successful, imposed penalties (mainly fines) have largely failed to act as a sufficient deterrent to others. A recent Scottish Government review of wildlife crime penalties (Poustie, 2015) has recommended increased tariffs for a number of offences and we hope that this advice will be implemented as soon as possible.

The SNH SAC took evidence from various stakeholders in connection with its Review of Sustainable Moorland Management in 2015. This review has partly been a response to public concerns raised about a number of intensive moorland management practices that are now custom and practice, particularly on land managed for "driven" grouse shooting. These concerns are also documented in the scientific literature (e.g. The Environmental Impacts of high output driven shooting of red grouse *Lagopus lagopus scoticus*. Thompson et al., Ibis, 2016). Highlighted negative practices include: illegal predator control; burning on deep peatland areas (Douglas, 2015); the culling of mountain hares to prevent grouse diseases; the widespread use of lead ammunition, (an environmental pollutant), and the medication of 'wild' red grouse. There have also been similar, however less well documented concerns, about the impacts of large scale non-native pheasant and red-legged partridge releases (estimated at 50 million birds per annum in the UK), with unknown consequences for the wider environment. These impacts may include damage to sensitive habitats and species, as well providing a large food source, thereby increasing predator numbers and survival to un-natural levels. These additional predation impacts could adversely affect the populations of native species.

SNH are currently conducting a review of gamebird licensing systems in Europe

following a commitment by the Scottish Government in the annual wildlife crime debate in the Scottish Parliament. Previous work on this subject (Mustin et al., 2012) has shown that Scotland and the rest of the UK have some of the most intensive gamebird management systems which are very lightly regulated when compared to other EU and North American countries. In other similar European Union countries, such as Germany and Spain, there are powers for the relevant authorities to remove hunting licences and firearm certificates, amongst other punitive sanctions, where wildlife crimes are committed. Habitat Management Plans and game bag returns are also required in order to inform conservation action for the populations of huntable species.

This petition builds on the present review by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) of gamebird hunting licensing systems in other parts of the EU (expected to report in mid-Summer 2016) and the SNH Review of Sustainable Moorland Management (October 2015).

Unique web address

<http://ww3.parliament.scot/GettingInvolved/Petitions/PE01615>

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Comments to stimulate online discussion

We maintain that those involved with gamebird hunting have had many warnings from the Scottish Government over a long time period to get their house in order and show that self regulation of this sector is workable. There is good evidence that the illegal killing of birds of prey has continued unabated in many places, and that some land management practices designed to promote gamebird hunting are being shown to be becoming increasingly intensive and unsustainable:

- Do you agree that the time has now come to introduce a gamebird hunting licensing system in Scotland to protect the public interest?
- Do you agree that a future licensing system should include powers for the public authorities in Scotland to revoke or amend the licence if conditions (such as adherence to laws to protect birds of prey) are broken?
- Do you agree that a licensing approach to gamebird hunting would act as a meaningful deterrent to illegal or bad practice?
- Do you agree that SNH should have a more formal role in collecting gamebird hunting bag data, as part of a licensing return, to inform future sustainable hunting practices?

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We understand that most other countries in Europe have some form of system of licensing of gamebird hunting, whilst Scotland already has systems to ensure the sustainable management of other natural resources such as deer and salmon.

- What can we in Scotland learn from gamebird hunting licensing systems employed elsewhere in Europe, or from other systems of natural resources management here?
- Would law-abiding and responsible managers of gamebird hunting enterprises have anything to fear from a licensing system, given experience in other countries?