Thank you for responding to the Local Government and Regeneration Committee's Call for Evidence on the Air Weapons and Licensing (Scotland) Bill. All submissions will be examined and considered as part of the Committee's scrutiny of the Bill.

Please be aware that questions marked with an asterisk (*) require an answer before you can submit the form.

Follow the Local Government and Regeneration Committee's Twitter feed - all Committee tweets on this Bill will have the hashtag #aw&lbill.

*1. Please supply your name and contact details:

Name: Gary Sutherland
Organisation: 
Address 1: 
Address 2: 
City/Town: 
Postcode: 
Country: 
Email address (if no email leave blank): 
Phone Number: 

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY
SUBMISSION ID NUMBER 137
2. Please confirm that you have read and understood the Scottish Parliaments “Policy on the treatment of written evidence by subject and mandatory committees”:

☑ Yes

3. Please confirm whether you are content for your name to be published with your submission:

☑ Yes

☐ No

4. Which of the three categories below best describes your interest in the Bill (please tick only one)?

☑ Personal

☐ Professional

☐ Commercial

5. Do you wish your email to be added to the Committee’s distribution list for updates on progress of the Bill:

☑ Yes

☐ No
6. Invitations to give oral evidence to the Committee on the Bill will be based on the submissions received. If you wish your submission to be included amongst those considered for possible invitation to give oral evidence, please indicate here.

☐ Yes

☐ No

7. You may answer questions on the entire Bill, or on any part of the Bill. Please indicate which parts of the Bill you are responding to? (You may select as many options that apply).

☐ All of the Bill

☐ Equalities, climate change and other Scottish Government objectives

☐ Air Weapons

☐ General licensing issues

☐ Alcohol licensing

☐ Civic licensing – taxi/private hire car licensing

☐ Civic licensing – scrap metal dealers

☐ Civic licensing – theatre licensing

☐ Civic licensing – sexual entertainment venues
Name/Organisation:

Gary Sutherland

1. Air Weapons Licensing

You may respond to all the questions or only those you have a specific interest in. (Text boxes have no word limit, they will increase in size accordingly).

13. In what ways will the creation of an air weapons licensing system in Scotland contribute to preserving public order and safety, reducing crime and advancing public health policy?

I do not believe it will contribute in any significantly positive way. Adequate laws already exist to ensure that persons misusing airguns are prosecuted and punished without there being any need for more legislation.

Since the introduction of the VCR Act firearms crime has fallen substantially. This is due to the vast majority of airgun users being responsible and law-abiding individuals.

Remember that licensing did nothing prevent the massacres that took place at Hungerford, Dunblane, and more recently in Cumbria. In each case the weapons used were all legally owned and licensed.

Public health may in fact suffer as a result of a reduction in the numbers of pest species such as rats and pigeons that are killed by airgun users under the General License.

14. Is there sufficient provision, or sufficient capacity to provide, suitable numbers of air weapons clubs across all areas of Scotland for use by registered air weapons owners/users?

Most certainly not, especially in more rural areas.

In my own personal case an each-way journey of 97 miles is required to visit my nearest airgun club at Strathpeffer.

15. How will the air weapons licensing system affect those using air weapons for personal/recreational use?
Many airgun owners practice their sport in their back gardens shooting at paper targets. This is a very safe activity that does not require regulation.

Under the proposed scheme this activity may become criminalised.

It should be noted here that the new scheme only applies to sub-12ft/lb equivalent airguns. More powerful airguns are already covered under the existing firearms licensing scheme.

16. How will the air weapons licensing system affect those aged 14 to 17 who use air weapons?

The scheme may discourage the numbers of young people taking up the sport.

As the recent Commonwealth Games in Glasgow demonstrated, shooting is a popular sport.

Introducing young people to airguns is a good way to teach them respect and safe handling practices for all firearms.

17. How will the air weapons licensing system affect those using air weapons for commercial/professional reasons (for example: for pest control; as part of the tourist/hunting season; as part of fairs, paintballing centre, entertainment sector etc.)?

Pest control professions will no doubt seek and obtain the necessary registration however a substantial amount of the pest control that takes place in Scotland is done by amateur shooters using airguns.

If this is caused to stop then a substantial increase in the number of pest species will be the result along with the knock-on effect on crop damage and public health.

18. How will the air weapons licensing system affect those using air weapons for competitive sporting purposes?
Professional sporting persons will no doubt carry on as at present, albeit with additional cost, however it is the recreational sports person who will suffer as a result of potentially being deprived of their principle practice area – their gardens. The details of the scheme are very vague in this area, failing to denote the size of land that it would permit shooting to take place upon.

I, for instance, own an acre of land that surrounds my home. Would this be considered to be a garden and thus outlawed for shooting?

This would be despite the fact that I practice safe pest control on it as it is also used for the grazing of chickens and pigs, as well as for cultivation.

19. Is it equitable for those applying for an air weapons certificate to pay a fee which cannot be refundable irrespective of whether a certificate is granted or not?

No. Under the present shotgun certificate scheme if a license is not granted then the fee is returned. I can see no reason why this should be otherwise for an airgun licensing scheme.

20. Will the air weapons licensing system have a positive or negative impact on other areas of the public sector in Scotland (eg. The work of local government, public agencies etc.)?

The scheme would have a significant negative impact upon the police force whose job it would be to process each application for an airgun license.

As was noted earlier, gun crime in Scotland has fallen considerably in recent years and so this would appear to place an unnecessary burden upon our already over-stretched police service.

21. What, if any, might the unintended consequences of introducing an air weapons licensing system in Scotland be?
Many airgun users may decide that the additional cost and inconvenience are sufficient for them to decide to obtain a shotgun certificate instead. This would result in there being substantially more true firearms in private ownership than presently.

The introduction of this scheme could (and probably would) force a large number of people to give up their sport leading to a glut of airguns appearing on the market for sale. This would in turn drive down the market prices leading to a significant financial loss for many people. It would seem only fair that they would seek compensation from the Scottish Government for this loss.

22. Do you have any other comments to make on air weapons licensing aspects of the Bill?

I believe the proposed bill is being introduced not in the interests of reducing crime – this has already fallen considerably in recent years – but more for political reasons: a desire by the Justice Minister to ‘be seen to be doing something’, particularly in the wake of the tragic death of Andrew Morton.

There has been no evidence presented to show that licensing of airguns will have any detectable impact upon the small number of incidents that are still taking place.