



T: 0300 244 4000

E: scottish.ministers@gov.scot

Graeme Dey MSP

Convener

Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform

Committee

Room T3.40

The Scottish Parliament

Edinburgh

EH99 1SP

10 July 2017

Dear Graeme,

Scottish Government's Wildlife Crime in Scotland 2015 Annual Report

Thank you for your letter of 26 March 2017, highlighting issues arising from the Committee's January 2017 evidence session on the Scottish Government's 2015 Wildlife Crime Annual Report. Please accept my apologies for the delay in responding.

I note that the Committee has made a number of comments and recommendations on the content and presentation of the report, and I have asked my officials to look at all those which are the responsibility of the Scottish Government, or where improvements can be made in partnership with other stakeholders, including Police Scotland. There a number of issues I would like to mention in particular:

The Committee welcomes the desire to make the report as robust and useful as possible, and supports the presentation of information by financial year. However, the Committee considers issues in relation to different data sets continue to affect the ease of interpretation. The Committee is also concerned that the current crime recording system does not enable extrapolation of data. The Committee encourages the Scottish Government to look to address this and make further improvements in the presentation of data in subsequent reports.

The Scottish Government will consider how better the data can be presented, noting that the report has changed significantly since its inception and continues to improve. I acknowledge that it is not currently possible to access detailed data on wildlife crimes from the crime recording system. Officials have previously discussed this concern with Police Scotland, who will continue to provide a manually disaggregated breakdown of wildlife offence data to address this gap in the meantime.

The Committee would also welcome an explanation as to why quarterly breakdowns were not included in the report in line with previous commitments and whether this will be included in future annual reports. The Committee also recommends that these breakdowns are made public on a quarterly basis.

Quarterly breakdowns were not provided in the most recent annual report because of staff resource issues, however this will be included going forward. The Scottish Government will consider the value of, and the available resource for, publishing this data on a quarterly basis.

The Committee is concerned about the lack of data on the health of species...the Committee appreciates that this goes beyond Police Scotland and requests the Scottish Government to outline what steps it plans to take to address this and the likely resource requirement of this.

The Scottish Government will consider with Scottish Natural Heritage what information is currently available and what resource might be required to obtain it if it is not currently available.

The Committee, while acknowledging the overall dedication of Police Scotland in combating wildlife crime, nevertheless notes a number of gaps in its work. This includes its intelligence on whether a reduction in wildlife in specific areas is due to natural changes to populations or reveals potential persecution. The Committee appreciates that this may require the application of resources but believes that this must be prioritised in order to get a clear picture of wildlife crime in Scotland so that the data provided in future annual reports is not just ‘the tip of the iceberg’.

Further to the response to on health of species above, the Scottish Government will work with key partners including Police Scotland and SNH to consider this recommendation in further detail. The Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime (PAW Scotland) Science Group will also look at issues related to this recommendation, in particular what conclusions law enforcement can draw from scientific evidence on the presence, absence or abundance of protected species such as raptors.

The Scottish Government will continue to work with partners to improve the overall availability and reliability of wildlife crime data and from 2018 will look to bring the publication dates of the annual reports forward, to ensure the contents are as timely as possible. I will write to provide you with a further progress update later this year.

I am grateful for the Committee’s continued interest in this area, and I hope you find this response useful.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Roseanna', written in a cursive style.

ROSEANNA CUNNINGHAM